

*All the
stories
of the* **Bible**

as crafted and told by John Walsh

All the stories of the Bible in five books:

Beginnings

Stories 1-52

Building a Nation

Stories 53-113

Path Down to Captivity

Stories 114-161

Beauty from Ashes

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Work of the Holy Spirit

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Path Down to Captivity

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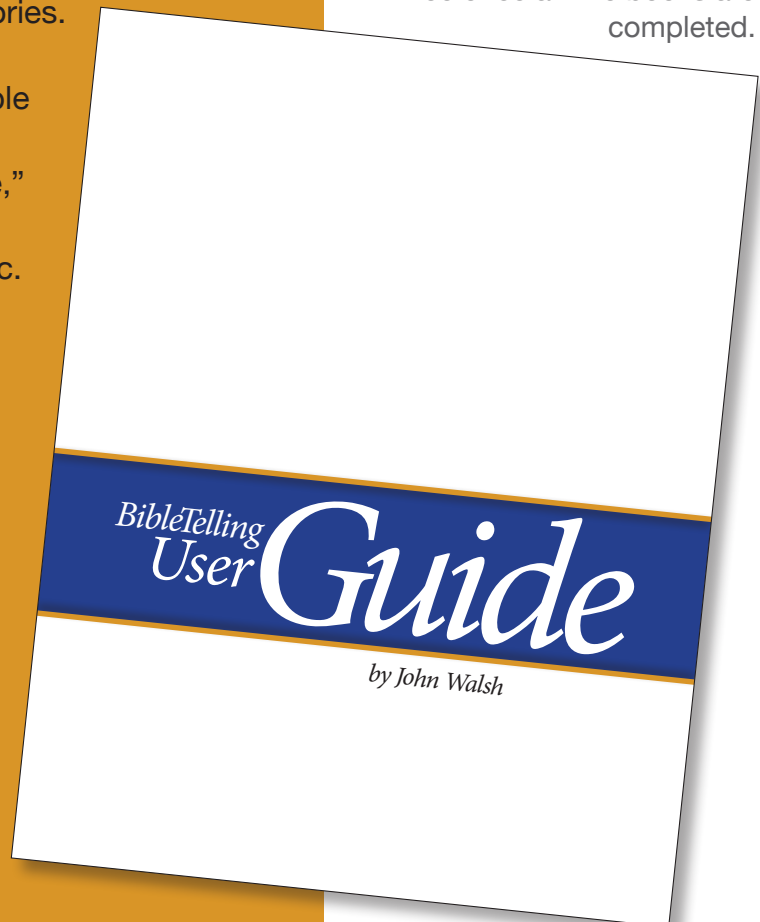
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114 Wisdom of Solomon

I Kings 3-4 & II Chronicles 1

Solomon loved the Lord and tried to follow the example of his father David. One day, he went to Gibeon and sacrificed 1,000 burnt offerings upon the altar. That night God appeared to him in a dream. "What do you want me to give you?"

Without hesitation, he said, "Lord, my father was a great king, but I feel like a child who doesn't know anything. Give me the wisdom and understanding to rule over your people."

The Lord was pleased with Solomon's answer. "You've asked for wisdom instead of long life, riches, or peace. Therefore I'll give you wisdom. It will exceed what any one has had, or ever will have. I'll also give you great riches and honor. And I'll give you long life, but only if you follow me like David did."

Soon after this promise, two prostitutes went to the judgment hall and stood before the king. One said, "This woman and I live in the same house. Each of us gave birth to a son. While we were sleeping, she accidentally rolled over on her son and killed him. So in the night, she took my child and put her dead son in his place. I awoke in the morning to nurse my son, but the child was dead. I then realized it wasn't my son at all, but hers. She has my child."

The other woman said, "No, the living child is

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mine and the dead one is hers!" The two began arguing in front of the king.

Solomon turned to a guard and said, "Come here with a sword." Pointing to the child he said, "Cut the boy in two pieces and give each mother half of him."

One woman cried out, "No! Don't kill my son! She can have him! Please let him live."

The other woman said, "Yes, cut him in half, so we both will have a part."

The king turned to the guard, "Give the boy to the first woman. She's the mother because her heart cries out for the child." The people of Israel marveled at his wisdom.

Solomon ruled over all the nations from the Euphrates River in the north, to Egypt in the south. That whole region was at peace as long as he lived. There were so many people in Israel that they were like the sand on the seashore. Everyone was at peace and lived without fear of war.

Solomon gained knowledge about many subjects. He had understanding about plants, birds, and animals. His wisdom was greater than that of anyone else in the world. Kings from around the world would send people to listen to him and learn from him.

115 Building the Temple

I Kings 5-9 & II Chronicles 2-7

Solomon knew it was his responsibility to build the Temple of the Lord. Therefore, he gathered a large work force and provided them all the materials they needed. He got cedar from King Hiram of Lebanon, who had been a friend of David, his father.

The entire construction took seven years to complete. During that time, there wasn't the sound of tools at the Temple site because everything was assembled elsewhere. The inside walls were totally covered with cedar. The walls of the most Holy Place were covered with pure gold. All of the vessels, furnishings, and tools for worship were also made of gold. He also made a place for Gentiles who wanted to come to the Temple and pray.

Once the Temple was done, King Solomon assembled the leaders from all the tribes of Israel. The priests went and got the Ark of God. The only things in it at that time were the two tablets of stone that Moses had put there. As the priests carefully carried the Ark toward the Temple, sacrifices were made all along the way. Finally they arrived, and the Ark of God was put in the Most Holy Place.

Suddenly, the glory of the Lord filled the Temple like a cloud. It was so thick the priests

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had to stop what they were doing.

The king gave thanks to God. He then turned to face the people and gave them a blessing and a prayer of dedication. Finally, he stood before the altar of the Lord and prayed. He asked God to hear his people when they confessed their sins and asked for forgiveness. He also asked God to hear Gentiles who prayed at the Temple.

Together, the entire nation of Israel sacrificed to God and dedicated the Temple to the Lord. This celebration lasted for fourteen days. Once it was over, the people returned to their homes with their hearts full of happiness.

God then met with Solomon a second time. He said, "I have heard your prayer and have set this house apart for myself. If you walk with me as your father did, I'll establish your kingdom forever. But if you or your descendants disobey my commandments and start worshiping other gods, I'll depart from this house, and it will become a disgrace. I'll then take the people of Israel off from this land."

For the next thirteen years, Solomon built a house for himself. After that, he built several cities. He established a great work force for all of his construction projects. There was no other king in the entire world like Solomon.

116 Queen of Sheba

I Kings 10-11:25, 42-43 & II Chronicles 9

The queen of Sheba heard about the great wisdom of King Solomon. She couldn't believe it was true. So she decided to go and test him with a list of hard questions. She organized a large band of servants to travel with her and selected presents to present to the king. She arrived in Jerusalem with a great caravan of camels loaded with gold, jewels, and spices.

She met with the king and asked him her list of questions. He was able to answer every single question. None of them was too difficult for him to explain to her. She was amazed to see the palace he had built, the variety of food at every meal, the way his servants were dressed, and the burnt offerings he made at the Temple. She said, "Everything I heard about you is true, but I couldn't believe it until I saw it with my own eyes. Now I find that I wasn't told half of what is true about you. May your God continue to bless you as you carry out justice and righteousness."

She gave him a half a ton of gold, and more spices than had ever come to Jerusalem. Solomon also gave her many gifts before she and her servants returned home.

Every year, Solomon received 25 tons of gold in addition to normal trade. Because of this, he covered many things with gold – ornaments, drinking cups, dishes, and his throne. He didn't use silver because he didn't think it was valuable.

Solomon crafted 200 large shields, each made with 15 pounds of hammered gold. He

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also made 300 smaller shields with 4 pounds of gold in each one. No other king in the world was as rich and wise as Solomon.

He accumulated a large herd of horses for his military. These were imported from many countries around that part of the world.

Unfortunately, Solomon also accumulated many women, which was a direct violation of God's law. He had 700 wives, all daughters of kings. Each one worshiped the gods of her country. He also had 300 concubines.

When Solomon got old, these women convinced him to build a shrine for each of their gods. Eventually, every hill around Jerusalem had a shrine on it, honoring their many gods. Solomon started burning incense at these places and offering sacrifices. Finally he departed from worshiping the Lord and joined his wives in worshiping their gods. Wickedness filled his heart.

God was angry with Solomon because he departed from following the ways of David. The Lord said, "I'm going to tear your kingdom in two, and give one part to a servant of yours. But I won't do this in your lifetime because of my promise to David. Your son will lose most of your kingdom."

Then God allowed the enemies of Solomon to organize against him, so there was no longer peace in the land. Finally, Solomon died. He had been king of Israel for forty years.

117 The Kingdom Divided

*I Kings 11:26 – 12:24 &
II Chronicles 10 – 11:1-4*

When Solomon was alive, he promoted one of his servants, named Jeroboam. He had a unique ability of getting things done.

One day Jeroboam met a prophet, who was wearing a new coat. The prophet said, “Here is a message from God.”

He then took off the coat and ripped it into twelve pieces. He handed Jeroboam ten of them and gave him this message from the Lord: “Solomon left me and turned to worshipping idols. Therefore, I’m going to rip the kingdom out of his hands. You’ll rule over the northern ten tribes of Israel. I’m not taking all the tribes away because of David and Jerusalem. Therefore Solomon’s son will rule over Judah.

“Follow me and obey my commandments. If you do, I’ll be with you. I’ll establish your kingdom, and you’ll have a lasting dynasty just like I gave David.”

Solomon found out about this prophecy and tried to kill Jeroboam. But he ran away and hid in Egypt until Solomon died.

One of Solomon’s sons was Rehoboam, whose mother was an Ammonite woman. After his father died, he went to Shechem so the northern tribes of Israel could crown him king.

Before the elders of Israel met with him they sent for Jeroboam. Once he arrived, they said to Rehoboam, “Your father put a yoke on us that was harsh. Promise us that you’ll lighten our load and lower our taxes. If you do, we’ll gladly serve you.”

Rehoboam said, “Give me three days to think about this.”

After Jeroboam and the elders of Israel

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left, Rehoboam asked advice from the older counselors in his father’s court. They said, “Serve these people with all your heart. Be kind to them, and they’ll serve you for the rest of your life.”

Rehoboam then asked for advice from his younger counselors, the ones he grew up with. They said, “Tell those rebels, ‘My father was easy on you compared to me. My little finger will be heavier than my father’s leg. He hit you with whips. I’m going to hit you with scorpions.’ ”

Rehoboam listened to this advice and rejected the counsel of the older men. He said to the leaders of Israel, “My father was easy on you compared to me. He hit you with whips. I’m going to hit you with scorpions.” That was exactly what the Lord wanted him to say.

When Jeroboam and the people of Israel heard this, they said, “We want nothing to do with the house of David! We’re not from Judah.”

So the people of Israel went home and Rehoboam returned to Jerusalem. He sent one of his officials to restore order among the northern tribes. The people stoned him until he was dead.

The ten tribes broke away from Judah and called themselves Israel. They asked Jeroboam to be their king.

Rehoboam gathered an army from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. They prepared to invade Israel and force them back under Rehoboam’s control.

Just then a man of God came to them with a message from the Lord. “Don’t go fight your brothers. Go home. I’m the one that caused them to rebel against you.” Everyone listened to the Lord, and went home.

118 Jeroboam's Sin

1 Kings 12:25 – 13:8 & 13:33-34

Jeroboam chose the city of Shechem to be the capital of Israel. He built it up and put his palace there.

He realized his people had a natural tendency to be loyal to the family of David. He said to his advisors, "The people keep going to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple. Eventually, they'll decide their true loyalty is to the king from the line of David. They'll kill me and reunite with Judah."

To solve this problem, he made two golden calves. He put one in the south at Bethel and the other in the north at Dan. He said to the people, "It's too hard to travel to Jerusalem several times a year. Here's your god who brought you out of Egypt."

Jeroboam built shrines to these idols and appointed priests for them. The priests weren't from the tribe of Levi but were just anyone who wanted to be a priest. He then made annual celebrations at the same times as the ones in Jerusalem.

When he took the golden calf to Dan, people lined up behind it as it went along. Once they got there, Jeroboam made sacrifices to this new idol. He then went south to Bethel to sacrifice on the altar he had built there.

A young man of God from Judah walked up to Jeroboam as he was standing by the altar. The prophet yelled, "Altar, altar! Hear what the Lord God says to you. 'A king will be born in Judah

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named Josiah. On this altar he'll sacrifice the priests who burn incense on it.' "

The young prophet then turned to the people, "The Lord gave me a sign that these things will happen. This altar will rip apart and the ashes will spill to the ground."

King Jeroboam got angry and pointed at the prophet. "Grab that man!" As soon as he said those words, the hand he had stretched out froze in position and he couldn't pull it back. Suddenly the altar ripped apart and the ashes spilled to the ground.

Seeing this, the king begged the man of God. "Please pray to the Lord and ask him to restore my hand back to me."

So the man of God prayed and Jeroboam's hand returned to the way it was before. The king said, "Come with me to the palace and eat something. Then I'll give you a gift."

The young prophet said, "I wouldn't go with you even if you gave me half of everything you own. The Lord said that I'm not to eat or drink anything while I'm here. And I'm to go back to Judah a different way from how I came." With that, he walked away.

Even with this warning, Jeroboam didn't repent of what he was doing. He continued to promote the worship of the two calves and appoint priests for them. Because of this sin, his kingdom didn't continue after his death, and he had no descendants.

119 The Old Prophet

I Kings 13:11-32

There was an old prophet living at Bethel. His sons told him about the young man of God from Judah, and what he had done at Jeroboam's altar. The old prophet said, "Which way did he go?"

He then told his sons to saddle his donkey. He rode down the road until he found the man of God sitting under an oak tree.

"Are you the man of God from Judah?"

"Yes, I am"

The old prophet said, "Come home with me and I'll serve you a meal."

"No, I can't go with you. The Lord told me not to eat or drink anything while I'm here."

The old man said, "Yes I know. I'm a prophet too, just like you. The Lord sent an angel to me who told me to come get you and provide you food and water. So, come to my house."

