

2 Kings

1

Summary: *After Ahab's death, Moab rebels against Israel. Ahaziah son of Ahab falls through a lattice in his upper room in Samaria and is injured. He sends messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether he will recover. The angel of the LORD sends the prophet Elijah to intercept the messengers with a devastating question: 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baal-zebub?' Elijah pronounces that Ahaziah will not leave his bed but will certainly die. The messengers return and report the encounter. Ahaziah recognizes the description as Elijah and sends a captain with fifty soldiers to seize the prophet. Elijah is sitting on top of a hill. The captain commands him to come down, calling him 'man of God.' Elijah responds: 'If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.' Fire falls and destroys them. A second captain and fifty are sent with the same result. A third captain comes but falls on his knees and begs for his life. The angel of the LORD tells Elijah to go down with him without fear. Elijah accompanies the third captain to the king and delivers the death sentence face to face. Ahaziah dies according to the word of the LORD, and Jehoram his brother succeeds him because Ahaziah has no son.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The chapter draws a sharp line between the God of Israel and the gods of the nations. Ahaziah's decision to consult Baal-zebub rather than the LORD is not merely a religious preference but a political statement — the king of Israel is treating a Philistine deity as more reliable than Israel's covenant God. The repeated question 'Is it because there is no God in Israel?' (appearing three times in the chapter) is one of the most cutting rhetorical devices in Kings. Each repetition intensifies the indictment: the king's behavior implies that the LORD does not exist or is powerless. The fire from heaven connects Elijah to the Carmel confrontation (1 Kings 18) — fire already settled the question of which deity is real, yet Ahaziah acts as if that contest never happened. The three captains create a pattern of escalating crisis: the first two approach with military arrogance and are destroyed; the third approaches with humility and lives. The pattern teaches that the power of God cannot be commanded by royal authority.*

Translation Friction: *The destruction of two groups of fifty soldiers raises moral questions about proportional response — these soldiers were following orders, not personally guilty of idolatry. Some interpreters note that the fire from heaven is a response to the captains' presumptuous command ('come down') rather than to their mere presence. The third captain's survival because of his humility suggests the judgment is directed at the arrogance of approaching God's prophet as a criminal to be arrested rather than as a messenger to be heard. The name 'Baal-zebub' (lord of flies) is likely a Hebrew mockery of 'Baal-zebul' (lord of the exalted*

dwelling / Baal the prince). The transition between 1 Kings and 2 Kings is artificial — the chapter division was imposed centuries later — and this chapter continues the Ahaziah notice that began in 1 Kings 22:51-53.

Connections: The fire from heaven connects backward to 1 Kings 18:38 (fire on Carmel) and forward to Luke 9:54 where James and John ask Jesus if they should call fire from heaven on a Samaritan village — Jesus rebukes them, marking a new-covenant reorientation. The inquiry of foreign gods echoes Saul's visit to the medium at Endor (1 Samuel 28), where a king in crisis bypasses the LORD and consults another spiritual source. Ahaziah's death without a son creates a succession crisis that transfers power to his brother Jehoram, connecting the Omride dynasty's decline to its persistent rejection of the LORD. The lattice fall in the upper room is a small but symbolically loaded detail — the king who reached upward toward Baal falls downward through his own floor.

¹After Ahab died, Moab broke away from its subjection to Israel. ²Ahaziah fell through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and was injured. He sent messengers, telling them, "Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I will recover from this injury." ³But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Get up, go to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and say to them: Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?" ⁴Therefore, this is what the LORD says: You will not come down from the bed you have gone up on — you will certainly die." And Elijah went. ⁵The messengers returned to Ahaziah, and he asked them, "Why have you come back?" ⁶The y told him, "A man came up to meet us and said, 'Go back to the king who sent you and tell him: This is what the LORD says — Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you will not come down from the bed you have gone up on. You will certainly die.'" ⁷He asked them, "What sort of man was it who came up to meet you and spoke these words to you?" ⁸They answered, "A man wearing a garment of hair, with a leather belt strapped around his waist." He said, "That is Elijah the Tishbite." ⁹The king sent a captain of fifty with his fifty soldiers to Elijah. The captain went up to him — he was sitting on top of a hill — and said to him, "Man of God, the king has spoken: come down." ¹⁰Elijah answered the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. ¹¹The king sent another captain of fifty with his fifty soldiers. This one said to Elijah, "Man of God, this is what the king says: come down at once!" ¹²Elijah answered them, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." The fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. ¹³He sent a third captain of fifty with his fifty soldiers. The third captain went up, fell on his knees before Elijah, and pleaded with him: "Man of God, please — let my life and the lives of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your eyes." ¹⁴"Fire has already come down from heaven and consumed the first two captains of fifty with their men. Now let my life be precious in your eyes." ¹⁵The angel of the LORD said to Elijah, "Go down with him. Do not be afraid of him." So Elijah got up and went down with the captain to the king. ¹⁶Elijah said to him, "This is what the LORD says: Because you sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron — is it because there is no God in Israel whose word you could seek? — therefore you will not come down from the bed you have gone up on. You will certainly die." ¹⁷So Ahaziah died, according to the word of the LORD that Elijah had spoken. Jehoram reigned in his place in the second year of Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, because Ahaziah had no son. ¹⁸The rest of the acts of Ahaziah and what he accomplished — are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *va-yifsha* ('he rebelled, transgressed') signals a political break: Moab had been a vassal state paying tribute to Israel, and Ahab's death opened a power vacuum. The Mesha Stele (Moabite Stone) corroborates this rebellion from the Moabite perspective. This verse sets the political backdrop for the entire early section of 2 Kings.
2. The *sevakhah* ('lattice') was a wooden screen or railing on an upper-story window or opening. Falling through it suggests it was either poorly maintained or Ahaziah leaned against it. The name *Ba'al Zevuv* ('lord of flies') is almost certainly a deliberate Hebrew distortion of *Ba'al Zevul* ('Baal the Prince' or 'lord of the exalted dwelling'). Ekron was one of the five major Philistine cities. The verb *va-yachal* ('he became sick, was injured') indicates the fall was serious enough to confine him to bed.
3. The rhetorical question *ha-mibeli ein Elohim be-Yisrael* ('is it from the lack — is there no God in Israel?') is devastating in its simplicity. It does not argue for God's superiority over Baal-zebub; it implies that consulting a foreign god is equivalent to declaring that the LORD does not exist. Elijah the

Tishbite re-enters the narrative as the LORD's agent of confrontation, just as he was at Carmel.

4. The death sentence uses the emphatic *mot tamut* ('dying you will die'), the same intensified construction used in the Eden warning (Genesis 2:17). The bed from which Ahaziah will not come down stands in ironic contrast to the lattice through which he fell down — his fall brought him to a bed that becomes his deathbed. Elijah departs without waiting for a response; the prophetic word is delivered and requires no negotiation.
5. Ahaziah's question *mah zeh shavtem* ('what is this — you have returned?') reveals his surprise. The messengers were supposed to travel to Ekron, a considerable journey. Their premature return signals that something has interrupted the mission.
6. The messengers relay the oracle in full, repeating both the rhetorical question and the death sentence. The second-person singular 'you are sending' (*attah sholeach*) shifts the accusation from the messengers collectively (verse 3) to the king personally. The prophetic word reaches Ahaziah despite his attempt to bypass the LORD.
7. Ahaziah asks *mah mishpat ha-ish* ('what was the manner/appearance of the man?'). The word *mishpat* here means 'manner, custom, characteristic appearance' rather than its more common sense of 'judgment.' The king is trying to identify the prophet by description.
8. The description *ish ba'al se'ar* ('a man who is a master of hair' or 'a hairy man') likely refers to a hairy garment or cloak rather than bodily hairiness — this is the prophetic mantle that becomes central in chapter 2. The leather belt (*ezor* or) around his waist completes the ascetic prophet's appearance. Ahaziah recognizes Elijah immediately from this description, indicating Elijah's reputation and distinctive appearance were well known. John the Baptist later adopts this same clothing (Matthew 3:4), deliberately evoking Elijah.
9. The captain's command *redah* ('come down!') is an order, not a request. He calls Elijah *ish ha-Elohim* ('man of God') but the title functions as a form of address rather than an expression of reverence — he is identifying Elijah's role in order to command him. The king's authority is invoked: *ha-melekh dibber* ('the king has spoken'). The confrontation is between royal power and prophetic authority: can the king command a man of God?
10. The conditional *im* ('if') does not express Elijah's doubt about his own identity but creates a theological syllogism: if I am what you called me, then the God I serve will validate it. The fire from heaven echoes 1 Kings 18:38 (Carmel) and anticipates the fire motif that runs through Elijah's narrative. The verb *va-tokhal* ('and it consumed') indicates total destruction.
11. The second captain adds *meherah* ('quickly, at once') to the command — escalating the urgency and the arrogance. Despite the destruction of the first group, the second captain approaches with the same presumption that royal authority overrides prophetic authority. The repetition of the same command despite the previous result reveals the stubbornness of the royal house.
12. This time the text specifies *esh Elohim* ('fire of God') rather than simply *esh* ('fire'), making the divine origin explicit. The exact repetition of the pattern — command, conditional response, fire — creates the narrative rhythm that makes the third encounter's variation all the more striking.
13. The third captain breaks the deadly pattern. He uses the same title *ish ha-Elohim* ('man of God') but with entirely different posture — on his knees, pleading (*va-yitchannen*, from the root *chanan*, 'to show grace, to plead for grace'). His request *tiqar na nafshi* ('let my life be precious, valued') acknowledges that his life depends on the prophet's favor, not the king's authority. He calls his soldiers *avadekha* ('your servants'), transferring allegiance from the king to the prophet.
14. The third captain presents evidence: he knows what happened to his predecessors. His plea is informed by observation — he has learned from the deaths of the first hundred soldiers that approaching with arrogance is fatal. His humility is practical as well as spiritual: he has assessed the situation and concluded that the prophet's authority outranks the king's.
15. The angel's command *red oto al tira mipanav* ('go down with him, do not fear from before him') reveals that Elijah's position on the hilltop was not merely geographical but defensive — he remained on high ground where royal soldiers had to come to him. Now that the third captain has shown proper humility, Elijah can descend safely. The assurance 'do not be afraid' suggests real physical danger — Ahaziah might still attempt to harm the prophet.
16. The third and final delivery of the oracle is spoken face to face to the king. This version adds a crucial phrase: *lidrosh bidvaro* ('to inquire of His word'). The issue is not merely the existence of a God in Israel but the availability of His word — the LORD has a word to give, and Ahaziah refused to seek it. The face-to-face delivery ensures the king cannot claim ignorance. Elijah delivers the sentence directly, fulfilling his prophetic commission completely.
17. The death formula *va-yamat kidvar YHWH asher dibber Eliyahu* ('he died according to the word of the LORD that Elijah spoke') makes the theological point explicit: the king died not from the fall but from the prophetic sentence. The succession passes to Jehoram (Ahaziah's brother) because Ahaziah had no son — the dynasty continues but through a lateral move. The synchronism with Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat in Judah creates some chronological complexity that scholars continue to debate.
18. The standard closing formula for a king's reign directs the reader to the *sefer divrei ha-yamim le-malkhei Yisrael* ('Book of the Annals/Chronicles of the Kings of Israel'), a now-lost royal record. The formula is brief and contains no evaluation — Ahaziah's evil was already established in 1 Kings 22:52-53. His reign receives minimal coverage: a fall, a failed inquiry, a confrontation with Elijah, and death.