This was a lie, but the man of God went with him and ate bread in his house and drank water. While they were sitting at the table, the Lord spoke through the old prophet, saying, "You've rebelled against my command. I told you not to eat or drink anything at this place. Because you disobeyed me, you'll die and you won't be buried in your family's grave."

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After the two men were done eating, the old prophet saddled the young man's donkey. He left, and along the way a lion jumped on the man of God and killed him. His body fell to the ground, but the donkey didn't run away. He simply stood by the body of the young prophet. The lion stood on the other side.

Some travelers saw this and told the people in the town about it. When the old prophet heard it, he said, "I know who that is. It's the man of God who disobeyed the Lord."

He told his sons to once again saddle a donkey for him. He went and found the body. The lion was still standing next to it, as well as the donkey. Yet, the lion hadn't eaten the corpse nor attacked the donkey.

The old prophet put the body of the man of God on the donkey that was standing there. He took it back home and buried it in his own grave. He mourned the young man's death saying, "Oh my brother."

He then told his sons. "When I die, bury me where this man of God is buried. Put my bones beside his bones. He spoke God's words against these idols and Israel's sin. Everything he said will come true."

120 Rehoboam & Jeroboam

I Kings 14, 15:33-34 & II Chronicles 12

One of the sons of Jeroboam became sick. The king said to his wife, “When I was a servant of Solomon, a prophet told me that I’d become king of the northern ten tribes of Israel. He lives in Shiloh. Take him gifts of food and ask him what will happen to our son. Put on a disguise, so he won’t know you’re my wife.”

The prophet was now old and blind. The Lord said to him, “Jeroboam’s wife is coming wearing a disguise. She’s going to ask you about their son who is sick.” Then the Lord told him what to say.

Soon the prophet heard the woman’s footsteps. He said, “Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why are you wearing a disguise? Listen, God has a message for your husband, a horrible message!”

The Lord says, “I selected you when you were an average man. I tore part of the kingdom away from the family of David and gave it to you. But look what you’ve done. You haven’t followed me. You haven’t kept my commandments. Instead, you’ve insulted me with two golden calves, and you’ve become more wicked than anyone else.

“So, listen to what I’m going to do to you. All of the males in your family will die a horrible death. The family name of Jeroboam won’t continue after you’re gone. Dogs will eat those who die in the city, and birds will eat those who die in the country.

“There will be only one exception to this. Your son who is now sick is a good man, the only one in your family. He will die a normal death. But he’ll die as soon as you get home. You’ll bury him, and

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all of Israel will mourn his death. But he’ll be the only one in your family that will be buried.

“All of this will happen because of what Jeroboam did to Israel. His sin will force me to hit Israel so hard that their roots will be ripped up from this soil. They’ll be carried away and scattered among the nations.”

Jeroboam’s wife went home, and her son died as soon as she walked into their house. He was buried and all of Israel mourned his death.

Jeroboam ruled for 22 years, and then died. His son became king after him. He followed the example of his father but only ruled for two years. He was killed and the entire family of Jeroboam was destroyed. It all happened just like the prophet said.

While Jeroboam ruled Israel in the north, Rehoboam ruled Judah in the south. He also made the Lord angry by leading the people in ways that were evil. Judah became as wicked as all the surrounding nations.

During the fifth year of Rehoboam’s reign, Egypt came and plundered Jerusalem. They took all the gold from the Temple and the royal palace. They took the gold shields Solomon had made.

After they left, Rehoboam replaced the shields with ones made of bronze. Whenever the king left the palace and went to the Temple, guards walked along with him, carrying the bronze shields.

There was war between Judah and Israel as long as Rehoboam and Jeroboam lived. Rehoboam died after ruling Judah for 17 years, and his son became king after him.

121 Abijah & Asa

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I Kings 15 & II Chronicles 13 – 16

When Rehoboam died, his son Abijah became king of Judah. Soon afterward, Israel invaded Judah. Jeroboam was still king of Israel at the time.

When the two armies faced one another, Israel's army was twice as big. Still, Abijah stood and yelled over at the men of Israel. He told them how he trusted the Lord. He compared how Judah worshiped the Lord at the Temple to how Israel worshiped the two golden calves.

While he was talking, Jeroboam sent half of his men around to the back of Abijah's army. When the battle started, Judah suddenly realized they were surrounded. They cried out to the Lord and the priests blew the trumpets. God fought against Israel and they ran from the battlefield. Many of their soldiers died that day.

Jeroboam never recovered from this massive defeat, and he died soon afterwards. Abijah became stronger because he trusted the Lord.

After Abijah died, his son Asa became king of Judah. He ruled for 41 years. The Lord gave him 10 years of peace because he returned the nation to the ways of David. He destroyed the idols Solomon set up. He told the people of Judah to seek the Lord God.

Suddenly a vast army from Ethiopia invaded from the south. The army of Judah was greatly outnumbered. Asa prayed, "Oh Lord. Only you can help us now!"

So the Lord helped him defeat the Ethiopian army. Many of them were killed as they tried to run away. When it was all done, their army was crushed before the Lord. The men of Judah collected all the possessions from the bodies that were lying on the battlefield. They also got all of their sheep and camels.

As Asa and his men went back to Jerusalem, a prophet met him and challenged him to continue his walk with God. So the king decided to start destroying the idols from all the other cities of Judah. He even removed his grandmother from being Queen Mother because

of her loyalty to an idol.

People from the northern kingdom of Israel moved to Judah in large numbers because they worshiped the Lord. On a certain day, everyone met together and vowed to always serve God. Asa then took silver and gold and put it in the Temple treasury. So the Lord gave Judah peace from all their enemies.

Unfortunately Asa came to a turning point in his life. The new king of Israel declared war on Judah and invaded the land. He took control of a key city.

Instead of trusting the Lord, Asa thought of another way he could get the advantage over Israel. He took the gold and silver out of the Temple and sent it to Benhadad, the king of Syria that was north of Israel. He sent a message saying, "I'm sending you gold and silver so you will break your treaty with Israel, and establish a treaty between our two nations."

King Benhadad took the gold and silver and made a treaty with Asa. He then invaded Israel and captured several of their cities. Quickly the army of Israel left Judah so they could defend themselves against Syria.

It seemed like Asa's plan had worked. But then, a prophet went to king Asa and said, "You should have asked the Lord to fight for you – not Syria! Don't you remember what God did with the massive army of Ethiopia? The Lord is looking for those who will trust Him. You were foolish in doing this. Therefore, you will be at war until you die."

Asa was angry with the prophet and called for a guard. "Put this man in prison!" After that, he became cruel toward his own people. Suddenly he developed a disease in his feet, which got worse and worse. Still, he didn't seek the Lord's help, even when the disease became life threatening. Instead, he trusted the doctors to help him. Finally he died after two years of great pain.

122 Elijah & the Widow

I Kings 17

Israel had many wicked kings. They all followed the example of Jeroboam.

While Asa was still king of Judah, Ahab became king of Israel. He was extremely evil, more than any of the kings that were before him. He married a woman named Jezebel, who worshiped Baal. Through her influence, Ahab built a temple of Baal in the capital city of Samaria.

The prophet Elijah stood before the king and said, "I have a message from God. There will be no dew or rain until I say so!"

The Lord said to Elijah, "Leave here and go to a certain brook. It will provide you water, and I have already told the ravens to bring you food."

So Elijah went and lived next to that brook. And just as the Lord said, the ravens brought him bread and meat every morning and every evening. But in time, the brook dried up because there hadn't been any rain.

The Lord said, "Go to a Gentile town called Zarephath. I have selected a widow to provide for you there." When Elijah entered the village, he saw a woman gathering wood. He said to her, "Please bring me a little water." As she went to get it, he said, "And also bring me some bread."

She turned and looked at him. "I don't have any bread. All I have is a handful of flour in the jar, and a bit of oil in the jug. I was gathering these sticks so I could make it into bread for my son and myself. We were going to eat it and then die."

The prophet said, "Don't be afraid to do what I say. Go and make your bread, but when it's done, give some to me first. The Lord God of Israel has said, 'The jar will always have flour,

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and the jug will always have oil until the day God sends rain.' "

Again, she looked at him, and then went and did as he asked. She made the bread, and gave some to him first. Sure enough, from that day on, the jar always had some flour, and the jug of oil never ran dry.

She prepared a place for the prophet in the upper room of her house. It had a bed, a table, and a chair.

Some time later, the woman's son got sick. Soon his illness was severe, and finally he died. The woman went to Elijah and said, "Man of God, why did you come in to my house? Was it to expose my guilt, so you could kill my son?"

Elijah said, "Give me your son." He took the boy to the upper room where he was staying. He laid him on the bed and then prayed, "Oh Lord God, why did you bring me into this woman's home, and then kill her son?"

He then stretched out over the boy and prayed, "Oh Lord my God, please bring life back into this boy!"

He stretched out over the boy a second time. "Oh Lord my God, please bring life back into this boy!"

He stretched out over the boy a third time. "Oh Lord my God, please bring life back into this boy!"

Suddenly the boy started breathing. Elijah took him back down into the house, and gave him to his mother. He said, "Here is your son. He's alive."

The woman fell down before the prophet and said, "Now I know you are a man of God, and his word is in your mouth!"

123 Elijah on Mount Carmel

I Kings 18

The famine in Israel was severe and lasted for three years. Finally the Lord said to Elijah, “Go tell King Ahab that I am going to send rain to the land.”

The person in charge of Ahab’s courts was a man named Obadiah. He was faithful to God, and even hid 100 prophets of the LORD when Jezebel was trying to hunt them down.

He and the king went out to find grass for the palace livestock. They went different directions so they could search more land.

As Obadiah went along, Elijah suddenly walked up to him. Obadiah immediately fell to the ground and said, “Oh my lord Elijah.”

The prophet said, “Go tell the king that I’m here.”

Obadiah was shocked. He said, “What have I done that you want me killed? The king has looked for you all across the nation, and even in other countries. As soon as I tell him that you’re here, the Lord will carry you off to some other place. Then Ahab will kill me when he comes and finds that you’re not here. Please don’t do this to me.”

The prophet said, “Don’t worry. As the Lord lives, I’ll meet with Ahab today.”

So Obadiah went and told Ahab. As soon as the king saw Elijah, he said, “So, there is the man who’s destroyed Israel.”

Elijah said, “No, it’s not me, but you who has destroyed Israel. You’ve turned your back on the Lord and are serving Baal. Tell Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. Bring the prophets of Baal and

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Asherah, the ones who eat at Jezebel’s table.”

So Ahab told the Israelites to gather at Mount Carmel, along with the prophets. Once everyone was there, Elijah said to the people, “How long will you go back and forth? If the Lord is God, follow Him. If Baal is God, follow him.” The people didn’t say anything, but just looked at the prophet.

He said. “I stand here as only one prophet of the Lord, but look, there are 450 prophets of Baal. Give us two bulls. They’ll take one, prepare it for sacrifice, and put it on top of the wood. But they won’t put fire on the wood. I’ll do the same. They will call on the name of their god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The God who lights the fire, He is God.”

The people said. “Yes. That sounds fair.”

Elijah said to the prophets of Baal. “You go first.”

So they prepared the bull, and called on the name of Baal. They prayed all morning until noon. They danced around the altar, but nothing happened.

Elijah started mocking them. “Maybe you should shout louder! Your god might be sleeping, and you need to wake him up! Maybe he’s gone to the toilet.” They shouted loudly, and cut themselves, until blood gushed out. They kept this up all afternoon, but nothing happened.

Finally Elijah built an altar with twelve stones, one for each tribe of Israel. He dug a trench around the altar, and put the wood on it. He then placed the bull on top of the wood.

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He said to the people, “Go get some water and pour it on the sacrifice.” Once they had done this, he told them to do it again. After they had done it a second time, he told them to do it a third time. Once they were done, the altar was totally wet, and the trench was full of water.

Elijah then walked up to the altar and prayed. “Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Let everyone know that you are God, and I’m your servant. Answer me so these people will turn back to you!”

Suddenly, fire fell down from heaven and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, and the twelve stones. It even licked up the water that was in the trench. The people fell down and shouted, “The Lord, he is God! The Lord, he is God!”

Elijah ordered, “Grab the prophets of Baal! Don’t let any of them escape.” The people grabbed the prophets of Baal, and Elijah killed all of them.

He turned to Ahab and said, “Eat something. There’s a rainstorm coming.”

He then went up to the top of the mountain to pray. He said to his servant, “Look toward the sea. What do you see?”

The servant said, “I don’t see anything.”

Elijah prayed a second time. He then said to his servant, “Look toward the sea. What do you see?”

The servant said, “I don’t see anything.”

Elijah prayed again, and then said to his servant, “Look toward the sea. What do you see?”

The servant said, “I don’t see anything.”

Elijah prayed again, and then said to his servant, “Look toward the sea. What do you see?”

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Elijah prayed again, and then said to his servant, “Look toward the sea. What do you see?”

The servant said, “I don’t see anything.”

Elijah prayed again, and then said to his servant, “Look toward the sea. What do you see?”

The servant said, “I don’t see anything.”

Elijah prayed again, and then said to his servant, “Look toward the sea. What do you see?”

The servant said, “I see a small cloud, about the size of a man’s hand, coming from the sea.”

Elijah said, “Quick, go tell Ahab, ‘Rush home as fast as you can so the rain doesn’t stop you.’ ” Ahab got in his chariot and rushed toward home.

In a short time, the sky grew dark and the wind started to blow. Suddenly there was a downpour of rain. The power of God came over Elijah, and he ran faster than Ahab’s chariot, and arrived in Samaria before him.

124 Elijah on Mount Horeb

1 Kings 19

Ahab told Jezebel what Elijah had done on Mount Carmel. He told her how all the prophets of Baal had been killed. Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah. She said, "I am going to kill you! Mark my word. You'll be dead before tomorrow night."

This struck fear in the heart of Elijah. He ran away to save his life. He left Israel and went to the southern part of Judah. He left his servant there and went on into the wilderness. He walked for another day and finally stopped and sat under a juniper tree.

He cried, "What have I done! I'm no better than my fathers. Lord, take my life" Then he lay down and fell asleep.

After he slept a while, an angel touched him. "Get up and eat." Elijah woke up and saw a jug of water and some bread baking over hot coals. He ate the bread and drank the water and fell back to sleep.

Later, the angel of the Lord awoke him again and said, "Get up and eat. You have a long trip ahead of you."

Elijah woke up and once again found bread and water. So he got up, ate the bread and drank water. He then walked 40 days and 40 nights to Horeb, the mountain of God, also called Mt. Sinai. Once there, he entered a cave and spent the night.

In the morning the Lord said to him, "Elijah, what are you doing here?"

He said, "Lord, I've worked for you with all my heart. But Israel has forgotten their agreement with you. They've torn down your altars. They killed your prophets. I'm the last one, and they're trying to kill me."

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The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain." Suddenly, a powerful wind hit the mountains and shattered rocks. But the Lord wasn't in the wind.

Then there was an earthquake. But the Lord wasn't in the earthquake.

After that, there was a blast of fire. But the Lord wasn't in the fire.

Then Elijah heard a soft whisper. He wrapped his mantle around his face and went out of the cave and stood at the entrance.

The voice said to him, "Elijah, what are you doing here?"

"Lord, I've worked for you with all my heart. But Israel has forgotten their agreement with you. They've torn down your altars, and killed your prophets. I'm the last one, and they're trying to kill me."

The Lord said, "Oh Elijah, go back home. I have 7,000 men in Israel who haven't bowed to Baal." He then gave the prophet detailed instructions of what he was to do, which included anointing Elisha to replace him and selecting a new king for Israel.

Elijah went back to Israel where he found Elisha plowing a field. The prophet walked up to him and threw his mantle over him and walked on. Elisha left the oxen and ran to catch up with the prophet. He said, "Please, let me say good bye to my father and mother. Then I'll follow you."

Elijah turned and said, "You may go back, but don't forget the calling that is now yours."

With that, Elisha took the wooden yoke and plow and built a fire. He killed the oxen and made a meal for his family. When they were done eating, he left them and followed Elijah.

125 The Wounded Prophet

1 Kings 20

The king of Syria invaded Israel and marched his army against Samaria. He sent a message to King Ahab saying, "Give me your silver and gold. I also want your wives and sons."

Ahab sent a message back. "I'll give it all to you. I even give myself to you."

The king of Syria sent another message. "There's one more thing. Tomorrow, I'm sending people to search your palace and all the best houses. They'll take everything of value."

Ahab told this to the leaders of Israel. They said, "Don't do it. We'll fight him."

Ahab sent this message to the king of Syria, and he became angry. He said, "I'll totally destroy Samaria! When I'm done, it'll only be a trash heap." With that, he got drunk with some other kings who were with him.

As Ahab made preparations for battle, a prophet went to him and said, "The army of Syria is much bigger than yours, but the Lord is going to help you defeat them. You are to personally lead your men into battle so you'll see firsthand that the Lord is in control."

The King of Syria was still drunk when he heard that Ahab was marching his army out of Samaria. He told his soldiers "Take the men of Israel alive. I want them as slaves."

The army of Israel hit the Syrians so hard that they ran from the battlefield. It was a crushing defeat for the Syrian army. Even their king just barely escaped.

The prophet walked up to Ahab and said, "Get ready. They're coming back next spring."

The officials of Syria met with their king and said, "Their god is the god of the mountains. You were defeated because you fought them in the hills. You'll win if you fight them on flat land."

So in the spring, he once again invaded Israel. Ahab's army was like a small flock of goats next to a vast army.

The prophet said to Ahab. "They think the

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Lord is a god of the hills, and has no power on flat land. Therefore you'll defeat them, and then you'll know that the Lord – he is in control."

The battle started and the Syrian army suffered a massive defeat. 100,000 of their men died. They rushed back to their city, but suddenly a wall fell and killed another 27,000.

The king of Syria ran and hid in a closet. Finally his officials decided to humble themselves and go ask Ahab to have mercy on their king. Ahab said, "Oh, is my brother still alive? Bring him here." The two kings met together and worked out an agreement.

When the prophet heard about this, he turned to a friend and said, "God wants you to hit me."

The friend was shocked. He said, "I'm not going to hit you."

The prophet said, "You disobeyed the Lord. Therefore a lion will kill you." It happened just as he said. Soon after the friend left, a lion jumped on him and killed him.

The prophet said to another man, "God wants you to hit me." So the man beat him up. The prophet then covered his wounds with bandages and stood by the road.

Soon Ahab came by, but didn't know who this man was. The prophet yelled, "Your Majesty. During the battle, I was paid to guard a prisoner. I was told I'd be killed if he got away. Oh, I got distracted and the prisoner escaped."

The king said, "You fool! You'll get exactly what you said you'd get."

The prophet then pulled off his bandages and Ahab saw who he was. He said, "The Lord told you to kill the king of Syria, and you didn't do it. So now you'll die in his place! And your people will die instead of his people."

Ahab left the prophet and went back to Samaria, but he was no longer happy about his victory. Instead he became angry and depressed.

126 Naboth's Vineyard

I Kings 21

In the town of Jezreel, a man named Naboth owned a vineyard next to the palace of King Ahab. The king told Naboth he wanted to buy the vineyard and make it into a vegetable garden. He said, "I'll pay you full value in silver, or if you prefer, I'll give you a better vineyard someplace else."

Naboth said, "No. I couldn't sell this vineyard. It has been owned by our family for several hundred years."

At first, this made the king angry. He went home and refused to eat anything. Finally he became depressed and went and lay in his bed facing the wall.

Jezebel, the king's wife, asked him what was wrong. He said, "I asked Naboth to sell me his vineyard and he told me no! I even offered him a better vineyard in exchange for his."

Jezebel said, "Oh, is that all? Well, come have something to eat, and don't worry about Naboth's vineyard. I'll get it for you."

She wrote a letter to the town officials. It said, "Go get Naboth and have him stand before you. Bring in two liars that will swear he cursed God and the king. Then take him out and stone him until he's dead." She signed Ahab's name to the letter and sealed it with the official seal.

The city leaders did exactly as they were told. They got Naboth and condemned him to death. After the stoning, they sent a message back to

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Jezebel saying, "Naboth is dead."

She went to her husband and said, "You now own the vineyard you wanted. Go and enjoy it because Naboth is dead." When the king heard this good news, he went to see his vineyard.

At that same moment, the Lord said to Elijah, "King Ahab just stole Naboth's vineyard. Go tell him this. 'You murdered Naboth and the dogs licked his blood from the ground. Dogs will lick your blood at that exact spot.' "

Elijah went and found Ahab at Naboth's vineyard. When the king saw the prophet coming, he said, "Well, look at this. My enemy has found me."

"Yes, I found you. And you have found every way possible to do the things God hates. Now it's time for judgment. Your punishment will be just like King Jeroboam. You'll have no descendants. First, dogs will eat the body of your wife Jezebel. After that, your entire family will be eliminated from the earth. Dogs will eat all your relatives that die in the city. Birds will eat those who die in the country."

This struck Ahab in the heart. He ripped his clothes in sorrow. He fasted and wore sackcloth day and night. Finally, the Lord said to Elijah, "Ahab is truly sorry for what he did. Therefore, I won't destroy his family until after he's dead. All that I said will happen when his son is king."

127 Jehoshaphat & Ahab

I Kings 22 & II Chronicles 17 – 19:3

After Asa died, his son Jehoshaphat became king of Judah. The Lord was with him, and he followed the example of King David.

The first thing he did was make the nation more secure. He also set up an educational program so people could understand God's Laws. The Lord made the surrounding nations fear Jehoshaphat, so they didn't want to go to war with him.

The king decided to build an alliance with the kingdom of Israel. So he arranged a marriage between his son and the daughter of King Ahab.

Jehoshaphat then went to Israel to make the alliance stronger. Ahab said to him, "I'm going to fight a battle. Come with me and we'll do it together."

Jehoshaphat said, "I'm willing to go if it's God's will, so let's ask a prophet."

Ahab sent for of his 400 prophets. He said, "Should we go into this battle?"

They said, "Yes! Go fight because God will give you victory."

King Jehoshaphat said, "I want to hear from a prophet of the Lord. Don't you have one in Israel?"

Ahab said, "Well yes. We have one. But I hate to call him because he only says bad things about me. He's always talking about judgment."

Jehoshaphat said, "Still, I want to hear from him."

So Ahab said to his guards, "Go get Micaiah and bring him here."

As the guards brought the prophet in, they said him; "Everyone else is saying good things about the king's plans. So go along with them."

He said, "As there is a God in heaven, I'll say what the Lord tells me to say."

When King Ahab saw Micaiah, he said, "Tell me. Should I lead my army into this battle, or should I stay home?"

Micaiah said, "Oh, you should definitely go. You'll be successful."

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Ahab glared at him, "I've told you over and over. Always tell me the truth. What does the Lord really say about this battle?"

Micaiah said, "I see Israel scattered like sheep without a shepherd. Their master is dead."

Ahab turned to Jehoshaphat. "See I told you. He only says bad things about me."

Micaiah said, "Hear the Word of the Lord. I saw God sitting among his angels. He said, 'How shall I get King Ahab to go to this battle?' The angels had various ideas. Then one spirit said, 'I can make him go. I'll become a lying spirit in the mouth of his prophets. He'll believe them and go into the battle.' So, that's what he did. Listen, the Lord wants you at that battle."

One of Ahab's prophets walked over and slapped Micaiah. Ahab yelled at his guards, "Put this man in prison. Give him nothing but bread and water until I come back from battle."

Micaiah yelled at the crowd, "Everyone listen and remember. I'm not a prophet of God if the king returns from this battle."

Both kings went to the battlefield. Once they were there, Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, "You can wear your royal robes, but I'll disguise myself as a common soldier."

The battle was fierce. The opposing army was focused on killing Ahab, but they couldn't find him. At one point, they thought King Jehoshaphat was Ahab. But once they realized they were mistaken, they turned away from him.

Finally a man shot an arrow into the air without aiming. It hit Ahab at a joint in his armor. He yelled, "Take me off of the battlefield. I'm wounded."

Ahab watched the battle propped up in his chariot. He died as the sun set in the west.

They took his body back to the capital city and buried him. Someone washed his chariot at a pool. Dogs licked up his blood just as the Lord had said.

128 Jehoshaphat's Victory

II Chronicles 19 – 20

Jehoshaphat was 35 years old when he became king of Judah. He ruled for 25 years. He set up an educational system, established justice in the land, and reformed the legal system.

Things were going well in Judah, until suddenly the nations of Moab, Ammon, and Edom decided to unite together and fight against Jehoshaphat. A massive army moved from the east side of the Dead Sea to En-gedi, on the west side.

Jehoshaphat was afraid, so he sought the Lord's help. He sent out a proclamation saying that everyone was to fast and seek God's favor. The people responded, and many went to Jerusalem to be with their king and pray with him. A huge crowd went to the Temple and stood before the Lord. Men brought their wives and children, so entire families prayed together and sought God's help.

Jehoshaphat stood before all the people and prayed to God. He said, "Oh Lord, you're the God of heaven. You're the one who gave this land to your friend Abraham. You control all power and might. You said we're to trust you when we're in trouble. Look! The Moabites and Ammonites have gathered a massive army and have come to destroy us. We have no power to fight against them. We don't know what else to do but look to you."

Suddenly the Spirit of God came on a prophet. He said, "Hear what God says to you. 'Don't be afraid of this vast multitude. This isn't your battle, but mine. Tomorrow, go against them. You'll see them coming, but you don't have to fight them. Get in position, but stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. Don't be afraid, I am with you.' "

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Jehoshaphat bowed down and put his face to the ground. All the people did the same and worshiped the Lord. Suddenly the Levites stood and started praising the Lord God with a loud voice.

In the morning, the men got up early and went out to face their enemies. Jehoshaphat told them, "Believe in the Lord and you'll be successful." He then appointed people to sing for the Lord. They went out in front of the army singing, "Give thanks to the Lord. His faithful love endures forever."

As the people shouted and praised the Lord, suddenly their enemy became confused. The Ammonites and the Moabites turned on those from Edom and totally annihilated them. They then turned on one another and kept killing until every man was dead. When the army of Judah arrived on the battlefield, there was nothing but corpses lying on the ground. No one had escaped.

Jehoshaphat told his people to gather up anything of value from the dead bodies. They found that their enemies had carried a large amount of valuables onto the battlefield. There was so much that the people gathered for three days. Finally they couldn't carry any more.

They met on the fourth day, just to praise God. Then they returned to Jerusalem with Jehoshaphat at the lead. Everyone gathered at the Temple to once again praise the Lord with great rejoicing!

All the nations around Judah heard about the great victory God had given his people. They were all terrified of the Lord, and none of them attacked Jehoshaphat as long as he lived. So there was peace in the land, and all was quiet.

129 Captain of 50

II Kings 1

After Ahab died, his son Ahaziah became king of Israel. A short time later, he broke through a wooden rail and fell to the ground from the second floor of his house. He was seriously injured, so he said to his servants. "Go ask the god Baal-zebub if I'll recover from this."

Elijah stopped the servants along the road and said, "There is a God in Israel. So why are you taking this question to Baal-zebub? Here is the Lord's answer for the king. You won't get up from your sickbed. Instead, you're going to die."

The servants went back and gave King Ahaziah this message. The king said, "What did the man look like who told you this?"

"He was a hairy man with a leather belt around his waist."

"Oh, I know who he is. That's Elijah."

So King Ahaziah sent 50 soldiers to go get Elijah. When they got to where he was staying, the prophet was sitting at the top of an embankment. The captain of the men yelled up at him. "Man of God, come down! I have orders to take you to the king."

Elijah said, "If I'm a man of God, fire will come out of the sky and kill you and your 50 men." Suddenly a fireball fell from the sky and killed the captain and his men.

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So the king sent another 50 soldiers to get Elijah. When they got to where he was staying, the prophet was still sitting at the top of the embankment. The captain of the men yelled up at him. "Man of God, come down! I have orders to take you to the king."

Elijah said, "If I'm a man of God, fire will come out of the sky and kill you and your 50 men." Another fireball fell from the sky and killed the captain and his men.

Once again, the king sent 50 soldiers to go get Elijah. When they got to where he was staying, the captain of the men fell on his knees in front of Elijah. He said, "Man of God, please show compassion on us. Spare my life and the lives of these 50 servants of yours."

The angel of the Lord said to Elijah, "Go with them. You'll be safe." So he got up and went with them.