2

Summary: *The LORD is about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind. Elijah travels from Gilgal to Bethel to Jericho to the Jordan, and at each stop he tells Elisha to stay behind. Elisha refuses each time: 'As the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you.' At each location, the sons of the prophets tell Elisha that the LORD will take his master today; Elisha already knows and tells them to be silent. At the Jordan, Elijah takes his mantle, rolls it up, and strikes the water. The river parts, and the two cross on dry ground. Elijah asks Elisha what he can do for him before he is taken. Elisha requests a double portion of Elijah's spirit. Elijah says this is a hard thing but grants the condition: if Elisha sees him being taken, the request will be granted. As they walk and talk, a chariot of fire and horses of fire appear and separate them, and Elijah goes up in a whirlwind to heaven. Elisha sees it and cries out, 'My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!' He tears his garments in two. He picks up Elijah's mantle that had fallen from him, returns to the Jordan, strikes the water with the mantle, and the river parts again. The sons of the prophets at Jericho see him and declare that Elijah's spirit rests on Elisha. They insist on sending fifty men to search for Elijah, thinking the spirit of the LORD may have cast him onto a mountain or valley. Elisha resists but finally consents; they search three days and find nothing. Elisha then performs two miracles: he heals the bad water at Jericho by throwing salt into the spring, and he pronounces a curse on youths from Bethel who mock him, resulting in two bears mauling forty-two of them. Elisha then goes to Mount Carmel and returns to Samaria.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter narrates one of only two instances in the Hebrew Bible where a person does not die but is taken directly by God (the other being Enoch in Genesis 5:24). The ascension of Elijah is not a quiet departure but a cosmic event involving a chariot and horses of fire and a whirlwind — the imagery of divine warfare applied to the departure of a single prophet. The parting of the Jordan deliberately echoes Joshua's crossing and ultimately Moses' parting of the sea, placing Elijah in the succession of Israel's greatest leaders. Elisha's request for a 'double portion' (pi shenayim) is not a request for twice as much power but for the firstborn's inheritance share — he is asking to be recognized as Elijah's primary heir in the prophetic office. The mantle (aderet) becomes the physical symbol of prophetic succession: it falls from Elijah as he ascends, and Elisha picks it up and uses it to part the Jordan, proving the transfer is complete. The chapter is structured as a journey with three refusals to stay behind, creating a pattern of loyalty testing that recalls Ruth's refusal to leave Naomi.*

Translation Friction: *Elisha's cry 'My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!' is enigmatic. Is he calling Elijah 'the chariots of Israel' — meaning Elijah himself was Israel's true military defense? Or is he describing what he sees — the actual chariot and horses of fire? Most interpreters take the first reading: Elijah was worth more to Israel than its entire chariot force. The bear incident at the end of the chapter is deeply troubling to modern readers. The Hebrew ne'arim qetannim can mean 'small boys' or 'young men' — the age is debated. Their taunt 'go up, go up, baldhead' may mock Elijah's ascension ('go up' echoes the ascension language), making it a theological provocation rather than mere childish insult. The severity of the curse — forty-two mauled — remains difficult. The fifty men's search for Elijah creates narrative tension: the sons of the prophets cannot fully grasp what has happened. Their assumption that the ruach YHWH ('spirit of the LORD') might have deposited Elijah somewhere shows they understand prophetic transport (cf. 1 Kings 18:12) but not permanent departure.*

Connections: *The Jordan crossing connects to Joshua 3-4 (Israel crossing into the promised land) and to Moses at the Red Sea (Exodus 14). Elijah retraces Israel's entry into the land in reverse — crossing eastward — as if departing the promised land before ascending. The chariot of fire connects to the broader fire imagery of Elijah's ministry (fire on Carmel, fire on the captains in chapter 1). The double portion request connects to Deuteronomy 21:17, where the firstborn receives pi shenayim ('a mouth of two,' i.e., a double share) of the inheritance. Elijah's ascension becomes the basis for the expectation of Elijah's return before the Day of the LORD (Malachi 4:5-6), which the New Testament applies to John the Baptist (Matthew 11:14, 17:10-13) and which appears at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:3). The healing of Jericho's water anticipates Elisha's ministry of restoration, in contrast to Elijah's ministry of confrontation.*

¹When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha set out from Gilgal. ²Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here, because the LORD has sent me to Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. ³The sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha and said, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master from over you?" He said, "Yes, I know. Be silent." ⁴Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here, because the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. ⁵The sons of the prophets at Jericho came up to Elisha and said, "Do you know that today the LORD will take your master from over you?" He answered, "Yes, I know. Be silent." ⁶Elijah said to him, "Stay here, because the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." And the two of them walked on together. ⁷Fifty men from the sons of the prophets went and stood at a distance, watching, while the two of them stood by the Jordan. ⁸Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and struck the water. The water divided to one side and the other, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground. ⁹When they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I should do for you before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please, let a double portion of your spirit come upon me." ¹⁰Elijah said, "You have asked a difficult thing. If you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be so for you. But if not, it will not be so." ¹¹As they were walking along, talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up in a whirlwind to heaven. ¹²Elisha saw it and cried out, "My father, my father! The chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" Then he saw him no more. He grabbed his own garments and tore them in two. ¹³He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, went back, and stood on the bank of the Jordan. ¹⁴He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" He struck the water, and it divided to one side and the other, and Elisha crossed over. ¹⁵The sons of the prophets at Jericho saw him from a distance and said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." They came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him. ¹⁶They said to him, "Look, your servants include fifty strong men. Let them go and search for your master — perhaps the Spirit of the LORD has carried him off and set him down on some mountain or in some valley." He said, "Do not send them." ¹⁷But they pressed him until he was embarrassed, and he said, "Send them." So they sent fifty men, who searched for three days but did not find him. ¹⁸They returned to him while he was staying in Jericho, and he said to them, "Did I not tell you not to go?" ¹⁹The men of the city said to Elisha, "The location of this city is good, as my lord can see, but the water is bad and the land causes miscarriage." ²⁰He said, "Bring me a new bowl and put salt in it." They brought it to him. ²¹He went out to the spring where the water originated and threw the salt into it. Then he said, "This is what the LORD says: I have healed this water. Death and miscarriage will no longer come from it." ²²The water has been wholesome to this day, according to the word that Elisha spoke. ²³He went up from there to Bethel. As he was going up along the road, young men came out of the city and taunted him, saying, "Go up, baldhead! Go up, baldhead!" ²⁴He turned around, looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the LORD. Two female bears came out of the forest and mauled forty-two of the youths. ²⁵From there he went to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb beha'alot (hif'il infinitive of 'alah, 'to go up') makes God the one who causes the ascent. The se'arah ('whirlwind') appears elsewhere in connection with divine manifestation: God answers Job from the se'arah (Job 38:1). Gilgal was a significant location in Israelite memory — the site of Israel's first camp after crossing the Jordan under Joshua. Elijah's journey begins where Israel's occupation of the land began.
2. Elisha's oath chai YHWH ve-chei nafshekha im e'ezvekka ('as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, I will not leave you') is the strongest form of personal commitment available in Hebrew. The double oath — by God's life and by the life of the person addressed — places the vow under the most solemn possible guarantee. This formula will be repeated at each stop, creating a loyalty refrain.
3. The phrase benei ha-nevi'im ('sons of the prophets') refers to prophetic guilds or communities, not biological children. Their question ha-yadata ('do you know?') is not informational but communal — they are processing the approaching loss together. The phrase me'al roshekha ('from over your head') portrays Elijah as a covering or authority over Elisha. Elisha's terse response gam ani yadati hekheshu ('I also know — be silent!') reveals his emotional state: he knows what is coming and cannot bear to discuss it.
4. The second test of loyalty follows the identical pattern. Elijah now addresses Elisha by name, making the dismissal more personal. Elisha's oath is word-for-word identical, showing that his resolve has not weakened with the journey.