When he saw King Ahaziah, he said, "This is a message from the Lord. 'You could have asked me anything you wanted and I would have answered. But no! You sent your messengers to Baal-zebub. Therefore, you'll not get up from your sickbed. Instead, you'll die.'"

It happened just like Elijah said. King Ahaziah died. He didn't have children, so his brother Joram became king of Israel.

130 Elijah in the Whirlwind

II Kings 2

The time came for the Lord to take Elijah to heaven. So the old prophet said to Elisha, "Stay here. The Lord is sending me to Bethel."

Elisha said, "As sure as the Lord lives, I won't leave you." So they went to Bethel.

There was a group of prophets at Bethel. They said to Elisha, "Do you know the Lord is going to take your master away from you today?"

"Yes, I know. Now be quiet."

Elijah said, "Elisha, stay here. The Lord is sending me to Jericho."

Elisha said, "As sure as the Lord lives, I won't leave you." So they went to Jericho.

The prophets at Jericho said to Elisha, "Do you know the Lord is going to take your master away from you today?"

"Yes, I know. Now be quiet."

Elijah said to him, "Stay here. The Lord is sending me to the Jordan River."

Elisha said, "As sure as the Lord lives, I won't leave you." So they went on together.

When they got to the Jordan, Elijah rolled up his cloak, and struck the water. Immediately, the waters parted and the two men walked across the river on dry ground. Fifty prophets watched from a distance.

Once the two men were on the other side, Elijah said to Elisha, "What do you want me to do for you before I'm taken away?"

Elisha didn't hesitate. "Please, I want a double portion of your spirit."

Elijah was shocked. He said, "What? Your request is difficult. But, you'll have it if you see me being taken from you. If not, you won't get it."

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As they continued on, suddenly a chariot of fire with horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them. Then Elijah was taken up into heaven in the whirlwind ... and was gone.

Elisha saw it all. He ripped his clothes and yelled, "My father, my father, the chariots and horsemen of Israel!"

He then saw Elijah's cloak, which fell when the prophet went up into the air. Elisha walked over and picked it up. He turned and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan River. He lifted the cloak high in the air, and then struck the water. He said, "Where's the Lord God of Elijah?!" The waters parted, and he walked across on dry ground.

The fifty prophets saw all of this. They said, "The spirit of Elijah lives in Elisha." From that day on, they honored him as their new leader.

When he got back to Jericho, the people of the city said to him, "Jericho is a good place to live, but the spring is bad. It even keeps our crops from growing.

He said, "Put some salt in a new bowl and bring it to me."

They brought it to him and he went to the spring. He threw the salt into the water and said, "The Lord has made this water pure. You can now grow crops and no one will starve."

He left Jericho to return to Bethel. Along the way, some boys started making fun of him. They said, "Get out of here, baldy!"

The prophet turned and put a curse on them. Immediately, two bears ran out of the woods and killed 42 of the boys and ripped them apart.

131 Ditches of Water

II Kings 3

For many years, Moab was controlled by Israel and paid them high taxes. When Ahab died, the king of Moab refused to pay Israel any more taxes.

Ahab's son, King Joram organized his army and prepared to march against Moab. He sent a message to Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. "Please join me in our campaign against the king of Moab. He has rebelled against me."

Jehoshaphat agreed and the two armies marched south of the Dead Sea and into Edom. The Edomite army joined them. So all three continued their march toward Moab.

Soon they realized there wasn't enough water in that desert for all their men and animals. Joram said, "I think the Lord has led us here so we could all be captured by the Moabites."

Jehoshaphat said, "Do we have a prophet of God with us?"

One of the officers said, "Yes, Elisha is here."

The three kings went to him. When he saw Joram, he said, "Why are you coming to me. Why don't you talk to one of your idols?"

Joram said, "Please, I think the Lord your God has led us here so we would be captured by the Moabites."

Elisha said, "If it was just you, I wouldn't give you the time of day. But I have great respect for King Jehoshaphat, so send someone with a harp."

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As the harp played, the Lord gave Elisha a message for Joram. "Dig ditches in this dry riverbed. You won't see a storm, but this riverbed will fill up with plenty of water. There will be enough for you and your animals. This is an easy thing for the Lord to do. He will also help you defeat the Moabite army, and you'll be able to capture their cities."

The next morning, the water suddenly started flowing, so much so that it flooded the land. The Moabite army got up early and looked in the direction of the three kings. The sun was shining on the water and made it look red. They shouted, "Look at all that blood. The armies of the three kings have turned and killed one another. Come! Let's go collect the spoils from their camps."

When they got to Israel's camp, the Israelite army attacked them. They chased them back into Moab, and started taking city after city. Finally there was only one left that hadn't been defeated.

Israel surrounded it. The king of Moab tried to escape by taking 700 of his key soldiers and breaking through the front lines. The plan failed, so he grabbed his oldest son and sacrificed him as an offering on the city wall. The sight of this was so horrible that the Moabite soldiers went into a frenzy of rage. Seeing this, the three armies withdrew and went home.

132 Oil, Stew, Bread, and Ax

II Kings 4:1-4, 38-44, & 6:1-7

Elisha was in charge of the school of the prophets. There are several miracles associated with that group of young men.

There was the time when one of men died. His wife came to Elisha and said, "You know my husband followed the Lord and honored him. When he died, he owed a man some money. Now that man is coming to collect. He is going to take my two sons and sell them as slaves."

The prophet said, "Let me think. Surely I can help you. Tell me, do you have anything in your house that is valuable?"

She said, "No, I don't have anything of value in the house. Well, I do have a small jar of oil."

Elisha said, "Go to all of your neighbors and borrow as many containers as they have. Don't stop with just a few. Once you have them, go into your house with your sons and close the door. Pour oil into all those containers. Each time one is full, set it aside and fill the next one."

She and her sons went to every house and borrowed as many jars as they could. They took them into their house and closed the door. She then started pouring the oil into each jar. Her sons kept bringing her the empty ones. When they were all full, she turned and said, "Son, bring me another container."

He said, "Mother, there are no more." With that, the oil stopped.

She ran and told the man of God what happened. He said, "Go and sell the oil. Pay your debt and live on what is left over."

At another time, there was a famine so severe that there was very little to eat. When Elisha returned from a trip, the young prophets gathered around to listen to him teach. He said to a servant, "Fix a large pot of stew for these men."

One of the men went into the forest to get some herbs for the stew. He found a vine

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of wild gourds and didn't know they were poisonous. He gathered as many as he could carry, and cut them up and put them in the stew.

Once it was ready, some men tasted it and realized what had happened. They yelled, "Man of God. Watch out. There is death in the pot. Don't eat it."

Elisha said, "Bring me some flour." They gave him the flour and he threw it in the pot.

He then said, "Come, eat." Everyone ate, and there was nothing wrong with the stew.

Once a man came to Elisha with 20 small loaves of barley bread. It was the first bread from the harvest. The man of God said, "Serve this to the men so they can enjoy it."

"Sir, there are 100 men, and we only have 20 loaves of bread. There isn't enough for everyone."

Elisha said, "Give it to them. The Lord says there will be enough, and we'll have some left over."

So the bread was served to the men, and it was just like the Lord promised. There was enough for everyone, with some left over.

There came a time when the sons of the prophets realized their facilities were too small for them. Elisha gave them permission to go to the Jordan River and cut some logs for a new building. He agreed to go with them.

One of the men borrowed an iron ax and was using it to cut down a tree. Suddenly the ax head fell off and went into the water. The man yelled, "Master! I borrowed that ax and now it's ruined."

Elisha said, "Where did it fall into the water?"

The man pointed to the spot. Elisha then cut a stick and threw it in the water at the spot the young man showed him. The ax head floated to the surface. The young man got it and fixed the ax.

133 Shunammite Woman

II Kings 4:8-37

Elisha traveled to a town called Shunem. A prominent woman provided a meal for him. She then gave him an invitation to eat at their home whenever he was in their town.

Some time later, the woman said to her husband, "The man who comes here is a holy man. Let's make a small room for him upstairs. We'll provide a bed, table, chair, and a lamp. He can stay there whenever he comes to our city." They prepared the room, and Elisha used it whenever he was in Shunem.

One day, the prophet stopped at the home and went up to his room. He said to Gehazi his servant, "The Shunammite woman has done all of this for us. Go ask her what I can do for her. Possibly she would like me to speak to the king for her, or a commander of the army.

Gehazi went and talked to her, but she said that her family provided for all her needs. Elisha then asked his servant, "Do you have any ideas of what we can do for her?"

"Well, she doesn't have a son, and her husband is old."

Elisha said, "Tell her to come and stand in the doorway."

The woman went up the stairs and stood in the doorway of the prophet's room. He said to her, "This time next year, you'll have a son."

She begged him. "Oh man of God, don't tell me that unless it's true."

A year later, she gave birth to a baby boy, just as Elisha had promised. The child grew and in time was old enough to help his father with the harvest.

One day out in the field, he complained of a severe headache. His father told a servant to take the boy to his mother. The servant took him there and she held her son on her lap. Still, he died around noon. She took him up to Elisha's room and laid him on the prophet's bed.

She then sent a message to her husband. "Please send me a donkey and a servant. I need to hurry and go see the man of God. I'll come back as fast as I can."

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The husband agreed and sent her a donkey and a servant. She said to the servant, "Take me to the man of God at Mount Carmel. Don't slow down unless I tell you."

Elisha saw her coming from a distance, but the Lord didn't tell him why she was coming. He sent Gehazi to ask why, but she wouldn't tell him.

When she got to the prophet, she ran up, fell down, and grabbed his feet. Gehazi started to pull her away, but the prophet said, "Don't! She's deeply troubled and God still hasn't told me why."

The woman looked up and yelled, "I told you not to tell me I'd have a son unless it was true!"

The prophet turned to Gehazi. "Run back to her house. Don't talk to anyone along the way. Take this staff and place it on the boy's face."

Gehazi took the staff and left. Elisha then told the woman that she and her servant could go home. She said, "Listen to me carefully. As sure as God is alive, and as sure as you're alive, I'm not leaving you until my son is alive." So Elisha went with them to her house.

Gehazi got there first and placed the staff on the boy's face. Nothing happened. When Elisha arrived, he went into the room alone and locked the door. He prayed to the Lord, and then went over and stretched out over the boy's body with his eyes over the boy's eyes, his mouth over the boy's mouth, and his hands over the boy's hands. Soon the boy's flesh became warm once again, but he didn't start breathing.

The prophet got up and paced back and forth. Then he once again stretched out over the boy's body. Suddenly the boy sneezed ... and then he sneezed again ... and then he sneezed again. He sneezed a total of seven times. After that, the boy opened his eyes and looked at the prophet.

Elisha got up and called for Gehazi. "Go and get the Shunammite woman."

When she came into the room, the prophet said, "Pick up your son." Without saying a word, she knelt at the feet of the man of God. She then picked up her son and left.

134 Naaman

II Kings 5:1-14

Naaman was the commander of the Syrian army. He was a brave warrior and led his men to win many victories. His king considered him a great man. During one of their wars with Israel, he captured a young girl and brought her back to be a servant for his wife.

In time, Naaman realized he had leprosy, a crippling disease of the skin. The young slave girl said, "I wish my master could go to Israel. They have a prophet who's able to heal people, even those with leprosy."

Naaman told this to the king. Immediately, the king made preparations to send Naaman to the king of Israel. He sent gifts of gold, silver, and fine clothes along with a letter saying, "I'm sending my servant Naaman so you can cure him of leprosy."

The king of Israel was shocked when he read the letter. He ripped his clothes and yelled, "Who does he think I am? I'm not God. I can't cure people of leprosy! He's trying to start a war with me."

Elisha heard about this and sent a message

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to the king. "Why are you ripping your clothes? Send the man to me so he'll know there's a prophet in Israel."

So Naaman and his men rode to the prophet's house and stood outside. Elisha sent his servant Gehazi out with this message. "Go down to the Jordan River and wash seven times. After you're done, you'll be healed of leprosy."

Naaman couldn't believe what he was hearing. He became furious and stormed away. He said, "A true prophet would come out and stand in front of me. He'd pray to the Lord and wave his hand over my skin. If I thought washing in a river would help, I'd bathe in one of the beautiful rivers of Syria – not a dirty river like the Jordan."

His servants said to him, "My father, if the prophet had asked you to do something hard, you would've done it. But he told you to do something easy – wash and be clean."

So Naaman went to the Jordan River and dipped into it seven times. Suddenly his skin was healed just as the prophet said it would be. In fact, it was like the skin of a young boy.

Continued in the next story

135 Gehazi

II Kings 5:15-27

Continued from the previous story

After Naaman was healed at the Jordan River, he and his men went back to the prophet's house and stood before him. Naaman said, "Today I've learned, and now know, that there's no god on earth except the God of Israel. Please accept my humble gift."

Elisha said, "As sure as God lives, I won't take a gift from you." Naaman insisted, but the prophet still refused.

Then the commander said, "Please let me have as much dirt as two mules can carry. I'll no longer worship any other god. Instead, I'll kneel on this dirt from Israel and worship the Lord God."

He then asked for something else. "When my king goes into the temple of his god, I'm required to go with him because I'm his commander. While I'm there, I have to kneel down in front of the idol. I ask that the Lord will forgive me for doing this."

Elisha said, "Go home in peace, and don't worry about that situation."

Shortly after Naaman left, Gehazi started thinking. "My master let this Syrian off too easy. He should've paid something. I'll go catch up with him and ask for a gift for myself."

So Gehazi went after the Syrian commander.

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Soon, Naaman saw him coming and stopped his chariot. He got off and greeted the servant. "Is everything all right?"

Gehazi said, "Oh yes, everything is fine. My master just found out that he's having two young guests staying with us tonight. They're from the school of the prophets. He was wondering if you would like to help with the expenses – possibly 75 pounds of silver and a couple of sets of clothes."

"Certainly! Here, I'll give you 150 pounds of silver in two bags, as well as two sets of clothes." The commander gave all of this to a couple of his men so they could carry it back for the servant.

Gehazi had the men take the silver and clothes to his own house. Once everything was put away, he sent the men away. He then went and stood next to his master.

Elisha said, Gehazi, where did you go?"

"I didn't go anywhere."

Elisha said, "Oh my dear friend. My spirit was there when Naaman stopped his chariot and stepped down to greet you. It wasn't your place to accept money, clothes, olive trees, vineyards, animals, or slaves. Therefore, Naaman's leprosy is now attaching itself to your skin."

With that, Gehazi turned and left the house. He looked down at his arms, and they were already white with leprosy.

136 Blind Soldiers

II Kings 6:8-23

The king of Syria invaded the land of Israel. He brought in his military leaders and told them his plans – where he was going to set up camp and how he was going to attack the Israelites. As soon as he spoke the words, Elisha went and told the king of Israel exactly what the Syrians were planning. The army of Israel made preparations and won the battle.

This happened several times until the king of Syria finally realized that the Israelites always knew exactly what he was planning. He said to his commanders, “Which one of you is a spy for Israel?”

One of them said. “My lord, we’re all loyal to you. It’s Elisha, the prophet. He is the one telling his king about your plans. He knows what you say, even when you’re in your bedroom.”

“Where does this prophet live?”

“He lives in Dothan, my lord.”

So the king sent a large army with horses and chariots to Dothan. They arrived at night and surrounded the city.

Elisha’s servant got up early and stepped outside. Suddenly he saw this massive army. Running back inside, he yelled, “The Syrian army has surrounded the city. What are we going to do?”

Elisha was surprised. “Why are you afraid? Our army is much bigger than theirs.”

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Then he prayed, “Lord, open this man’s eyes so he can see.” So the Lord opened his eyes. He looked out and saw that the mountain was covered with horses and chariots of fire. All of them were for Elisha.

At that point, the Syrians started moving in on the city. The prophet prayed, “Lord, please make all these men blind.” Suddenly the Lord struck them with blindness.

The prophet walked up to them and said, “Somehow you’ve gotten on the wrong road. You’re at the wrong city. I’ll guide you and take you to the right place.”

He then led them to Samaria, the capital of Israel. Once they were inside the gate, he prayed, “Lord, open the eyes of these men so they can see.” The men looked around and realized they were in Samaria.

The king of Israel saw this and said to Elisha, “Should I kill them? ”

“No. You can’t kill these men. You didn’t capture them in battle. They’re your guests. Give them food and drink, and let them go back to their master.”

So the king prepared a great feast for his guests. When everyone had enough to eat and drink, they went back to the king of Syria. It was a long time before Syria invaded Israel again.

137 Four Lepers & the Syrian Camp

II Kings 6:24 – 7:20

The king of Syria once again invaded Israel. His army surrounded Samaria and set up camp just outside the city walls. They cut off all supplies going into the city. Eventually there was no food, and the people started to starve. It was so bad that a donkey's head sold for two pounds of silver, and a small bowl of dove's droppings sold for two ounces of silver.

A woman saw the king walking along the top of the city wall. She asked him to help her. He said, "I don't know if I can. What's your problem?"

She said, "My friend won't keep her promise. We agreed we'd eat our two sons, mine on the first day and hers on the second. So, we boiled and ate my son, but now she has hidden her son."

When the king heard this, he ripped his clothes. He said, "I'll get Elisha for this if it's the last thing I do." He sent a guard to cut off the prophet's head.

Elisha was sitting in his house with several elders of Israel. He said, "Our murdering king has sent a guard to cut off my head. The king is right behind him."

Just then the king walked in. He yelled at the prophet. "You said all this trouble is from God. So why should I serve him if he acts like this?"

Elisha said, "I have a message from God. He said this disaster is almost over. Tomorrow at this time, people will buy a sack of fine flour for a few coins. They'll buy a large sack of barley for the same price."

The king's chief adviser said, "Impossible! We couldn't have that much food around here even if God opened up the windows of heaven."

The man of God said, "You'll see it with your own eyes, but you won't eat any of it."

During the night, the Syrian army heard a loud noise like a large army marching toward them. The noise got louder and sounded like the army had many horses and chariots.

The Syrian soldiers thought Israel had hired

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other nations to come and help them. They yelled, "Let's get out of here!" They got up and ran away, leaving everything behind.

Before light the next morning, four lepers were sitting just outside of the city gates. One said to the others, "Why are we just sitting here slowly dying of hunger?"

Another one said, "Well, it's no better in the city. If we go in there, we'll still die of hunger."

"Well that's true, but we can't stay here. Let's go into the Syrian camp. If they kill us – well, we're about to die anyway. But maybe they'll have pity on us and give us food."

So, the four men got up and walked toward the camp, not knowing it was empty. They went into the first tent and found food, gold, silver, and expensive clothes. The first thing they did was eat the food. They then took the other things away and hid them. They came back and hid what they found in the next tent.

Finally they said, "What we're doing isn't right. People are dying of hunger on the other side of the wall. God will punish us if we don't go tell them about this."

So they went to the city gate and yelled to the gatekeeper, telling him exactly what they found. When the king heard about this, he thought it was a trap. He said, "The Syrian army is hiding out of sight, waiting for us to come out of the city."

So he sent a few soldiers to scout out the land. The men found the route the Syrians had taken. It was full of clothes and equipment the army had thrown away so they could run faster.

The soldiers went back and told the king what they had found. With that, people flooded out of the city to raid the Syrian camp. The price of food immediately dropped.

The king gave his chief adviser the job of crowd control at the gate. Soon, he was trampled to death. All of this fulfilled what the prophet had said.

138 Elisha Crying

II Kings 8:1-15

Elisha went to the Shunammite woman and said, "Take your family and leave Israel as soon as you can. A famine will hit the land and last for seven years."

She did as the man of God said. Her family left Israel and moved to the land of the Philistines and stayed there seven years. When she came back to Israel, she went to the king to ask that their family house and land be returned to her.

When she arrived, she found that the king was listening to Gehazi, who was talking about some of the great things Elisha had done. It happened that the servant was telling about the time the prophet brought the dead boy back to life.

Just then, the Shunammite woman walked in. Gehazi said, "My lord. This is the woman I was talking about. It was her son that was raised from the dead."

The king asked her to tell the story from her viewpoint. After she told the story, he said to a court official, "Make sure this woman gets everything back that belongs to her. Also, give her whatever money was made from her fields while she was away."

Some time later, Elisha went to the capital of Syria. The Syrian king was sick. When he heard that Elisha was in town, he sent his servant Hazael

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to the prophet. "Take some gifts to the man of God and ask him if I'll recover from this illness."

Hazael took 40 camel-loads of all kinds of goods as a gift. He said to the prophet, "The king of Syria wants to know if he'll recover from his illness."

Elisha said, "Go tell him that he'll recover from his illness. But that's not true. The Lord has told me that he'll die."

Then Elisha stared at Hazael. He stared so long that Hazael became embarrassed. Then the prophet broke down and cried. Hazael said, "Man of God, why are you crying?"

"Oh, because of the horrible things you'll do to the people of Israel. You'll burn down their cities and kill their young men. You'll crush the heads of babies and rip open pregnant women."

Hazael said, "How can I do these terrible things? I'm only a servant."

"Oh, the Lord has shown me that you are going to be the king of Syria."

Hazael left the prophet and went back to his master. The king asked, "What did Elisha say?"

"He said you'd recover from your illness."

The next day, Hazael dipped a heavy cloth into water, and used it to suffocate the king. After he died, Hazael took his place as king of Syria.

139 Jehu becomes King

II Kings 8:28 – 9:29

Elisha selected one of the sons of the prophets. He said to him, “Take this bottle of oil and go to Jehu. He’ll be with his friends, so ask to see him alone. Anoint him king of Israel. Once you’re done, open the door and run away.”

The young prophet found Jehu visiting with the other commanders of the army. The young man said to him, “I have a message for you.”

The two of them went into the house. The young prophet poured oil on Jehu’s head and said, “Here is the message from the Lord. ‘I anoint you king over Israel. You’re to kill the entire household of Ahab. Every male in his family is to die. Jezebel will be eaten by the dogs.’ ” With that, the young man opened the door and ran away.

Jehu went back to his friends. They said, “What did that crazy prophet want?”

“Oh, you know how they are. He went on and on about nothing.”

They said, “You’re not telling the truth. What did he say?”

“Oh well, he did say one interesting thing. He said, ‘I anoint you king of Israel.’ ”

The others jumped up and spread their coats down before him. They blew a ram’s horn and shouted “Jehu is king!” Immediately they started planning how they were going to overthrow Joram, king of Israel. He was the son of Ahab and Jezebel.

Joram was at his palace at Jezreel. His nephew, the king of Judah, had come to visit him. Jehu gathered his men and went to Jezreel.

The watchman saw him and his men coming and said to the king, “There’s a band of soldiers coming this way.”

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Joram said, “Send a rider out to them to see if they’re coming in peace.”

A man rode out to Jehu and said, “The king wants to know if you’re coming in peace.”

“He knows nothing about peace. Get behind my men.”

The watchman said to the king, “The rider got there but isn’t coming back. He’s now riding behind the others.”

So the king sent another rider out. He rode up to Jehu and said, “The king wants to know if you’re coming in peace.”

“He knows nothing about peace. Get behind my men.”

The watchman said to the king, “The second rider has also joined them. My lord, I know who’s coming. It’s like a wild man is driving the lead chariot. That’s how Jehu drives a chariot.”

Joram said, “Go get our chariots!” Both kings rode out to meet the soldiers, each in his own chariot. Joram yelled, “Jehu, do you come in peace?”

He yelled back, “How can there be peace when Jezebel practices witchcraft and makes everyone worship idols?”

Joram turned his chariot around and yelled to his nephew. “Run! It’s a trap.”

Jehu shot an arrow and killed Joram, hitting him between his shoulder blades. The commander shouted, “Take his body and throw it in the field that was stolen from Naboth.”

He then chased after the young king of Judah, because he was the grandson of Ahab. Once he was in range, Jehu shot the king with an arrow. So, in one day, Jehu killed both the king of Israel and the king of Judah.

Continued in the next story

140 Jezebel

! *II Kings 9:30 – 10:36*

Continued from the previous story

After Jehu killed the two kings, he went back to Jezreel to find Jezebel. She knew he was coming, so she put on makeup, brushed her hair, and sat next to her second floor window.

When he arrived, she called down to him, “Why are you here – to keep killing people who are better than you?”

He looked up at her, and then yelled, “Is anyone up there that’s on my side?” Some men who worked for the queen looked down from the window. Jehu yelled, “Throw her out of the window!”

They picked up Jezebel and threw her out of the window. She fell to the ground, splattering blood on the wall. Jehu drove his chariot over her several times. He then went inside to get something to eat.

After the meal, he said, “Well, I guess we should bury her. After all, she is a queen.”

He sent some men out to take care of this, but they could only find her skull, feet and the palms of her hands. They told Jehu and he said, “God spoke through Elijah when he said, ‘Dogs will eat Jezebel at Naboth’s field, and she will be fertilizer.’ ”

Jehu then sent a message to the elders in Samaria. “Your city walls are strong, and you have plenty of horses, chariots and weapons. The 70 sons of Ahab live under your protection. Therefore, select one to be your king, and prepare for battle.”

The elders were terrified when they got

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this letter. They sent him a message saying, “We don’t want to make any of these sons of Ahab our king. We’re your servants and will do whatever you say.”

He sent a message back to them. “If that’s true, put the heads of those 70 sons in baskets and send them to me.” So the 70 sons of Ahab were killed, and their heads were sent to Jehu. He then made sure no other relative of Ahab was still alive.

Once all of this was done, Jehu made an announcement in Samaria. He said, “Ahab served Baal a little, but I’m totally dedicated to him. Therefore I’m having a great sacrifice to Baal. All the true worshipers of Baal are to be there. I’ll kill anyone who misses this meeting.”

This announcement was made all across Israel. Baal worshipers came from every part of the nation. They filled up the temple of Baal. No one was missing. Jehu said, “Look around and see if there are any servants of the Lord with us. If you see one, throw him out immediately. Only servants of Baal are welcome here.”

Once this was done, the people started making their burnt offerings. Jehu went outside and said to his men. “Go in and kill everyone. If anyone escapes, you’ll give your life for his.”

So the men went in and killed everyone. They then tore down the temple of Baal and made it into a large toilet.

The Lord said, “You have followed my instructions with enthusiasm. Therefore, your sons will be king of Israel for four generations.” So Jehu reigned over Israel for 28 years.

141 Athaliah

II Chronicles 21-23 &

II Kings 8:16-29, 9:14-29, 11:1-21

King Jehoshaphat wanted to establish a good relationship between Judah and Israel. To do that, he had his oldest son marry Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, king of Israel. Unfortunately, Athaliah influenced her husband to follow the sinful ways of Israel.

As soon as Jehoshaphat died, his son became king and put idols all around Judah, and built a temple to Baal in Jerusalem. He killed his six brothers to make sure they wouldn't take the kingdom away from him.

Elisha sent him a message. "You've caused the people to worship idols, and now you've killed your brothers. They were all better men than you. Therefore, all of your sons will be killed, and you'll die a slow agonizing death."

Immediately, Judah started losing battles. The king developed a severe stomach illness. All of his sons were killed except the youngest. The king's illness caused him extreme pain for two years. When he finally died, no one mourned his death.

His youngest son became king, but followed the direction of his mother Athaliah. He went to visit his uncle, the king of Israel. Jehu killed both of them.

At that point, Athaliah decided to become the king, even though she was a woman. Still, she knew the people of Judah always selected their kings from the descendants of David. That meant the people could kill her and make one of her grandchildren king. Therefore, she decided to kill them. She called for the guard and told him to go to the palace and kill them all.

Athaliah's daughter heard this and rushed to the palace. She worshiped the Lord and was married to Jehoiada, the high priest. At the palace, she took the baby Joash and his nurse, and left just before the guards got there. She hid the child in the Temple of the Lord. Meanwhile the guards

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killed all the other royal descendants of David.

Athaliah was confident she had killed them all. So, she became king of Judah and ruled the nation for six years.

Jehoiada hid Joash in the Temple until he was seven years old. Finally the priest knew it was time to act. He organized a meeting with trusted military leaders and the heads of various family groups. He asked them, "What would you do if you had a descendant of King David?"

"We would make him king!"

Jehoiada then brought Joash before them and said, "Here is your next king."

Together, they set a date to bring him out before the people. They organized the military, Temple activities, and crowd control. On the big day, the people of Judah went to the Temple.