5. The exact repetition of the Bethel exchange at Jericho reinforces the universal awareness within the prophetic community that Elijah's departure is imminent. Everyone knows. Elisha's identical response shows that his command for silence is not irritation but grief management — he will not process this loss publicly.
6. The third and final test of loyalty. The destination is now the Jordan — the boundary river of the promised land. The phrase *va-yelkhu sheneihem* ('and the two of them went') echoes Genesis 22:6, where Abraham and Isaac walk together toward the Aqedah: *va-yelkhu sheneihem yachdav* ('and the two of them walked together'). Both narratives describe a journey toward a momentous, irreversible event.
7. The fifty prophetic witnesses position themselves *mineged merachocq* ('opposite, from a distance'). They are close enough to see but too far to participate — they are observers, not participants, in what is about to happen. The contrast between the fifty at a distance and the two at the river marks the boundary between the prophetic community and the unique relationship between Elijah and Elisha.
8. The *aderet* is a wide, heavy cloak — the outer garment of a person of authority. The verb *va-yiglom* ('he rolled it up') appears only here in the Hebrew Bible, making the action distinctive. The water divides *hennah va-hennah* ('to here and to there'), the same phrase used in Exodus 14:22, 29 and Joshua 3:16 for the parting of waters. This is a deliberate echo establishing Elijah in the Moses-Joshua line of succession.
9. The phrase *pi shenayim* ('a mouth of two') is a legal formula from inheritance law (Deuteronomy 21:17). It means 'two-thirds' or 'a double share' — the firstborn's portion in a family with multiple heirs. Elisha is making a succession claim, not a request for superior power. The request acknowledges Elijah as his spiritual father. The verb *ellaqech* ('I am taken') is passive — God is the agent who takes Elijah, not Elijah himself.
10. Elijah calls the request *hiqshita lish'ol* ('you have made your request difficult') — not impossible, but beyond what Elijah himself can grant. The condition is visual: *im tireh oti luqach me'ittakh* ('if you see me being taken from you'). Seeing the ascension becomes the test of readiness to receive the prophetic spirit. The ability to perceive the heavenly event — to have eyes for what God is doing — determines whether the successor is qualified.
11. The chariot of fire (*rekhev esh*) and horses of fire (*susei esh*) are not the vehicle of transport but the agents of separation. Elijah goes up in the *se'arah* ('whirlwind'), not in the chariot. The imagery is military-theophanic: the divine warrior's equipment (chariot and war-horses) made of fire. The separation (*va-yafridu*) is the key action — it is what prevents Elisha from following his master physically.
12. The phrase *rekhev Yisrael u-farshav* ('the chariot of Israel and its horsemen') reappears when Elisha himself dies (2 Kings 13:14), confirming it as a title of honor for the prophetic office. The tearing of garments (*qeri'at begadim*) is a mourning ritual, but tearing them into exactly two pieces may symbolize the complete break with his former identity. He will not sew these garments back together; he will pick up the mantle instead.
13. The mantle (*aderet*) that fell from Elijah during his ascent now becomes Elisha's. The verb *va-yarem* ('he lifted up, he picked up') is deliberate — the mantle was on the ground where it fell, and Elisha must choose to take it up. The prophetic office is not forced on the successor; it must be claimed. He returns to the Jordan — the boundary he must now cross alone.
14. The phrase *ayeh YHWH Elohei Eliyahu* is textually difficult — the Masoretic text includes *af hu* ('also he' or 'even he') which some versions render as part of the cry ('where is the LORD God of Elijah, even he?') and others treat as a narrative comment ('he also struck the water'). The parting of the water validates Elisha's succession: the same miracle, the same mantle, the same God responding.
15. The prophetic community confirms the succession: *nachah ruach Eliyahu al Elisha* ('the spirit of Elijah has rested on Elisha'). The verb *nachah* ('to rest, to settle') indicates a permanent settling, not a temporary visitation. Their prostration (*va-yishtachavu lo artzah*, 'they bowed to the ground before him') acknowledges his new authority. The public recognition completes the private transfer.
16. The fifty men's proposal reveals their understanding of prophetic transport: they know the *ruach YHWH* ('Spirit of the LORD') can physically relocate a prophet (cf. 1 Kings 18:12, where Obadiah fears the Spirit will carry Elijah away). But they do not grasp that this departure is permanent. Elisha knows the truth — Elijah has not been deposited somewhere — and refuses: *lo tishlachuh* ('you shall not send').
17. The verb *va-yifzeruv* ('they pressed him, urged him insistently') indicates persistent pressure. The phrase *ad bosh* ('until embarrassment, until shame') means Elisha felt he could no longer refuse without appearing unreasonable. He concedes — not because they are right but because further resistance would damage his relationship with the community he now leads. Three days of fruitless searching confirms what Elisha already knew.
18. Elisha's response *ha-lo amarti aleikhem al telekhu* ('did I not say to you, do not go?') is a gentle rebuke rather than a harsh reprimand. He waited in Jericho for them — he knew they would fail and return. The exchange establishes Elisha's authority: he knew what the community did not.
19. The word *meshakkelet* ('causing miscarriage, causing bereavement of offspring') indicates the water is causing sterility or miscarriage in both humans and livestock. The problem is not merely bad-tasting water but water that kills life at its source. This sets up Elisha's first miracle of restoration — healing the source of life.
20. The *tzlochit chadashah* ('new bowl') must be unused — an object with no prior contamination. Salt in the Hebrew Bible is associated with covenant (the 'covenant of salt' in Numbers 18:19 and 2 Chronicles 13:5) and with purification. The new vessel and the salt together signify that God is doing something fresh and cleansing.
21. Elisha goes to the *motza ha-mayim* ('the source/outlet of the water') — healing happens at the source, not downstream. The declaration *rippiti la-mayim ha-elleh* ('I have healed these waters') uses the prophetic perfect tense — the healing is already accomplished in God's word even before the physical effects are visible. The reversal is total: no more *mavet* ('death') and no more *meshakkelet* ('miscarriage/bereavement').
22. The narrator's aside *ad ha-yom ha-zeh* ('to this day') indicates the healing was permanent and still evident at the time of writing. The phrase *kidvar Elisha asher dibber* ('according to the word of Elisha that he spoke') attributes the ongoing miracle to the prophetic word — not to the salt, which

was merely a sign.

23. The phrase *ne'arim qetanim* is often translated 'little children' but *ne'arim* can refer to young men or youths — the word covers a wide age range from adolescents to young adults. Their taunt *aleh qereach* ('go up, baldhead!') has a double edge: *aleh* ('go up') may mock Elijah's ascension (the very event that just happened), and *qereach* ('baldhead') mocks Elisha's physical appearance or perhaps his lack of the hairy mantle that identified Elijah. The taunt, coming from Bethel — a center of the northern kingdom's calf worship (1 Kings 12:29) — carries anti-prophetic hostility.
24. Elisha's curse is *be-shem YHWH* ('in the name of the LORD') — this is not personal revenge but an invocation of divine authority against those who mock God's prophet and, by extension, God's work. The two she-bears (*dubbim*, feminine form) emerge from the *ya'ar* ('forest, thicket'). The number forty-two may be significant (it appears in other judgment contexts) or may simply indicate a large group. The word *yeladim* ('children, young ones') here completes the age ambiguity — the passage uses three different terms (*ne'arim*, *qetanim*, *yeladim*) that together suggest a group of youths rather than small children.
25. Elisha's journey to Mount Carmel — Elijah's great battleground — is a final act of continuity: the new prophet visits the site of his master's greatest triumph. From Carmel he returns to Samaria, the capital, establishing himself in the political center. The chapter ends with Elisha in place: the succession is complete, the miracles have begun, and the new prophet is positioned in the heart of the northern kingdom.

3

Summary: Jehoram son of Ahab becomes king over Israel. He does evil in the eyes of the LORD, though not as severely as his parents — he removes his father's Baal pillar but clings to the sins of Jeroboam. Mesha king of Moab, a sheep breeder who had been paying enormous tribute to Israel, rebels after Ahab's death. Jehoram musters Israel and recruits Jehoshaphat of Judah and the king of Edom for a joint campaign against Moab. They march by way of the wilderness of Edom, and after seven days the army has no water for soldiers or animals. Jehoram despairs, believing the LORD has brought three kings together to hand them to Moab. Jehoshaphat asks for a prophet of the LORD, and a servant identifies Elisha, who 'poured water on the hands of Elijah.' Elisha initially refuses to help Jehoram, telling him to consult his parents' prophets, but agrees to speak because of his respect for Jehoshaphat. A musician is brought, and the hand of the LORD comes upon Elisha. He commands them to dig ditches throughout the valley. The LORD will fill the valley with water without wind or rain. The next morning water comes from the direction of Edom and fills the valley. Meanwhile, the Moabites see the water reflecting red in the morning sun and mistake it for blood, concluding the kings have turned on each other. They rush to plunder the Israelite camp but find an army ready for battle. Israel routs Moab, destroys their cities, ruins their fields, stops up their springs, and cuts down their trees. Only Kir-hareseth remains, and when slingers surround it, Mesha king of Moab takes his firstborn son and offers him as a burnt offering on the city wall. A great wrath comes upon Israel, and they withdraw.

*What Makes This Remarkable: The chapter contains one of the most disturbing endings in the historical books. After a prophetically guaranteed victory, the Israelite coalition withdraws because of 'great wrath' (*qetzef gadol*) that comes upon them after Mesha sacrifices his son on the wall. The Hebrew text does not specify whose wrath this is — God's, Chemosh's, or the psychological horror of the Israelites at witnessing child sacrifice. The ambiguity is almost certainly deliberate. The text refuses to explain how a pagan king's desperate sacrifice of his own son could cause a victorious Israelite army to retreat. This unresolved ending forces the reader to sit with the horror of the event without a tidy theological resolution. Elisha's water miracle is also remarkable for its method: God sends water without rain, through natural drainage from the Edomite highlands — a miracle accomplished through natural processes supernaturally timed.*

*Translation Friction: The 'great wrath' (*qetzef gadol*) of verse 27 is the chapter's central interpretive crux. Three main readings exist: (1) the wrath of Chemosh, Moab's god, actually achieved something — deeply uncomfortable for monotheistic theology; (2) the wrath of the LORD fell on Israel for some unstated sin; (3) the Israelites were so horrified by the human sacrifice that they lost the will to fight. The text does not resolve this, and we render it without imposing a solution. The regnal formula for Jehoram (verses 1-3) creates chronological difficulties with the synchronism in 1:17. Mesha's tribute of 100,000 lambs and 100,000 rams with their wool seems impossibly large, though Moab was known for sheep husbandry. Elisha's requirement for a musician before prophesying (verse 15) raises questions about the relationship between music, ecstatic experience, and prophetic revelation.*

Connections: The water-from-Edom miracle echoes the wilderness water miracles of Moses (Exodus 17, Numbers 20). Jehoshaphat's request for a prophet of the LORD parallels his identical request in 1 Kings 22:7. Mesha's sacrifice of his firstborn connects to the broader biblical horror at child sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21, 20:2-5; Deuteronomy 12:31; 2 Kings 16:3, 21:6) and stands in terrible contrast to the Aqedah (Genesis 22), where God provides a substitute for the child. The Mesha Stele provides an extrabiblical Moabite account of this same period, offering a rare parallel perspective. Elisha's role as battlefield prophet continues the tradition of prophetic consultation before war (1 Samuel 28; 1 Kings 22).

¹Jehoram son of Ahab became king over Israel in Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned twelve years. ²He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, though not like his father and his mother. He removed the sacred pillar of Baal that his father had made. ³But he clung to the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin. He did not turn away from them. ⁴Now Mesha king of Moab was a sheep breeder, and he used to pay as tribute to the king of Israel one hundred thousand lambs and the wool of one hundred thousand rams. ⁵When Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel. ⁶King Jehoram set out from Samaria at that time and mustered all Israel. ⁷He sent word to Jehoshaphat king of Judah: "The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me to fight against Moab?" Jehoshaphat replied, "I will go. I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses." ⁸He asked, "Which route should we take?" He answered, "Through the wilderness of Edom." ⁹So the king of Israel set out with the king of Judah and the king of Edom. After a roundabout march of seven days, there was no water for the army or for the animals that accompanied them. ¹⁰The king of Israel exclaimed, "This is terrible! The LORD has summoned these three kings only to hand them over to Moab!" ¹¹But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there no prophet of the LORD here through whom we can inquire of the LORD?" One of the king of Israel's servants answered, "Elisha son of Shaphat is here — the one who used to pour water on the hands of Elijah." ¹²Jehoshaphat said, "He has the word of the LORD with him." So the king of Israel, Jehoshaphat, and the king of Edom went down to him. ¹³Elisha said to the king of Israel, "What do I have to do with you? Go to your father's prophets or your mother's prophets." The king of Israel said to him, "No — because the LORD has summoned these three kings to hand them over to Moab." ¹⁴Elisha said, "As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand — were it not that I have regard for Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would not look at you or even notice you." ¹⁵"Now bring me a musician." When the musician played, the hand of the LORD came upon Elisha. ¹⁶He said, "This is what the LORD says: Dig this valley full of trenches." ¹⁷"For this is what the LORD says: You will see no wind and you will see no rain, yet this valley will be filled with water. You will drink — you, your livestock, and your animals." ¹⁸"This is a small thing in the eyes of the LORD. He will also give Moab into your hand." ¹⁹"You will strike every fortified city and every major city. You will fell every good tree, stop up every spring of water, and ruin every good field with stones." ²⁰In the morning, at the time of the grain offering, water suddenly came flowing from the direction of Edom, and the land was filled with water. ²¹All the Moabites had heard that the kings had come up to fight against them. They mustered everyone who could strap on a belt — from the youngest soldier upward — and took their position at the border. ²²They rose early in the morning, and the sun shone on the water. The Moabites, looking from across the way, saw the water as red as blood. ²³They said, "That is blood! The kings have certainly turned on each other and struck each other down. Now to the plunder, Moab!" ²⁴When they reached the Israelite camp, the Israelites rose up and struck down the Moabites, who fled before them. The Israelites pressed forward, striking Moab as they went. ²⁵They tore down the cities, and on every good field each man threw a stone until the fields were covered. They stopped up every spring of water and felled every good tree, until only Kir-hareseth remained with its stones standing. The slingers surrounded it and attacked it. ²⁶When the king of Moab saw that the battle was going against him, he took seven hundred swordsmen and tried to break through to the king of Edom, but they could not. ²⁷He took his firstborn son, who was to succeed him as king, and offered him as a burnt offering on the city wall. A great wrath came against Israel, and they withdrew from him and returned to their own land.

1. The regnal formula places Jehoram's accession in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat, which creates a chronological tension with 1:17 (second year of Jehoram of Judah). Various solutions involving co-regencies have been proposed. The twelve-year reign connects to the overthrow by Jehu in chapter 9.
2. The evaluation formula *va-ya'as hara be-einei YHWH* ('he did evil in the eyes of the LORD') places Jehoram in the standard negative category, but with a qualification: *raq lo ke-aviv ukhe-immo* ('only not like his father and his mother'). The removal of the *matzevet ha-Ba'al* ('pillar of Baal') represents a partial reform — he rejects Baal worship but does not abandon the golden calves of Jeroboam (verse 3). Jezebel is implied by 'his mother.'
3. The verb *daveq* ('he clung, he adhered') is a strong attachment word — the same root used for a man clinging to his wife in Genesis 2:24. Jehoram's attachment to the sins of Jeroboam (the golden calf worship at Bethel and Dan) is described with the language of intimate, chosen loyalty. He actively chose not to depart (*lo sar*) from these practices.
4. Mesha is called a *noqed* ('sheep breeder, livestock owner on a large scale'). The same rare word describes Amos (Amos 1:1). The tribute — *me'ah elef karim* ('one hundred thousand lambs') and *me'ah elef eilim tzamer* ('one hundred thousand rams with their wool') — represents enormous economic value. Moab's economy was heavily pastoral, and this tribute reflects both its wealth and its subjugation. The Mesha Stele confirms Moab's perspective on Israelite domination.
5. The verb *va-yifsha* ('he rebelled') repeats from 1:1, reinforcing the political context. Ahab's death created the opening Moab needed to throw off the tributary relationship. The rebellion is against the institution of Israelite kingship, not just an individual king.
6. The verb *va-yifqod* ('he mustered, he numbered, he assembled for review') is a military census term. Jehoram is preparing for a punitive campaign to re-establish Moab's subjugation. The mustering of 'all Israel' indicates a full military mobilization.
7. Jehoshaphat's response — *kamoni kamokha ke-ammi ke-ammekha ke-susai ke-susekha* — is the exact same total-commitment formula he gave Ahab in 1 Kings 22:4. The repetition suggests this is a standard alliance pledge, but it also reveals that Jehoshaphat has not learned from the near-disaster at Ramoth-gilead. He again commits fully before consulting the LORD.
8. The southern route through the wilderness of Edom is the long way around — instead of attacking Moab directly from the north across the Jordan, the coalition will circle south through Edomite territory, approaching Moab from the less-defended south. This strategy adds a third ally (Edom) but also creates the logistical nightmare of a seven-day march through arid wilderness.
9. The seven-day march (*derekh shiv'at yamim*) through waterless wilderness creates a crisis that mirrors Israel's wilderness experience under Moses. The phrase *va-lo hayah mayim* ('there was no water') echoes the wilderness water crises of Exodus 17:1 and Numbers 20:2. Three kings with their armies are as helpless in the desert as the Israelite slaves were.
10. Jehoram's cry *ahahh* ('alas!') is followed by a theological claim: *ki qara YHWH* ('because the LORD has called'). He interprets the crisis as divine hostility — God has brought the three kings together for destruction. This is the fatalism of a king who does evil in the LORD's eyes but still blames the LORD when things go wrong. He does not repent or pray; he simply declares the situation hopeless.
11. Jehoshaphat's question is identical to his question in 1 Kings 22:7 — he is consistent in seeking a genuine *navi la-YHWH* ('prophet belonging to the LORD'). Elisha is identified not by title but by his service: *asher yatzaq mayim al yedei Eliyahu* ('who poured water on the hands of Elijah'). Pouring water on the master's hands was a servant's task, indicating that Elisha served as Elijah's personal attendant — an intimacy that qualified him for succession.
12. Jehoshaphat's declaration *yesh oto devar YHWH* ('the word of the LORD is with him') is both a validation of Elisha and a theological statement: the word is a presence that accompanies the prophet. Three kings descend to a prophet — *va-yerdu elav* ('they went down to him') — a striking reversal of normal protocol. Royalty comes to the prophet, not the other way around.
13. Elisha's rebuke *mah li valakh* ('what is to me and to you?') is a distancing formula — it means 'we have nothing in common, no shared ground.' His instruction *lekh el nevi'ei avikha ve-el nevi'ei immekha* ('go to your father's prophets and to your mother's prophets') is a stinging reference to the Baal prophets of Ahab and Jezebel. Jehoram's desperate reply repeats his fatalistic claim from verse 10, but now he uses it as an argument for why Elisha should help: the situation is dire.
14. Elisha's oath *chai YHWH tzevaot asher amadti lefanav* ('as the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand') is the strongest possible prophetic credential — he stands in the divine presence. His contempt for Jehoram is explicit: *lulei penei Yehoshafat* ('if not for the face of Jehoshaphat') — only the presence of the Judean king earns Jehoram any prophetic attention. The word *nosei* ('bearing, carrying, regarding') indicates that Elisha respects Jehoshaphat's covenant faithfulness.
15. The *menaggen* ('musician, one who plays a stringed instrument') is needed to create the conditions for prophetic reception. The phrase *va-tehi alav yad YHWH* ('and the hand of the LORD was upon him') describes prophetic inspiration — the *yad YHWH* ('hand of the LORD') is the power that moves the prophet to speak. Music facilitating prophecy appears elsewhere (1 Samuel 10:5-6) and suggests that the prophetic state involves the whole person, not merely the intellect.
16. The command *asoh ha-nachal ha-zeh gevim gevim* ('make this wadi ditches, ditches') uses the doubled noun for emphasis — dig trench after trench throughout the dry streambed. The *nachal* is a wadi, a seasonal riverbed that is dry most of the year. The soldiers must prepare by faith: digging water channels in a waterless wilderness.