Joash was brought out and put in the place reserved for the king. Jehoiada anointed him with oil and placed a crown on his head. The trumpets blew, the choir sang, and the people shouted, "Long live the king!!"

Athaliah heard all the shouting, so she went out to see what was going on. People were running through the streets, celebrating, and talking about the king. She walked into the Temple and saw Joash in the place reserved for the king, and he had a crown on his head. She ripped her clothes and screamed, "Treason! Treason!"

Jehoiada pointed at her and said, "Take that woman out, because it is not right to kill someone in the Temple."

So they dragged Athaliah out of the Temple, and killed her at the horse corral. The people went through the city and tore down everything that had to do with Baal. The high priest once again set up the worship of the Lord in the Temple. Everyone rejoiced because Athaliah's reign of terror was over.

142 Joash

II Kings 12 & II Chronicles 24

Joash was seven years old when he became king of Judah. Jehoiada, the high priest, taught the king and helped him live a godly life. As long as Jehoiada lived, Joash followed the ways of the Lord.

When the king was older, he decided to make repairs on the Temple of the Lord. Athaliah had taken every thing of value out of it to use in the worship of Baal.

Joash assigned priests and Levites to go throughout the nation and collect money for Temple repairs and annual upkeep. Many years earlier, Moses had provided for this by imposing a tax.

They started collecting the money, but the repairs didn't start. The king finally realized the money was being used for administration costs and for other things the priests thought important."

It was clear that the priests and Levites were the wrong people to oversee the Temple repair. Joash decided on a different method. He told men to make a large box and put it at the Temple gate. He then announced that people were to bring their money for the Temple and put it in the box.

The people of Judah liked this, so they brought their offerings and put them in the box. When it got full, the money was given to the men making the repairs. This gave them the ability to keep at their work and not slow down. They were men of integrity, so the king didn't require them to give an accounting of the money and how it was spent.

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The offerings kept coming in even after the work was done. So the extra money was used for making various tools of worship. The people of Judah became faithful at coming to the Temple and worshiping God.

All of this was done while Jehoiada was still alive. He died when he was 130 years old, having lived a good life. He had served his king, his God, and the people of Judah.

After his death, Joash listened to various leaders of Judah who wanted a different direction for the nation. He allowed them to make changes, and soon the people stopped going to the Temple to worship God. Instead they turned to idols and sex goddesses.

The Lord sent prophets to preach against this. The son of Jehoiada was now a priest. God had him stand before the people and say, "If you leave the Lord, he'll leave you."

The people rejected this message and wanted to kill the priest. Finally Joash ordered him to be stoned, even though he was the son of Jehoiada, who had been a faithful friend and advisor.

Soon afterwards, God allowed a small Syrian army to conquer the superior army of Judah and take Jerusalem. Many of the Jewish leaders were killed, the king was badly wounded, and the Syrians took everything of value. After they left, several men went into the king's bedroom and killed him.

Joash had been king for 40 years. The people didn't bury him in the tombs of the kings because of what he had done to the son of Jehoiada.

143 Death of Elisha

II Kings 13

Jehu's son became king after his father died. Unfortunately he wasn't a good king. Still, he sought the Lord's help once, and the Lord helped him.

His son was Jehoash. During his reign, Elisha became sick and was about to die. The king knelt down beside the prophet's bed and cried. He said, "My father, my father, the chariots and horsemen of Israel!"

Elisha said to him, "Go get your bow and some arrows."

When the king came back with them, the prophet said, "Grab the bow." So the king grabbed the bow. The man of God then put his hand on top of Jehoash's hand and said, "Now, open the window."

The king opened the window. Elisha said, "Shoot an arrow out the window." So Jehoash

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shot an arrow out the window.

Elisha said, "That was the Lord's arrow of victory. You'll have victory over Syria. Now grab a handful of arrows and hit them on the ground."

Jehoash grabbed some arrows and hit the ground three times and stopped. The prophet yelled at him. "Why did you only hit the ground three times? You should've hit it five or six times. Then you would have totally defeated Syria and brought an end to them. Now you'll only defeat them three times."

Elisha died and was buried in a tomb. The following spring, some Israelites were conducting a funeral. Suddenly they saw some men coming, and realized they were Moabite raiders. The men from Israel threw the body into Elisha's tomb and ran away. As soon as the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up.

144 Jonah & the Fish

Jonah 1-2

The Lord said to Jonah the prophet, “Leave right now and go to Nineveh. You’re to tell them I’m going to judge them because of their wickedness.”

Jonah knew that God was merciful and would forgive Nineveh if they repented. He didn’t want that, so he ran away from God’s will and went to the seaport town called Joppa. He bought a ticket and got on a ship going to Tarshish. He wanted to get far away from God’s will so there would be no possibility of Nineveh’s repenting.

Once the ship was out to sea, God sent a violent storm to hit it. The sailors were terrified because the storm was about to destroy their boat and drown them. They threw their cargo overboard to lighten the load. When that didn’t help, they prayed to their various gods. While all of this was going on, Jonah was fast asleep down in the hold of the boat.

The captain woke him up and said, “How can you sleep? We’re about to die. Get up and pray to your god.”

Eventually the sailors figured out that this storm was directed at only one person on the ship. They cast lots to see who it was. The results showed that Jonah was the reason for their troubles. They said, “Who are you, and what have you done?”

He said, “I serve the Lord God, who made the

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sea and the dry ground. But I’m running away from him.”

Suddenly the storm got worse! The men screamed at Jonah, “What should we do to you to calm the storm?”

Jonah yelled back, “God only wants one thing, and the storm won’t stop until He gets it. You’re to grab me and throw me overboard.”

The men didn’t want to kill an innocent man, so they worked even harder to fight against the storm and get to land. Finally they realized they couldn’t fight God. They cried out to the Lord and asked him for mercy for what they were about to do. They then grabbed Jonah and threw him overboard.

Immediately, the storm stopped! The men were shocked at the power of God. They fell to the deck and worshiped the Lord and vowed to serve only him.

God had a large fish waiting for Jonah as he went into the water. The fish immediately swallowed him, and he stayed in the fish’s stomach for three days.

Jonah prayed and acknowledged that it was God who put him in the fish. He finally said, “I’ll give you what you want. I’ll thank you for your will, and do what you want me to do.”

With that, the Lord spoke to the fish. It went to land and vomited Jonah onto the shore.

145 Jonah & the Vine

Jonah 3-4

Once again, God said to Jonah, “Leave right now and go to Nineveh. You’re to tell them I’m going to judge them because of their wickedness.” This time, Jonah immediately got up and went to Nineveh.

The city of Nineveh was extremely large. It took three days to walk from one side to the other. So Jonah started his walk across the city. He shouted, “God is going to destroy this city in 40 days!”

The people of the city heard him preach and believed what he said was true. They passed a law that said everyone was to fast – no exceptions. Everyone was to go without food, and they were to wear burlap sacks. They prayed and asked God to be merciful to them.

The king stepped down from his throne and laid aside his royal robes. He put on burlap sacks and sat on a pile of ashes. He sent out another law that said, “No one is to taste any food or water. That includes animals as well. Everyone is to wear burlap sacks, and stop any evil they are doing. Maybe God will change his mind and allow us to live.”

The Lord saw all they were doing. He knew they turned away from their wickedness, so he stopped the judgment that was about to kill them and destroy their city.

Jonah was furious when he heard about this. He said, “I told you this would happen! I knew you were a merciful God. I knew you were quick to forgive. That’s exactly why I didn’t want to

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come here. That’s why I ran away. Kill me right now. I don’t want to live.”

The Lord said, “Do you think it’s right to be so angry about this?”

Jonah didn’t answer, but went to the east side of the city. He made a small shelter so he could sit and see exactly what God was going to do with the city.

While he was sitting there, God caused a vine to grow up next to him. The vine had large leaves, which provided shade from the hot sun. Jonah was pleased with the plant, and enjoyed the shade it provided.

The next morning, God caused a worm to attack the vine and kill it. As the sun got hot, the plant withered. Then God caused a hot east wind to blow on Jonah. As the day went by, the sun and the wind got hotter and hotter, and there was no vine to protect him. Jonah cried, “I don’t want to live anymore. I want to die!”

God said to him, “Is it right to be angry about the vine?”

“Yes, it’s right for me to be angry. I’m so mad I want to die.”

The Lord said, “You’re angry about a simple vine. You didn’t plant it. You didn’t water it. It came up one day and died the next.”

“Shouldn’t I also care for the people of this city? If for no other reason, there are over 120,000 children living here, not to mention all the animals.

146 The Thistle and the Cedar

II Chronicles 25 & II Kings 14:1-22

After Joash died, Amaziah became king of Judah. He started off as a good king, and followed the Lord for many years.

Eventually, he decided to attack Edom and bring them under his control. He organized an army of 300,000 soldiers. He then hired another 100,000 soldiers from Israel and paid them four tons of silver.

A man of God came with a message. "Don't use soldiers from Israel. If you do, God will make sure you lose the battle."

The king said, "But what about the money I already paid them?"

The prophet said, "Don't worry about that money. God is able to give you much more than that."

So the king told the soldiers of Israel to go home. They became angry. Along the way they raided several cities of Judah and killed over 3,000 people.

While this was going on, the army of Judah marched south toward Edom. They won the battle and regained control over them. Unfortunately, Amaziah brought the gods of Edom back to Judah. He set them up and started worshiping them.

The Lord became angry and sent a prophet to speak to the king. "Why would you worship gods that weren't able to protect their own people from your army?"

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Before he could say any more, Amaziah said, "Stop talking! You're not one of my counselors. Leave or I'll have you killed."

The prophet said, "Because you won't listen to God's message, he is going to punish you."

So the Lord put in Amaziah's heart the desire to go to war against Israel. The king sent a message to king Jehoash saying, "Come out and face me in battle."

Jehoash sent a story back to Amaziah. He said, "A thistle sent a message to the cedar tree. He said, 'I want to arrange a marriage between my son and your daughter.' Suddenly an animal accidentally stepped on the thistle and crushed it."

"Don't be like the thistle. You had a good victory with Edom. Enjoy it, but don't let pride lift you up. Stay home, because if you come after me, Judah will fall."

God made sure Amaziah didn't listen to this. The two armies went into battle and Judah was totally defeated. Their army ran from the battlefield.

Jehoash captured Amaziah and then took Jerusalem. Israel broke down 600 feet of the wall of Jerusalem. They took all the gold and silver from the Temple and the king's palace.

Jehoash left Amaziah in Jerusalem and went back to Samaria. A group of men tried to kill Amaziah, but he escaped to another city. They hunted him down, and killed him there.

147 Uzziah

*II Chronicles 26-27 &
II Kings 15:1-7, 32-38*

When Amaziah died, the people made his son – Uzziah – king. He was 16 years old and served as king for 52 years. God gave him great success because he followed the Lord and wanted to please him.

Uzziah did many wonderful works. He defeated the enemies of Judah and was known far and wide as a powerful king. He restored Jerusalem and strengthened the other cities of Judah. He loved the soil, so he excelled in farm activities. He provided for his army so that every man was well equipped for battle. He invented the catapult, so he could throw large stones from the walls of Jerusalem.

One day, king Uzziah was feeling proud of his accomplishments and his dedication to God. He decided to go into the Temple and burn the incense himself, instead of letting the priest do it. The high priest suddenly realized what he was about to do. He got 80 other priests and went in the Temple so they could stop the king from doing this.

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He said, “Uzziah, this is wrong! God made it clear that only a descendant of Aaron is allowed to offer incense to the Lord. Please, leave right now! You’re not honoring God in this.”

Uzziah became angry as he stood next to the altar with the censer in his hand. He couldn’t believe all the priests were so bold as to confront him on this. Suddenly leprosy appeared on his forehead. All of the priests saw it and rushed him out of the Temple. He willingly went with them because he knew the Lord was punishing him.

Uzziah had leprosy for the rest of his life. He had to stay away from other people, so he lived in isolation. Because of the leprosy, he wasn’t allowed to go into the Temple. He couldn’t even go into his own palace. His son Jotham lived there and ruled the people in the king’s stead.

Jotham became king after his father died. He followed the example of his father’s early years. He continued to build up the kingdom of Judah. He did what was right and became a powerful king.

148 Ahaz

II Chronicles 28 & II Kings 16

Ahaz was 20 years old when he became king of Judah. Unlike his father and grandfather, he didn't follow the Lord. He started the worship of Baal in Jerusalem, and even began to practice the ritual of child sacrifice. Syria marched on Jerusalem and took people away as captives. Ahaz sent gold and silver to the king of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. He said, "I'll be your loyal servant if you rescue us from Syria."

So Assyria attacked Syria and totally destroyed their nation and sent most of their people into exile.

Ahaz went to Syria to meet with the king of Nineveh. While he was there, he saw a special altar he liked, and sent plans back to Jerusalem so his craftsmen could build one like it.

It was done by the time the king got back to Jerusalem. So he took many of the things from inside the Temple and started to use them with his new altar. He then closed the doors of the Temple so no one could go inside to worship.

The Lord became angry and allowed the king of Israel to defeat Judah. Their army marched on Jerusalem and killed 120,000 men, including some of Ahaz's sons. The army took a massive amount of Judah's wealth back to Israel. They also took 200,000 women and children, to be used as slaves.

A prophet of the Lord met the army as they came into Samaria. He said, "The Lord gave

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Israel victory over Judah because he was angry with them. But God is not pleased with you because you went too far. You slaughtered their people and took their women and children as slaves.

"Take them back to Judah now! If you don't, the Lord will strike you in anger, just as he did Judah."

This made the people of Israel afraid. Their leaders said to the army, "Don't bring those people here! We don't want to make God more angry with us than he already is."

So the people of Israel used the spoils of Judah to provide for their captives. They gave them clothes and attended to their medical needs. They gave everyone food and drink.

Once the captives were cared for, they took them to Jericho, and even provided donkeys for those who were weak. Once the captives were safely in the care of their own people, the Israelites went back to Samaria.

Ahaz's troubles continued on. All the nations around him attacked Jerusalem and took whatever they wanted. He once again asked Assyria for help, but they refused.

Ahaz still didn't turn to the Lord. Instead, he kept trying to find another god who would help him. Finally he died and his son Hezekiah became king. He would become one of the greatest kings of Judah.