17. The miracle is described by what will not happen: *lo tir'u ruach ve-lo tir'u geshem* ('you will not see wind and you will not see rain'). The water will come without visible cause — no storm, no clouds, no natural explanation visible to the army. Yet the wadi will fill. The water is for everyone: *attem u-miqneikhem u-vehemteikhem* ('you and your livestock and your animals'). God provides for the whole creation, not just the soldiers.
18. The phrase *ve-naqal zot be-einei YHWH* ('and this is light/easy in the eyes of the LORD') dismisses the water miracle as trivial compared to what follows — military victory. The distinction establishes a theological scale: providing water is simple for God; delivering nations is also within His power. Both are 'small things' to the LORD of hosts.
19. The oracle prescribes total devastation: cities struck, trees felled, springs stopped, fields ruined with stones. The verb *takh'ivu* ('you will cause pain, you will ruin') applied to fields means making them unusable by scattering stones across them. This level of destruction is unusual and may tension with Deuteronomy 20:19-20, which prohibits cutting down fruit trees during a siege — though some interpret the Deuteronomic law as applying only to the land of Israel, not enemy territory.
20. The timing — *ka'alot ha-minchah* ('at the time of the offering going up') — connects the miracle to the liturgical rhythm of Israel's worship. The grain offering was presented in the morning. Water comes *miderekh Edom* ('from the direction of Edom'), suggesting flash flooding from rainfall in the Edomite highlands — water that traveled through wadis to reach the army's position. The miracle uses natural processes at a supernaturally precise time.
21. The Moabite mobilization drafts *mikol choger chagorah vama'lah* ('everyone girding on a belt and upward') — meaning every male old enough to wear a military belt. This is a total mobilization for defense. They position themselves *al ha-gevul* ('at the border'), preparing to repel the invasion.
22. The sunrise turns the water *adummim ka-dam* ('red as blood'). The red color comes from the Edomite soil (Edom itself means 'red') dissolved in the floodwater, combined with the angle of the morning sun. The Moabites see what they expect to see: having heard that an alliance of three rival kings was marching together, they interpret the red water as evidence of internecine slaughter.
23. The Moabite conclusion — *hocherev nechervu ha-melakhim* ('the kings have certainly been destroyed') — uses an emphatic infinitive absolute construction. They assume the fragile alliance has shattered: *va-yakku ish et re'ehu* ('each struck his neighbor'). Their cry *la-shalal Mo'av* ('to the plunder, Moab!') sends them rushing toward what they believe is an undefended camp full of spoils. This misinterpretation turns God's provision (water) into a tactical weapon (deception).
24. The Moabites arrive expecting plunder and find a fully armed, rested, and watered army. The reversal is total: the hunters become the hunted. The phrase *va-yakku vam ve-hakkot et Mo'av* ('and they struck them, striking Moab') uses a participle to indicate continuous, relentless pursuit — the Israelites drive the Moabites back into their own territory.
25. The destruction follows Elisha's oracle precisely: cities razed, fields ruined, springs stopped, trees felled. *Kir-hareseth* (Qir Chareseth, 'city of broken pottery' or 'city of the sun') was the Moabite capital or at least its last stronghold. The slingers (*qalla'im*) surround and attack it, but the city holds — setting up the desperate act in the following verses.
26. Meshah's attempt to break through (*lehavqia*) to the king of Edom suggests he was trying to attack the weakest link in the coalition or perhaps to escape through the Edomite sector. The failure of this breakout attempt leaves Meshah trapped in his last fortress with no military options remaining — driving him to the desperate act of verse 27.
27. The identity of the *qetzel gadol* ('great wrath') remains the most debated question in the chapter. Three main interpretations exist: (1) wrath from Chemosh, Moab's god, somehow effective against Israel; (2) wrath from the LORD against Israel for some unspecified sin; (3) psychological revulsion — the Israelite soldiers were so horrified by the sight of child sacrifice that their fighting spirit collapsed. The text does not resolve the ambiguity. The Meshah Stele records Meshah's own account of deliverance from Israel, attributing it to Chemosh.

4

Summary: Four miracle stories demonstrate Elisha's prophetic power and God's provision for the vulnerable. First, a widow of one of the sons of the prophets faces a creditor who will take her two sons as debt-slaves. Elisha instructs her to borrow empty vessels from neighbors and pour her small jar of oil into them. The oil flows until every vessel is full, and she sells it to pay the debt and live on the rest. Second, a wealthy woman from Shunem provides Elisha with regular hospitality, building a special room for him. Elisha promises she will hold a son within a year, though her husband is old. The promise is fulfilled. Years later the child dies suddenly, apparently from heatstroke. The Shunammite rides urgently to Elisha at Mount Carmel. Gehazi, Elisha's servant, is sent ahead with Elisha's staff to lay on the child's face, but nothing happens. Elisha comes himself, lies on the child body-to-body, and the child revives after sneezing seven times. Third, during a famine Elisha feeds the sons of the prophets from a pot of stew that has been accidentally poisoned with wild gourds. He throws flour into the pot and declares it safe. Fourth, a man brings twenty loaves of barley bread and fresh grain, and Elisha commands it be given to a hundred men. The servant protests the inadequacy, but Elisha insists, and they eat with food left over.

What Makes This Remarkable: *The chapter presents Elisha as a prophet of domestic miracles — his power operates in kitchens, bedrooms, and family crises rather than on Mount Carmel or before kings. Each miracle addresses a concrete human need: debt, childlessness, death, famine, and inadequate food. The oil miracle reveals a principle of faith: the oil stops flowing when the vessels run out, suggesting that God's provision is limited only by the capacity to receive it. The Shunammite narrative is the chapter's centerpiece — the longest and most emotionally complex story. The woman's response to her son's death is extraordinary: she tells no one, rides directly to the prophet, and when asked if everything is well, says shalom ('peace') even though her son is dead. Her fierce, controlled determination to reach Elisha rather than surrendering to grief is one of the most powerful portraits of faith-in-crisis in the Hebrew Bible. The feeding miracle (twenty loaves for a hundred men with leftovers) anticipates Jesus' feeding of the five thousand.*

Translation Friction: *The Shunammite woman's response to Elisha in verse 28 — 'Did I ask you for a son? Did I not say, Do not deceive me?' — contains a sharp accusation: the prophetic gift has become a source of deeper pain than her original childlessness. This raises the question of whether God's gifts can become occasions for suffering. The failure of Gehazi's staff-on-the-face method (verse 31) contrasts with the success of Elisha's body-on-body method, raising questions about whether prophetic power can be delegated through objects or requires personal presence. The seven sneezes of the revived child (verse 35) are a specific and unusual detail that interpreters have variously understood as signs of returning breath, expulsion of death, or simply a realistic physical response. The poisoned stew miracle (verses 38-41) is brief and raises no theological difficulty but illustrates the prophetic community's poverty during famine.*

Connections: *The widow's oil miracle parallels Elijah's multiplication of the widow of Zarephath's flour and oil (1 Kings 17:8-16) — both prophets provide for destitute widows through miraculous provision. The Shunammite's son narrative parallels and intensifies the Zarephath narrative: Elijah also raised a widow's son (1 Kings 17:17-24), but here the woman is wealthy and the story more psychologically developed. Elisha's body-on-body resuscitation (verse 34) echoes Elijah's identical technique (1 Kings 17:21). The feeding of a hundred from twenty loaves anticipates Jesus' feeding miracles (Matthew 14:13-21, 15:32-38) with the same pattern: inadequate supply, prophetic command, abundant surplus. The debt-slavery crisis reflects the social legislation of Leviticus 25:39-43 and anticipates Nehemiah's reforms (Nehemiah 5).*

¹A woman from among the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, "Your servant my husband has died. You know that your servant feared the LORD, yet the creditor has come to take my two sons as his slaves." ²Elisha asked her, "What can I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" She said, "Your servant has nothing at all in the house except a small jar of oil." ³He said, "Go, borrow vessels from all your neighbors outside — empty vessels. Do not get too few." ⁴"Then go inside, shut the door behind you and your sons, and pour oil into all these vessels. Set each one aside when it is full." ⁵She left him and shut the door behind herself and her sons. They kept bringing vessels to her, and she kept pouring. ⁶When the vessels were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." He said, "There are no more vessels." And the oil stopped flowing. ⁷She went and told the man of God, and he said, "Go, sell the oil, pay your debt, and you and your sons can live on what remains." ⁸One day Elisha passed through Shunem, where a prominent woman persuaded him to eat a meal. From then on, whenever he passed through, he would stop there to eat. ⁹She said to her husband, "I am certain that this man who regularly passes through here is a holy man of God." ¹⁰"Let us make a small upper room on the wall and furnish it with a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp. Whenever he comes to us, he can stay there." ¹¹One day Elisha came and went up to the room and rested there. ¹²He said to Gehazi his servant, "Call this Shunammite woman." He called her, and she stood before him. ¹³He told Gehazi, "Say to her: You have gone to all this trouble for us. What can be done for you? Should I speak on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army?" She answered, "I live among my own people." ¹⁴He asked, "Then what can be done for her?" Gehazi answered, "She has no son, and her husband is old." ¹⁵He said, "Call her." When he called her, she stood in the doorway. ¹⁶Elisha said, "At this season next year, you will be holding a son." She said, "No, my lord, man of God — do not deceive your servant." ¹⁷The woman conceived and bore a son at that season the next year, just as Elisha had told her. ¹⁸The child grew. One day he went out to his father, who was among the reapers. ¹⁹He said to his father, "My head, my head!" The father told a servant, "Carry him to his mother." ²⁰He carried him and brought him to his mother. The child sat on her lap until noon, and then he died. ²¹She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, shut the door

behind him, and went out. ²²She called to her husband and said, "Send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can hurry to the man of God and come back." ²³He asked, "Why are you going to him today? It is not the new moon or the Sabbath." She said, "All is well." ²⁴She saddled the donkey and told her servant, "Drive fast. Do not slow the pace for me unless I tell you." ²⁵She went and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel. When the man of God saw her at a distance, he said to Gehazi his servant, "There is the Shunammite woman." ²⁶"Run now to meet her and ask her: Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?" She answered, "It is well." ²⁷When she reached the man of God at the hill, she grasped his feet. Gehazi came forward to push her away, but the man of God said, "Leave her alone. She is in bitter distress, and the LORD has hidden it from me — He has not told me." ²⁸She said, "Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me'?" ²⁹He said to Gehazi, "Strap up your robe, take my staff in your hand, and go. If you meet anyone, do not greet them; if anyone greets you, do not respond. Lay my staff on the child's face." ³⁰But the child's mother said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So Elisha got up and followed her. ³¹Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the child's face, but there was no sound and no response. He returned to meet Elisha and reported, "The child has not awakened." ³²When Elisha came into the house, the child was dead, lying on his bed. ³³He went in, shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the LORD. ³⁴He went up and lay on the child, placing his mouth on the child's mouth, his eyes on the child's eyes, and his hands on the child's hands. He stretched himself over the child, and the child's body grew warm. ³⁵Elisha got up, paced back and forth in the house, then went up again and stretched himself over the child. The child sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. ³⁶He called Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite woman." He called her, and she came to him. Elisha said, "Pick up your son." ³⁷She came in, fell at his feet, and bowed to the ground. Then she picked up her son and went out. ³⁸Elisha returned to Gilgal during a famine in the land. The sons of the prophets were sitting before him, and he said to his servant, "Put the large pot on the fire and make stew for the sons of the prophets." ³⁹One of them went out to the field to gather herbs and found a wild vine. He gathered wild gourds from it, filling his garment, and came back and sliced them into the pot of stew — not knowing what they were. ⁴⁰They served it to the men to eat, but as they tasted the stew, they cried out, "There is death in the pot, man of God!" They could not eat it. ⁴¹He said, "Bring some flour." He threw it into the pot and said, "Serve the people so they can eat." There was nothing harmful in the pot. ⁴²A man came from Baal-shalishah bringing the man of God bread from the firstfruits — twenty loaves of barley bread and fresh grain in his sack. Elisha said, "Give it to the people to eat." ⁴³His servant objected, "How can I set this before a hundred men?" But Elisha said, "Give it to the people to eat, for this is what the LORD says: They will eat and have some left over." ⁴⁴He set it before them. They ate and had some left over, according to the word of the LORD.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The widow identifies her husband as a God-fearing member of the prophetic community, yet he died in debt. Her appeal highlights a painful reality: faithfulness to God did not guarantee financial security, especially for prophets during the reign of kings hostile to the LORD. The creditor (noseh) had legal right under Israelite law to take children as debt-slaves (cf. Leviticus 25:39; Nehemiah 5:5), though the practice was supposed to be limited and humane.
2. Elisha's question *mah yesh lakh ba-bayit* ('what is there for you in the house?') redirects attention from what she lacks to what she has. The answer — *ein le-shifchatekha khol ba-bayit ki im asukh shamen* ('your maidservant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil') — establishes the starting point of the miracle: God works with what exists, however small. The *asukh* is a small flask or jar, emphasizing how little remains.
3. The instruction *al tam'iti* ('do not make few, do not limit') places the burden of faith on the widow: the scope of the miracle will be determined by how many vessels she collects. More vessels, more oil. Fewer vessels, less provision. This is an active faith — she must go to every neighbor and ask.
4. The instruction to shut the door (*ve-sagarat ha-delet ba'adekh*) creates a private space for the miracle. This is not a public spectacle but a domestic act of faith performed behind closed doors. The miracle happens in the hidden sphere of a poor widow's home, not on a mountain before crowds.
5. The scene behind the closed door has a beautiful rhythm: *hem maggishim eleha ve-hi motzaqet* ('they were bringing to her and she was pouring'). The sons bring vessels; the mother pours. The participial forms indicate continuous, ongoing action — a sustained miracle happening in the quiet repetition of domestic labor.
6. The verb *va-ya'amod* ('it stood, it stopped') is the same verb used for something coming to a halt. The oil did not run out — it stopped because there was nothing left to receive it. The theological implication is that divine abundance meets human capacity: God pours until there is no more room.

7. Elisha's instruction covers all three needs: pay the debt (ve-shalmi et nishyekh), which prevents the sons from being taken as slaves; then live on the surplus (tichyi ba-notar). The miracle is not merely dramatic — it is economically comprehensive. The woman's crisis is fully resolved.
8. The ishah gedolah ('great woman') is great in social standing — wealthy and influential. The verb va-tachazek bo ('she took hold of him, she urged him strongly') indicates persistent hospitality, not a casual invitation. The regular visits — midei ovro yasur shammah ('whenever he passed by, he would turn in there') — establish a relationship of prophetic patronage.
9. The woman's discernment — yadati ki ish Elohim qadosh hu ('I know that he is a holy man of God') — recognizes both his prophetic identity and his holiness. The word qadosh ('holy, set apart') applied to the prophet means she perceives the divine presence that accompanies him. This is spiritual perception, not merely social hospitality.
10. The furnishings — mittah, shulchan, kisei, menorah ('bed, table, chair, lamp') — represent complete provision for a guest. The aliyat qir qetannah ('small upper room on the wall') is a room built on the flat roof or as an extension of the upper wall. This is permanent hospitality — a dedicated space for the prophet, always ready.
11. The narrative is spare: he came, he went up, he lay down. The prophet accepts the hospitality without excessive gratitude or ceremony. The room serves its purpose.
12. Gehazi (Gechazi) is introduced as Elisha's na'ar ('servant, attendant'). He functions as the intermediary between prophet and petitioner — the same role Elisha once played for Elijah. The Shunammite stands lifnav ('before him'), the posture of one awaiting instruction.
13. Elisha offers political patronage — influence with the king or military commander — the most valuable currency in an ancient Near Eastern monarchy. Her response betokh ammi anakhi yoshevet ('among my own people I am dwelling') is remarkable: she needs nothing from the political establishment. She is content, embedded in her community, lacking nothing that power can provide. This sets up the deeper gift that follows.
14. Gehazi's observation ben ein lah ve-ishah zaqen ('a son she does not have, and her husband is old') identifies the one lack that wealth and community cannot fill. Childlessness in ancient Israel was not merely a personal sorrow but a threat to the family's future — no heir meant the end of the family line and the loss of the family's ancestral land.
15. The woman stands ba-petach ('in the doorway') — a threshold position between the public space and the private room. She is on the boundary between her present life and the promise about to be spoken.
16. The promise la-mo'ed ha-zeh ka-et chayyah att chobeqet ben ('at this appointed time, at the season of life, you will be embracing a son') echoes the promise to Sarah in Genesis 18:10, 14 — the same phrase ka-et chayyah ('at the time of life/living') appears in both passages. The Shunammite's response al tekhezzev be-shifchatekha ('do not deal falsely with your maidservant') reveals that she has learned to protect herself from the pain of hope. She would rather not hope than hope and be disappointed.
17. The fulfillment is precise: la-mo'ed ha-zeh ka-et chayyah asher dibber eleha Elisha ('at this appointed time, at the season of life, as Elisha had spoken to her'). The prophetic word and its fulfillment frame the promise — what Elisha spoke, reality produced.
18. The phrase va-yigdal ha-yeled ('the child grew') compresses years into two words. The scene shifts abruptly to harvest time — the boy is old enough to go to the field. The casualness of the opening — a normal day, a boy going to see his father at work — makes the crisis that follows more devastating.
19. The child's cry roshi roshi ('my head, my head!') suggests sunstroke or heatstroke during harvest — a realistic detail for outdoor labor in the summer heat. The father's response — sending the boy to his mother rather than attending to him personally — reflects the social reality that medical care for children fell within the mother's domain.
20. The boy dies at noon — the hottest part of the day — on his mother's knees. The brevity of va-yamot ('and he died') after the intimate image of a child on his mother's lap is devastating. The promised son, the impossible gift, is dead.
21. The Shunammite places her dead son on Elisha's bed — mittah ish ha-Elohim ('the bed of the man of God'). This is not a random choice but a deliberate act: she places her son in the space most saturated with the prophet's presence, the room she built, on the bed she provided. She shuts the door (va-tisgor ba'ado) as if sealing the child in the prophetic space, then leaves to seek the prophet himself.
22. She does not tell her husband the child is dead. The verb arutzah ('I will run') conveys urgency. She asks for minimal resources — one servant, one donkey — and frames the trip as brief: ve-ashuvah ('and I will return'). Her composure in this moment is extraordinary: she is managing information and logistics while her dead son lies on the prophet's bed.
23. Her husband's question reveals that visits to the prophet were normally reserved for religious occasions — the new moon (chodesh) and Sabbath (shabbat). Her answer shalom ('peace, all is well') is not a lie but a statement of determined faith — she is going to make it well by reaching the prophet. The word shalom here carries the weight of her entire desperate hope.
24. Her command nehag valekh al ta'atzor li lirkov ('drive and go, do not hold back the riding for me') means: maintain maximum speed regardless of my comfort. She is willing to endure the physical pain of hard riding to reach Elisha faster. Every detail reveals controlled urgency.
25. Elisha sees her mineged ('from a distance') and recognizes her immediately. His identification — hinneh ha-Shunamit hallaz ('there is that Shunammite') — suggests he already senses something is wrong. She has come at an unusual time, riding hard.