149 Israel in Exile

II Kings 17

The king of Assyria attacked the kingdom of Israel and took control of it. From that day on, they were to pay heavy taxes to Assyria. There came a time when the king of Egypt said he would help Israel get free of their bondage to Assyria. So the people stopped paying the taxes.

The armies of Assyria invaded Israel, captured their king, and put him in prison. They then encircled Samaria and kept anyone from going in or out. This lasted for three years, until finally Samaria surrendered.

The Assyrians were cruel to the people of Israel as a warning to other nations not to rebel against their authority. Finally the people were taken off the land and sent into exile.

Israel had been a separate kingdom from Judah for many years. Their first king set up two golden calves for worship. None of their kings destroyed the calves or followed the Lord. Some of the greatest prophets who ever lived were sent to Israel. Still, the people never turned to God.

So, after many warnings, God finally allowed

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Assyria to conquer them. They were taken off the land and made to live in other cities.

The Assyrians brought other people to live in the land of Israel. They settled in the cities and called their new nation Samaria, instead of Israel.

The new people knew nothing about the Lord, so they started worshiping the idols they brought with them. God sent lions among them, and many people were killed.

An advisor to the king of Assyria said, "The Samaritans don't know the God of the land. He sent lions to kill them because they don't know how to worship him correctly."

So the king said, "Select a few priests from the people of Israel and send them back to Samaria. Have them teach the people how to worship the God of the land."

A few priests were selected and they went back to Samaria. They taught the Samaritans how to properly worship the Lord. The people started worshiping God, but they also kept the idols of their old country. They mixed the two together. This continued for many years to come.

150 Hezekiah

II Chronicles 29-31 & II Kings 18:1-12

Hezekiah became king when he was 25 years old. He followed the Lord more than any king since David.

The first thing he did was to open the Temple his father had closed. He said to the priests and Levites, "We all know God has turned against us because of our sin. We're almost like the kingdom of Israel and nearly beyond hope. But I'm making an agreement with the Lord so possibly he'll turn his anger away from us. I need your help because you're chosen by God to stand in his presence and serve him."

The priests and Levites rallied around their king. The first thing they did was purify themselves before the Lord. They then went into the Temple and started cleaning it up. They took out things that were defiled and cleaned everything else.

After that, King Hezekiah and the city officials went and sacrificed to the Lord. They then made preparations so all the people of Jerusalem could come and worship God. The priests and Levites were put in place. Musical Levites got their instruments ready. Choirs prepared to sing the songs of David.

The people came and sacrificed to God. They sang to the Lord while trumpets blew. Everyone rejoiced, and bowed down and worshiped. So many burnt offerings were brought that the priests couldn't do it all. The Levites had to help them until the work was done.

When it was time for Passover, Hezekiah sent a message throughout all of Judah and Israel. He invited everyone to come and celebrate Passover together in Jerusalem.

The messengers went to every city throughout the entire area. God moved the hearts of the people of Judah, and they came to celebrate

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Passover with their king.

Most of the people of Israel had been taken to other countries, but there were still a few in the land. They were amazed when Hezekiah invited them to come back and worship the Lord in Jerusalem. Some laughed at the messengers, but others humbled themselves and made the trip to Jerusalem.

An extremely large crowd met together. The first thing the king had them do was walk throughout the city and tear down all the pagan altars. He also had them destroy the bronze snake that Moses had made, because people were burning incense to it.

They then offered the Passover lambs before the Lord. Many of the people from Israel weren't considered clean before God. Unfortunately, there wasn't enough time to go through that procedure. King Hezekiah prayed and asked the Lord to make an exception for them since they were coming to seek the Lord. God heard his prayer and purified the people so they could eat the Passover.

This celebration lasted for seven days. Then the entire crowd decided to extend it for another seven days. Everyone rejoiced together, whether they were from Judah or from Israel. Even Samaritans rejoiced with them. Such a festival hadn't been seen in Jerusalem since the days of David and Solomon.

After it was all over, the people went home. The first thing they did was to tear down all altars of false gods and objects of idol worship. They started sending their tithes and offerings to the Temple so the priests and Levites could continue their fulltime service to the Laws of God.

In all the history of Judah, there was no king like Hezekiah. He reigned for 29 years.

151 King of Assyria

II Chronicles 32:1-23 &

II Kings 18:13 - 19:37

The Assyrian army invaded Judah when Hezekiah was king. They had already conquered Israel a few years before.

When they arrived at Jerusalem, the commander of the Assyrian army called for a meeting with Jewish officials outside the walls of the city. He said, "Sennacherib, the great king of Assyria, sends this message to Hezekiah. 'Why do you resist my great army? Do you think other nations will come and help you? Listen. They won't come! They're afraid of us.'"

"Oh, are you trusting in the Lord your God? Why? It was your God who sent us here to destroy you!"

While the commander was talking, the people of Jerusalem were on the city walls - listening to everything he was saying. He spoke in Hebrew and was loud enough so they could hear. The Jewish officials said, "Please, speak in your language. We understand it."

The commander laughed and yelled louder, "No! This message is not only for your king. It's also for the common men. They're the ones who'll suffer when we crush you."

He pointed to the men on the wall. "Listen to me! Don't trust your king. Don't trust your God! Trust Sennacherib, the great king of Assyria! He'll take good care of you. We've conquered many nations and their gods weren't able to protect them. Your God can't stop the great king of Assyria!"

When King Hezekiah heard this report, he ripped his clothes and went into the Temple to pray. He sent messengers to the prophet Isaiah asking him to pray for God's people.

Isaiah sent word to Hezekiah. "I have a message from the Lord. He says, 'I've heard this man. Don't be afraid of him. I'll whisper into his ear and he'll rush back to his country. Once he

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gets there, someone will kill him.' "

Suddenly, the commander heard of trouble back in Assyria. He knew his king needed him. The entire army left.

Some time later, Sennacherib moved his army toward Jerusalem once again. Along the way, he sent a message to Hezekiah. "Did your God tell you that you're safe from me? Don't believe him! I've conquered the gods of many other nations, and burned them with fire. They couldn't protect their nations. What makes you think your God will protect you?"

Hezekiah took the letter to the Temple. He spread it out before God and prayed. Isaiah sent a message to Hezekiah, but it wasn't addressed to him. It was God's answer to Sennacherib.

It said, "Who do you think you are? I've told Jerusalem to spit on you. Who do you think you're mocking? I'm the one who put you in power so you could judge other nations. Now are you so arrogant that you yell at me? Here's what I'm going to do to you. I'm going to put a hook in your nose, and a bit in your mouth. Then I'll take you back to the barn from which you came!"

"Hezekiah, don't worry about Sennacherib. Not one arrow will hit the walls of Jerusalem. Before his army gets here, they'll turn around and go back to their country. I'm your defense! I'll fight this battle and save the city."

That evening the army of Assyria set up camp. The sun went down and men sat around the campfires until it was time to sleep. When the sun arose the next morning, 185,000 soldiers were dead where they had slept. The king of Assyria had an army of dead men!

He quickly returned home to Nineveh and knelt down before his idol. Two of his sons came in and killed him. Sennacherib, the great king of Assyria, was dead, and Jerusalem was at peace.

152 Fifteen Years

II Kings 20 & II Chronicles 32:24-33

King Hezekiah became extremely sick. The prophet Isaiah went to him and said, “God told me this sickness will kill you. So prepare to die.” He then turned and left the room.

Hezekiah cried out to God. “Oh Lord! I’ve walked with you and lived according to your commandments. Please spare my life.” He turned his head to the wall and cried bitterly.

Once again, God talked to Isaiah. “Go tell King Hezekiah I’ve heard his prayer and have seen his tears. Therefore I’ll add fifteen years to his life. I’ll also give him a sign so he’ll know that this promise is true. I’ll cause the shadow on the sundial to go backward ten degrees.”

Hezekiah watched the shadow on the sundial and saw it move back ten degrees. Immediately his sickness began to leave him until he totally recovered. He sang before the Lord and gave thanks.

After he recovered, a delegation came from Babylon with gifts. They gave him a letter from their king saying he was glad about Hezekiah’s recovery.

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Hezekiah was pleased with this, and honored the delegation with a tour of his palace and government buildings. He took them to the treasury house and showed them all of the nation’s treasures – including gold, silver, spices, and precious oil.

After the men from Babylon left, the prophet Isaiah asked, “Who were those men and what did they say to you?”

The king said, “They’re from a far-off country, a place called Babylon.”

“What did you show them?”

“I showed them everything. I didn’t hide anything of value from them.”

The prophet said, “Listen to the words of the Lord. ‘A day will come when Babylon will invade Judah and take everything they’ve seen back to their country. Your descendants will become personal slaves to the king of Babylon.’ ”

Hezekiah bowed his head, and finally said, “This message from the Lord is good. None of this will happen in my lifetime. While I live, there will be peace and security.”

153 An Evil King Who Repented

II Chronicles 33 & II Kings 21

Hezekiah was one of the best kings of all the descendants of David. His son Manasseh, however, was one of the most wicked of them all. He became king when he was 12 years old, and ruled for 55 years.

His acted worse then the kings of Canaan before the Israelites got there. His father had destroyed all the altars to false gods, but Manasseh had them rebuilt. He put several inside the Temple itself. He led the whole nation to practice witchcraft, and even sacrificed his own sons to false gods.

God spoke to Manasseh and the nation of Judah, but they didn't listen. Finally, the Lord allowed military commanders from Assyria to capture the king. They put a ring in his nose and led him away in bronze chains. He was put in a prison in Babylon.

This was the darkest time of Manasseh's life. So he humbled himself and called out to God. The Lord heard his prayer and was gracious to him.

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The time came when God allowed him to go back to Jerusalem and once again be king. Once he was there, Manasseh knew that the Lord had done this for him, and he was grateful.

He removed all the idols and altars from the Temple. He restored the altar of God and used it to give thanks to the Lord. He built up the walls of Jerusalem and made the city more secure. Through his leadership, the military became stronger.

When Manasseh died, his son Amon became king. He ruled for only two years, but he was as evil as his father had been in his early years. Unlike his father, however, he did not turn to the Lord.

His servants plotted against him and finally killed him. A mob of people in Judah hunted down those men and executed them.

They then took Amon's son and made him king. His name was Josiah, and he was only an 8-year-old boy. Still, Josiah became a great king of Judah.

154 A Book is Found

II Kings 22 & II Chronicles 34:1-32

Josiah was eight years old when he became king of Judah. He walked with the Lord from the day he became king until the day he died 31 years later. He was the last great king before the people of Judah went into captivity.

When he was 26 years old, he hired men to restore the Temple. Money had been given for that purpose, so he gave it to the workmen and said, "You have proven yourselves to be men of integrity. Therefore you don't have to keep an account of this money."

One day, a workman found the Book of the Law, written by Moses. He sent it to the king, who had it read out loud. When Josiah heard what was written in the book, he ripped his clothes and said, "Surely the Lord's anger is great against us! Our ancestors made a contract with God and then broke it over and over. His judgment on us must be close at hand. Go and find someone who can ask the Lord about this."

The priest went to a certain section of the city to the home of Huldah, a woman prophet. They asked her about what was written in the book. She said, "I have a message from God to the man who sent you here. God says, 'The people of this land have totally turned against me. They

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serve idols and false gods. I'm about to fulfill the judgment written in the book you found. Disaster will soon fall on this place and everyone who lives here. Nothing can turn away the judgment that is coming.' "

Huldah then said, "I have another message to the king of Judah. The Lord says, 'When you heard the words of this book, your heart was sad and you ripped your clothes and cried. You have sought me with humility, and I heard you. Therefore, you will not see the disaster I'm bringing on this place. I will wait until you die and are buried.' "

The priest took these words back to Josiah. When he heard them, he gathered together all the elders of Jerusalem and Judah. They in turn went and got the rest of the people. Everyone went to the Temple, where they heard the king read the Law of Moses. They heard about the agreements their nation had with God.

Once the reading of the Law was done, Josiah stood in the place reserved for the king. In front of everyone, he made those same commitments to the Lord. He vowed that he would follow God's commandments with all of his energies and power. All the people agreed to do the same.

155 Josiah's Reforms

II Kings 23 &

II Chronicles 34:32–35:1-27

King Josiah and the nation of Judah renewed their commitment to the Laws of God. The king then took all the false altars out of the Temple and had them burned. The people also went throughout Jerusalem and destroyed all the idols that were in the city.

Once that was done, the king personally went throughout the land of Judah and oversaw the destruction of idol worship in all the cities. Next he went throughout the land of Israel and destroyed all the idols and altars that were there. When he found a major pagan spot, he desecrated the altar so the people would never use it again.

He went to the altar Jeroboam had built at Bethel. Josiah totally destroyed everything that was around it. He saw some tombs nearby, so he sent men to get some human bones. He burnt them on top of the altar to desecrate it.

Then Josiah saw a monument nearby. He said, "What's that?"

The men of the area said, "That's the tomb of the prophet who came from Judah. The Lord sent him here to speak against Jeroboam when he dedicated this altar to his golden calves. He prophesied and told the people what you would do to this altar. Today you have fulfilled his prophecy. It is also the grave of a old prophet from Samaria."

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Josiah said, "Don't disturb these bones." He then returned to Jerusalem.

The king organized a Passover feast like no other. He and prominent men of Judah gave generously so everyone could have a sacrifice to give.

In the entire history of Judah, there had never been a king like Josiah, who loved and served the Lord with all his mind, heart, and strength. He totally followed the ways of God.

Still, the Lord planned to have Jerusalem destroyed. He was going to send the people of Judah into exile, just as he had done to Israel. But he didn't allow it to happen until after Josiah died.

When the king was 39 years old, the pharaoh of Egypt led his army past Judah on the way to help Assyria. Josiah took his army out to stop them. The pharaoh said, "My battle isn't with you. I'm going to fight someone else. Don't interfere, or God will use me to destroy you."

Josiah didn't listen to this advice. He went into battle, but disguised himself so the enemy wouldn't know he was the king. Suddenly an arrow hit him, and he slumped down in his chariot. His servants rushed him back to Jerusalem, and there he died.

All of Judah mourned Josiah's death. The prophet Jeremiah wrote a song that was sung at his funeral.

156 Broken Pot

*Jeremiah 1, 18 – 20,
II Chronicles 36:1-5 & II Kings 23:28-37*

Stories 156–161 happened during the life and ministry of Jeremiah, the prophet.