26. Elisha sends Gehazi with three shalom questions — ha-shalom lakh, ha-shalom le-ishekh, ha-shalom la-yeled ('is it peace to you, is it peace to your husband, is it peace to the child?'). She answers shalom to all three. But when she reaches Elisha himself (verse 27), the truth emerges. She gives Gehazi the surface answer; she reserves the real answer for the prophet.
27. She grasps his feet (va-tachazeg be-raglav) — a posture of desperate supplication. Gehazi tries to push her away (lehodfa), presumably to protect the prophet's dignity, but Elisha stops him with a remarkable admission: va-YHWH he'elim mimmenni ve-lo higgid li ('and the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me'). The prophet does not know everything; God reveals selectively. This honest limitation is theologically important.
28. Her accusation is piercing: ha-sha'alti ven me'et adoni ('did I ask for a son from my lord?'). She did not request the child — Elisha offered the promise unsolicited. Her warning in verse 16 — al tekhazzev ('do not deceive') — now returns as evidence: she anticipated this pain. The gift she did not ask for has become the source of her deepest suffering.
29. The instructions for urgency — no greetings, no social exchanges — indicate maximum speed. Greetings in the ancient Near East were lengthy affairs; skipping them saves significant time. The staff (mish'enet) is Elisha's personal prophetic instrument. Laying it on the child's face is an attempt at remote healing through a prophetic object. Its failure (verse 31) will demonstrate that prophetic power requires personal presence, not mere delegation.
30. The Shunammite uses the exact oath formula that Elisha himself used with Elijah in chapter 2: chai YHWH ve-chei nafshekha im e'ezvekka ('as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, I will not leave you'). She will not accept a staff and a servant as substitutes for the prophet himself. The echo is powerful: the loyalty Elisha showed Elijah, this mother now shows Elisha.
31. The staff fails: ve-ein qol ve-ein qashev ('no voice and no hearing/attention'). The doubled negative emphasizes complete absence of response. Gehazi reports lo heqitz ha-na'ar ('the child has not awakened') — using the language of sleep for death. The failure establishes that prophetic power cannot be mechanically transferred through objects; it requires the prophet's bodily presence and prayer.
32. Elisha arrives to find exactly what the Shunammite told him: the child is met ('dead'), lying on his bed — the prophet's own bed. The simple statement of fact — mushkav al mittato ('lying on his bed') — sets the scene for the most intimate of Elisha's miracles.
33. The closed door (va-yisgor ha-delet be'ad sheneihem) again creates a private space — this time between the living prophet and the dead child. The first action is prayer: va-yitpallel el YHWH ('he prayed to the LORD'). Before any physical action, Elisha appeals to God. The miracle's source is divine, not prophetic technique.
34. The body-on-body contact echoes Elijah's resurrection of the Zarephath widow's son (1 Kings 17:21). Some interpreters see mouth-to-mouth contact as a form of breath transfer — the prophet breathing the ruach ('breath, spirit') of life into the child. The warming of the flesh is the first sign of returning life, but the child is not yet revived.
35. Elisha paces — va-yelekh ba-bayit achat hennah ve-achat hennah ('he walked in the house, one way here and one way there') — before returning to the child a second time. The pacing may indicate prayer, agitation, or the building of spiritual intensity. The child's seven sneezes (va-yezorer ha-na'ar ad sheva pe'amim) are a vivid physical detail: the sneeze represents the violent expulsion of breath, the body reasserting its living function. Seven is the number of completion. The opening of the eyes (va-yifqach et einav) signals full restoration.
36. Elisha's words se'i venekh ('pick up your son') are spare and powerful — no explanation, no theological commentary, just the instruction to take the restored child. The brevity mirrors the simplicity of the miracle's resolution: what God has restored does not require elaboration.
37. Her response — falling at his feet, bowing to the ground — is wordless gratitude. The sequence is striking: prostration first, then she takes the child. She honors the prophet before claiming the miracle. Then va-tetze ('she went out') — back to her life, with her restored son.
38. The scene shifts to Gilgal during a famine (ra'av ba-aretz). The prophetic community is gathered, and food is scarce. Elisha orders a communal meal: shefot ha-sir ha-gedolah u-vashel nazid ('set the great pot and cook stew'). The story demonstrates Elisha's role as provider and protector of the prophetic community.
39. The paqqu'ot sadeh ('wild gourds, field gourds') are likely colocynth (*Citrullus colocynthis*), a bitter, toxic gourd that grows wild in the region. During famine, unfamiliar plants become food sources — the man did not know the gourds were dangerous (ki lo yada'u, 'they did not know'). The danger is accidental, not malicious.
40. The cry mavet ba-sir ('death in the pot!') is vivid and urgent — the bitter taste warned them of toxicity before they consumed a lethal amount. The stew that was meant to sustain the prophetic community has become a vessel of death. The crisis — like the water at Jericho in chapter 2 — involves a source of life turned toxic.
41. The flour (qemach) is not a natural antidote to the poison — it is a prophetic sign, like the salt thrown into Jericho's spring (2:21). The declaration tzeq la-am ve-yokhelu ('pour out for the people and let them eat') is authoritative: the prophet's word makes the food safe. The note ve-lo hayah davar ra ba-sir ('there was no evil thing in the pot') confirms complete purification.
42. The man from Ba'al Shalishah brings lechem bikkurim ('bread of the firstfruits') — grain from the first harvest, which under the Torah was to be brought to the priests (Leviticus 23:20). That he brings it to Elisha instead suggests either that the northern kingdom's prophets functioned as alternative religious leaders or that the man recognized Elisha's authority as equivalent to priestly authority. Twenty loaves of barley bread is a generous but limited gift.

43. The servant's protest — mah etten zeh lifnei me'ah ish ('what, shall I give this before a hundred men?') — is the reasonable objection: twenty loaves cannot feed a hundred people. Elisha's response is a prophetic oracle: ko amar YHWH, akhol ve-hoter ('thus says the LORD: eating and having left over'). The surplus is part of the promise — not merely enough but more than enough.
44. The fulfillment is stated with the now-familiar formula kidvar YHWH ('according to the word of the LORD'). The surplus (va-yotiru, 'they had left over') confirms that God's provision exceeds the need. This miracle — feeding many from inadequate supply with leftovers — is the closest Old Testament parallel to Jesus' feeding miracles (Matthew 14:20, 15:37), where twelve and seven baskets remain after the crowds are fed.

5

Summary: *Naaman, commander of the army of Aram, is a great and honored man through whom the LORD had given victory to Aram. But he suffers from a skin disease. A young Israelite girl captured in a raid and serving Naaman's wife tells her mistress about a prophet in Israel who could cure her master. Naaman goes to the king of Israel with a letter from the king of Aram, along with enormous gifts of silver, gold, and clothing. The Israelite king tears his robes in alarm, thinking Aram is picking a quarrel. Elisha hears and sends word: send Naaman to me, so he will know there is a prophet in Israel. Naaman arrives at Elisha's door with his horses and chariots, but Elisha does not come out. He sends a messenger telling Naaman to wash seven times in the Jordan. Naaman is furious — he expected the prophet to come out, wave his hand, call on the LORD, and cure him dramatically. He names the rivers of Damascus as superior to any water in Israel. His servants reason with him: if the prophet had told you something difficult, you would have done it. How much more when he simply says, wash and be clean? Naaman goes down and dips in the Jordan seven times, and his skin is restored like the skin of a young child. He returns to Elisha and declares that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel. He offers gifts, but Elisha refuses. Naaman asks for two mule-loads of Israelite soil to take home and requests pardon for bowing in the temple of Rimmon when he accompanies his king there. Elisha sends him away in peace. Gehazi, Elisha's servant, runs after Naaman and lies, claiming Elisha has changed his mind and wants silver and clothing for visiting prophets. Naaman gladly gives more than requested. Gehazi hides the goods and returns to Elisha, who confronts him: 'Was it a time to accept money, garments, olive groves, vineyards, sheep, oxen, and servants?' Naaman's skin disease transfers to Gehazi and his descendants forever.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The chapter is constructed around reversals and the crossing of every boundary the ancient world knew. A pagan general is healed by Israel's God; a captive slave girl has the knowledge that the most powerful men lack; the prophet of God will not even come to the door for the most important visitor in the story. Naaman's anger at being told to wash in the Jordan is theologically precise — he wanted a spectacular cure and received a humiliating command. He wanted the prophet to perform; instead the prophet sent a messenger. He wanted his own rivers; he was told to use Israel's river. Every expectation of how divine power works is overturned. The chapter also contains the clearest monotheistic confession by a non-Israelite in the books of Kings: 'Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel.' Naaman's request for two mule-loads of earth reveals a common ancient belief that deities were tied to specific territories — he wants Israelite soil so he can worship the LORD on His own ground. Elisha's response to the Rimmon question — 'Go in peace' — is strikingly tolerant, allowing Naaman to work out the practical implications of his new faith within his existing political obligations.*

Translation Friction: *Naaman's statement that the LORD gave victory to Aram (verse 1) is theologically startling — it attributes military success against Israel to Israel's own God. This implies that God's sovereignty extends beyond Israel's borders and interests, using even enemy nations for His purposes. Elisha's tolerance of Naaman's continued temple attendance for Rimmon (verses 18-19) raises questions about religious compromise — can a believer in the LORD participate in pagan worship as a political necessity? Gehazi's punishment — the skin disease of Naaman clinging to him and his descendants 'forever' — seems disproportionate and raises questions about hereditary punishment for individual sin. The young Israelite slave girl who initiates the entire chain of healing is never named, raising questions about how the biblical narrative preserves or erases the identities of the vulnerable. The LXX and some traditions add details not in the MT.*

Connections: Jesus cites this story in Luke 4:27 — 'There were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian' — using it to demonstrate that God's healing extends beyond ethnic Israel, provoking the Nazareth crowd to attempt to kill him. The seven washings connect to ritual purification laws in Leviticus 14 (the cleansing of skin disease). Naaman's confession ('no God in all the earth except in Israel') connects to the monotheistic declarations of Rahab (Joshua 2:11), the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:9), and Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:34-35). Gehazi's fall from prophetic servant to cursed outcast parallels Judas's fall from disciple to betrayer — both were destroyed by greed while serving a master who modeled radical generosity. The skin-disease transfer from Naaman to Gehazi is a narrative reversal: what the pagan was freed from, the Israelite receives.