During the time of King Josiah, the prophet Jeremiah was called of God to preach to the people of Judah. The Lord said, “You’re to tell them they’re wicked, and Babylon will come and take them away. It’ll be useless to resist this invasion because I’m the one making it happen.”

Jeremiah said, “Lord, I don’t want this job. I’m too young, and I’m not good at public speaking.”

The Lord said, “I chose you for this job before you were born. I’ll tell you exactly what to say. Still, the people won’t listen, and they’ll try to kill you. But don’t worry. I’ll be with you and protect you.”

For years, during the time of Josiah, the Lord told Jeremiah all the reasons why Judah would be punished and sent into exile. Jeremiah was burdened for the nation, so he cried and prayed for them. God said, “Stop that! These people are heading for disaster and there’s nothing you can do about it. I wouldn’t listen even if Samuel and Moses stood before me and pleaded for them! This situation is beyond religious acts and the giving of prayers.”

The Lord sent Jeremiah to the potter’s house. There he saw the potter working with a clay jar on the turning wheel. Suddenly he found a flaw in the pot. So he simply crushed

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the clay down and started over.

The Lord said, “Oh Israel, this is what I’m doing to you. You’re like clay in my hands and I’ll crush you so I can make you into that which will have my blessing and joy.”

The Lord told Jeremiah to buy a clay pot and go to the rulers of Judah. The prophet bought the pot and stood before the leaders of the people. He held it up in the air and said, “The people have forsaken the Lord to worship idols. Therefore, listen to what God is saying to you!”

He threw the pot down and it shattered into pieces! He said, “Jerusalem will be like this clay pot. I’ll totally destroy the city. Your enemies will slaughter the people. The city will lie in ruins just like this clay pot.”

One of the priests got angry and had Jeremiah beaten and put in stocks. The next day the priest went to release him. Jeremiah said to him, “The Lord has changed your name. It is now ‘Terror.’ In terror, you’ll see your friends killed in the streets. In terror, you’ll watch the city be destroyed. You’ll be taken to Babylon where you’ll die; and there you’ll be buried.”

Josiah was killed when he fought the army of Egypt. The people of Judah made his son king. Three months later, the pharaoh of Egypt captured Jerusalem and took the new king to Egypt, where he died. The pharaoh set up another son of Josiah to be king of Judah. His name was Jehoiakim.

157 Burning the Book

*Jeremiah 26, 36, II Chronicles 36 &
II Kings 23:31 – 25:30*

Stories 156–161 happened during the life and ministry of Jeremiah, the prophet.

Jeremiah had been prophesying for 23 years when Jehoiakim became king. Judah was under the control of Egypt and the king paid them high taxes year after year.

God told Jeremiah to go to the Temple and tell the people to repent or the Temple would become ruins. After he was done preaching, the priest and prophets grabbed him saying, “We’re going to kill you. How dare you come and speak these things in the name of the Lord!”

The officials of Judah defended Jeremiah saying, “He has a right to speak in the name of the Lord. Set him free.” They let him go, but told him he couldn’t come back to the Temple.

The Lord told Jeremiah, “Write a book of all the things I’ve told you about the coming judgment on Judah and Jerusalem.”

Jeremiah sent for Baruch, his scribe, and dictated to him everything the Lord had said. When they were done, the prophet said, “I’m not allowed to go to the Temple, so go there and read this book to the people.”

Baruch went and read the book in the Temple. Officials of the king heard about the book and asked him to read it to them. When he was done, the officials were afraid. They said, “The king needs to hear this.”

They told the scribe, “We’re taking this book to the king. You and Jeremiah hide, and don’t tell anyone where you’ve gone.”

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They took the book to King Jehoiakim, and he allowed it to be read to him. Because it was winter, he was sitting in front of a fire. Every time a portion of the book was read, he cut that part out and threw it into the fire. His officials asked him not to do this, but he kept doing it anyway until the entire book was gone.

Everyone in the room heard the book, but no one ripped his clothes or was afraid. Jehoiakim then gave the order to imprison Jeremiah and his scribe, but God protected them.

The Lord said to Jeremiah, “Write another book, just like the one that was burned. Also, give this message to King Jehoiakim. ‘You burned the book because you didn’t want anyone talking about how Babylon will destroy Jerusalem. Here’s what will happen to you. Your dead body won’t be buried, but will rot in the open sun. Also, the throne of David will be taken away from your descendants.’ ”

Jeremiah dictated the book once more and Baruch wrote it down. As time went by, he added more to it.

Jeremiah told the people of Judah, “Babylon will come and destroy this city and take you into captivity. You’ll be there for seventy years. After that, God will bring your children back to this land.”

God sent a special message to Baruch. “You’re concerned about what will happen to you. You bear the burden of being a scribe for God’s prophet. Don’t worry. I’ll spare your life when I destroy this city. I’ll be with you wherever you go.”

158 Two Baskets of Figs

II Chronicles 36 &

II Kings 23:31 – 25:30

Stories 156–161 happened during the life and ministry of Jeremiah, the prophet.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, invaded Judah and captured Jerusalem. King Jehoiakim dropped his allegiance to Egypt and swore his loyalty to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar took things from the Temple to put into the temples of his gods. He also took the best young men back to Babylon to serve as advisors. Among them was Daniel.

Several years later, Babylon and Egypt got into a fierce battle. Jehoiakim switched his loyalty back to Egypt. Jeremiah warned him not to do this, but he didn't listen.

Once again, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah and captured Jerusalem. This time he took Jehoiakim back to Babylon, where he died. His son Jehoiachin became king.

He was king for only three months when he also rebelled against Babylon. Jeremiah warned him that if he did this, he'd be taken away just like his father. The young king didn't listen.

Nebuchadnezzar's army came back, and this time they took all the treasures and gold from the Temple. They stripped the city of everything of value, including the craftsmen, military men, and scholars. 10,000 people were marched off to Babylon. Among them was Ezekiel.

Only the poor were left to oversee the land. Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin to Babylon and put him in prison. His uncle, Zedekiah, was made king of Judah.

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After they were gone, God gave Jeremiah a vision. The Lord said, "What do you see?"

The prophet said, "I see two baskets filled with figs. One is full of the most delicious fruit I've ever seen. The other has rotten figs that smell awful."

The Lord said, "The people in captivity are like the good figs. I'll watch over them and care for them. Their children will come back to this land, and they'll have a desire in their hearts to know me. I'll be their God and they'll be my people."

"But these people here in Judah are like the rotten figs. They're corrupt and rotten, and I'll treat them that way. I'll send heartache, plague, and famine. When I'm done, I'll throw Zedekiah and his people into the garbage."

The Lord had Jeremiah send a letter to those in exile. He said, "Build houses in Babylon and plant gardens. Get married, have children, and help your children get married. Get involved with your community and help your city to prosper. Don't believe anyone who tells you that you won't be there long. It's not true. You'll be in exile for 70 years, so make yourselves at home.

"I'll care for you. You can call on me whenever you want – and I'll listen. When the time of your exile is over, I'll bring you back here and restore to you all you left behind.

"The people here are like rotten figs. After I send them heartache, plagues, and famine, I'll throw them into the garbage."

159 Jerusalem Under Siege

II Chronicles 36:10-16 &

II Kings 24:18 – 25:2 & Jeremiah 37

Stories 156–161 happened during the life and ministry of Jeremiah, the prophet.

Nebuchadnezzar had made Zedekiah king of Judah. After he had been king for nine years, he rebelled against Babylon. He thought Egypt would help him. Jeremiah said, “If you do this, the king of Babylon will totally destroy Jerusalem.”

Zedekiah didn’t listen to the prophet, so Nebuchadnezzar brought his army and circled the city, not letting anyone in or out. Zedekiah asked Jeremiah to pray and ask God for help. Suddenly the Egyptian army came up from the south. With that, the Babylon army moved away from Jerusalem.

The Lord sent a message to Zedekiah. “Here’s what I am going to do. Pharaoh’s army will return to Egypt. Babylon will come back and burn this city to the ground. You can’t stop them. Even if your army went out and defeated them, leaving only a few wounded men alive, those few men would get up, come into the city, and burn it to the ground.”

Jeremiah decided to go outside the city walls and look at some property he owned. A guard saw him walking out of the city gate. He said, “You’re going to the Babylonian army.”

The prophet said, “No, I’d never do that.” But the guard didn’t believe him, and took him to the city officials. They were furious with him and

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had him beaten and put in a dungeon. He stayed there a long time.

Soon the Babylonians came back and once again encircled the city. Zedekiah secretly sent for Jeremiah, and brought him to the palace. The king said, “Do you have a message from the Lord?”

Jeremiah said, “Yes I do. He says, ‘You’ll be defeated by the Babylonians.’ ”

Then the prophet said to the king, “Don’t send me back to that dungeon. I’ll die if you do. What have I done? Everything I’ve said has come true. Where are the prophets who said Babylon wouldn’t return? I beg you. Don’t send me back.”

So King Zedekiah gave the command that Jeremiah wasn’t to go back to the dungeon. He was kept in the palace prison, where he received better care.

Soon there was no food in the city because the Babylonians had stopped everything from going in or out. The rulers of Jerusalem sent a message to Jeremiah. “Please, pray and ask God to deliver us! Perhaps he will give us a miracle like he’s done in the past.”

The Lord sent a message back to them, “No! I won’t deliver you. I’m the one fighting against you. I’ve given you to the king of Babylon. You’ll suffer hunger, disease and plagues. People and animals will die. Those who live through this will be given to the Babylonians.”

160 Well of Mud

II Chronicles 36:15-21 ✨

II Kings 25:3-21 ✨ *Jeremiah 32, 33, 38, 39, 40:1-6, 52*

Stories 156–161 happened during the life and ministry of Jeremiah, the prophet.

The Lord gave Jeremiah a message for the people. He said, “The choice is yours. You can have life or death. If you stay in Jerusalem, you’ll suffer hunger, disease, and death. If you surrender to the Babylonian army, you’ll live. I’ve given this city to them, and they’ll totally destroy it.”

When the officials of Judah heard this, they went to the king and said, “This man must die. He’s a traitor. He’s telling people to abandon us.”

So Zedekiah allowed them to do what they wanted with Jeremiah. They put ropes around him and let him down into an empty well. It didn’t have water in it, but instead the bottom was nothing but mud. Soon the prophet had sunk down into the mud.

Another official ran to the king and said, “This is wrong! The prophet will die in that well. He has no food or water.”

The king gave permission for the man to pull Jeremiah out of the well. So he got 30 other men to help him. They threw old rags down the well and told the prophet to put these under his arms to protect him from the ropes. They then pulled him out of the well and took him back to the palace prison.

The Babylonians kept the city under siege for two and a half years. Finally they broke through the walls and took the city. When Zedekiah heard this, he got out of Jerusalem during the night and tried to escape.

The Babylonians chased after the king and

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soon caught him. They brought him back to Nebuchadnezzar. He took Zedekiah and made him watch as they killed his sons in front of him. They then gouged out his eyes, put him in chains, and led him away to Babylon.

The Babylonians totally destroyed the city so it could never again resist them. They destroyed the Temple, burned all the houses, and broke down the walls. The city was totally demolished. The Babylon army took the rest of the people away to Babylon, leaving only a few to tend the land.

Nebuchadnezzar heard about Jeremiah, so he told his captain, “Find this man, and make sure he isn’t hurt. He’s to be cared for and given whatever he wants.”

The captain went and found the prophet. He was in chains along with the others who were being sent into exile. The captain took the chains off Jeremiah and said, “You’re free to go. If you come to Babylon with us, we’ll take care of you and meet your needs for the rest of your life. But if you want, you can stay here in Judah. The choice is yours.”

Jeremiah said he would stay in Judah, so they allowed him and Baruch to go back to their homes. The Lord also protected the official that had helped the prophet get out of the well.

The Lord said to Jeremiah, “The day will come when I’ll raise up a righteous Branch from the line of David, and He’ll bring justice and righteousness to the land. He’ll be called, ‘The Lord our Righteousness.’ ”

161 Going to Egypt

II Kings 25:22-30 &

Jeremiah 40-44, 52:31-34

Stories 156-161 happened during the life and ministry of Jeremiah, the prophet.

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, totally destroyed Jerusalem. He left a few people to care for the land, and made Gedaliah governor of Judah.

Rebel soldiers still lived in the hills of Judah. Gedaliah met with them and said, "The king of Babylon wants to have peace with you. So stop fighting. Look at what the people left behind when they went into exile. You can harvest their grapes and olives and summer fruit. Select a town and go live there. I'll represent you with the Babylonians."

The soldiers followed this advice and lived in the land. Jews who lived in other countries came back and accepted Gedaliah as their governor. Altogether, they had a great harvest that year.

The king of Ammon hired ten Jews to kill Gedaliah. The people of Judah warned the governor about this plot. They said, "We have it good here. We don't want these traitors to ruin it for the rest of us." But Gedaliah didn't believe them. He thought they were simply trying to get an advantage over their fellow countrymen.

Gedaliah invited the ten traitors to have a meal with him. During the meal, the men drew their swords and killed the governor. After throwing his body down a large well, they headed back to Ammon. The men of Judah chased after them. There was a battle, but

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most of the traitors got away.

The people of Judah knew what Nebuchadnezzar would do once he found out his governor had been killed. They made plans to escape to Egypt. They went to Jeremiah and said, "Ask the Lord what we should do. We promise we'll do whatever he says."

Ten days later, Jeremiah gave them a message from the Lord. "Don't move to Egypt, but stay in Judah. I'll be with you and protect you from the king of Babylon. If you stay, I'll build you up and establish you here.

"I know you're afraid, but listen to me. Your fears are waiting for you in Egypt. You won't find war, hunger, and disease in Judah. No, they're waiting for you in Egypt."

The people yelled at Jeremiah, "You're lying to us. The Lord didn't tell you that. You want us to stay here so Babylon will kill us."

The people left Judah and went to Egypt. They took the prophet and Baruch with them. Jeremiah finished his book in Egypt, and then he died.

Years later, a new king ruled Babylon. He brought King Jehoiachin out of prison and gave him his freedom. He was also given a living allowance and was invited to eat at the table of the king of Babylon. He lived in comfort for the rest of his life.