¹Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man in the eyes of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a mighty warrior — but he had a skin disease. ²Aramean raiding parties had gone out and captured a young girl from the land of Israel. She served Naaman's wife. ³She said to her mistress, "If only my master could go to the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his skin disease." ⁴Naaman went and told his lord, "The girl from the land of Israel said such and such." ⁵The king of Aram said, "Go, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, and ten sets of clothing. ⁶He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read: "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his skin disease." ⁷When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to give life, that this man sends to me to cure someone of his skin disease? See for yourselves how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!" ⁸When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent word to the king: "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." ⁹Naaman arrived with his horses and chariots and stood at the entrance of Elisha's house. ¹⁰Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your skin will be restored to you, and you will be clean." ¹¹But Naaman went away furious. He said, "I thought he would surely come out to me, stand there, call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot, and cure the skin disease. ¹²"Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" He turned and left in a rage. ¹³But his servants approached him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more when he simply tells you, 'Wash and be clean'?" ¹⁴So he went down and immersed himself in the Jordan seven times, according to the word of the man of God. His skin was restored like the skin of a young child, and he was clean. ¹⁵He returned to the man of God — he and his entire retinue — came in, and stood before him. He said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel. Please accept a gift from your servant." ¹⁶But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will not accept it." Naaman urged him to take it, but he refused. ¹⁷Naaman said, "Then please let your servant be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will no longer offer burnt offerings or sacrifices to any other god but the LORD." ¹⁸"But in this matter may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master enters the temple of Rimmon to worship there and he leans on my arm, and I bow down in the temple of Rimmon — when I bow in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD pardon your servant in this." ¹⁹Elisha said to him, "Go in peace." Naaman departed from him and had gone some distance, ²⁰But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said to himself, "My master has let this Aramean Naaman off too easily by not accepting what he brought. As the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something from him." ²¹Gehazi pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw someone running after him, he got down from his chariot to meet him and asked, "Is everything well?" ²²Gehazi said, "All is well. My master has sent me to say: Two young men from the sons of the prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two sets of clothing." ²³Naaman said, "Please, take two talents." He urged Gehazi, tied up two talents of silver in two bags along with two sets of clothing, and gave them to two of his servants, who carried them ahead of Gehazi. ²⁴When he reached the hill, he took the goods from the servants' hands, stored them in the house, and sent the men away. ²⁵He went in and stood before his master. Elisha asked him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" He said, "Your servant has not gone anywhere." ²⁶Elisha said to him, "Did not my heart go with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to accept silver, clothing, olive groves, vineyards, sheep, oxen, male servants, and female servants?" ²⁷"Theref

ore the skin disease of Naaman will cling to you and to your descendants forever." Gehazi left his presence afflicted with a skin disease, white as snow.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word *metzora* is traditionally translated 'leper' but the Hebrew *tzara'at* covers a range of skin conditions far broader than Hansen's disease (modern leprosy). We render it 'skin disease' to avoid medical anachronism. The name Na'aman means 'pleasant, gracious' — an ironic name for a man whose skin condition would have been considered repulsive. The phrase *nesu fanim* ('lifted of face') is an idiom for high social standing and the favor of superiors.
2. The *na'arah qetannah* ('young girl, small maiden') is an Israelite war captive — taken in a raid, separated from her family, enslaved in a foreign household. Despite her powerlessness, she becomes the catalyst for the entire narrative. She has no name, no family history, no tribal identity in the text — she is identified only by her age, her nationality, and her servitude. Yet she knows about the prophet in Israel, and she speaks.
3. The slave girl's declaration *achalei adoni lifnei ha-navi asher be-Shomron* ('if only my master were before the prophet who is in Samaria') is an act of extraordinary compassion — she wishes healing for the master of the household that enslaved her. The verb *ye'esof* ('he would gather, he would remove') applied to the skin disease means to gather it away, to cure it. Her faith in the prophet is unconditional.
4. The report reaches the king of Aram through Naaman himself. The phrase *kazot ve-khazot* ('thus and thus, such and such') is a summary formula indicating the full content was relayed. The entire diplomatic and military apparatus of two kingdoms is about to be set in motion by the words of an unnamed slave girl.
5. The gifts are staggering: *eser kikkerei khesef* ('ten talents of silver') amounts to roughly 340 kilograms of silver; *sheshet alafim zahav* ('six thousand gold pieces') is an enormous sum. The ten sets of clothing (*chalifot begadim*) were luxury goods in the ancient world. Naaman approaches healing as a transaction — he brings payment commensurate with his status, expecting a commercial exchange for the cure.
6. The Aramean king's letter is addressed king-to-king; he assumes healing is a royal prerogative, something one king can command another to produce. The instruction *va-asafto mitzara'to* ('and you shall remove his skin disease') treats the cure as a political favor between sovereigns. The letter entirely bypasses the prophet — the king of Aram does not understand that healing comes from God through the prophet, not from the king.
7. The king's alarm is revealing: *ha-Elohim ani lehamit uleha'achayot* ('am I God, to kill and to give life?'). He correctly recognizes that healing skin disease is beyond human power — it belongs to God alone. But he does not think of the prophet. His panic — *ki mit'anneh hu li* ('he is seeking a pretext against me') — reveals political paranoia: he interprets the impossible request as a deliberate provocation designed to justify war.
8. Elisha's message corrects the king's panic and redirects Naaman. The key phrase is *ve-yeda ki yesh navi be-Yisrael* ('and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel'). The purpose of the healing is not merely medical but revelatory — Naaman must come to know that the God of Israel has a prophet, a spokesperson, a living representative. The healing will be evidence of God's reality.
9. Naaman arrives in full military display — *be-susav u-ve-rikhbo* ('with his horses and his chariot') — at the *petach ha-bayit* ('entrance of the house') of the prophet. The contrast is deliberate: the commander of the Aramean army, with all the trappings of military power, stands at the door of a prophet's modest dwelling. The expected protocol — that the host emerges to greet a distinguished visitor — is about to be violated.
10. Elisha does not come out. He sends a *mal'akh* ('messenger') with instructions. The command is simple: *halokh ve-rachatzta sheva pe'amim ba-Yarden* ('go and wash seven times in the Jordan'). The promise is twofold: *ve-yashov besarkha lekha* ('your flesh will return to you') and *utehar* ('you will be clean'). The seven washings connect to the Levitical purification ritual for skin disease (Leviticus 14). The Jordan is specified — not just any water, but Israel's river.
11. Naaman's fury (*va-yiqtzof*) stems from violated expectations. He had scripted the encounter in his mind: the prophet would *yetze yatzo* ('certainly come out'), *ve-amad* ('stand'), *ve-qara ve-shem YHWH Elohav* ('call on the name of the LORD his God'), *ve-henif yado* ('wave his hand'). He wanted spectacle, drama, personal attention — a performance worthy of his status. Instead he received a secondhand message and a command to wash in a river.
12. Naaman's comparison — the *Abanah* (modern Barada) and *Pharpar* (possibly the A'waj) versus the waters of Israel — reflects both national pride and a fundamental misunderstanding. He thinks the healing power is in the water's quality. But the Jordan's significance is not hydraulic — it is theological. It is the river of Israel's identity, the boundary of the promised land. Healing in the Jordan means healing on God's terms, in God's place. Naaman's rage (*chemah*, 'heat, fury') drives him away from the cure.
13. The servants' wisdom is expressed in an *fortiori* argument (*qal va-chomer*): if you would obey a hard command, how much more an easy one? They address him as *avi* ('my father'), a term of respectful affection that softens the correction. The servants — like the slave girl earlier — understand what the powerful man does not: obedience does not require understanding.
14. The verb *va-yitbol* ('he immersed') is the root of the later word for ritual immersion (*tevilah*). The comparison to a *na'ar qaton* ('small child') emphasizes complete renewal rather than mere repair. The phrase *kidvar ish ha-Elohim* ('according to the word of the man of God') links the healing to prophetic authority — the cure works because it follows the prophet's instruction, not because of any quality in the Jordan's water.
15. The confession *ein Elohim bekhoh ha-aretz ki im be-Yisrael* ('there is no God in all the earth except in Israel') goes further than mere henotheism (acknowledging other gods exist but worshipping one). It is a monotheistic declaration: no God exists anywhere except the God of Israel. The word

berakhah ('blessing') used for the gift is significant — Naaman is not offering payment but a blessing-gift, a token of gratitude and relationship.

16. Elisha's refusal is sworn: *chai YHWH asher amadti lefanav im eqqach* ('as the LORD lives before whom I stand, I will not take'). The oath is the same formula used in 3:14. The refusal is theologically essential: accepting payment would make the healing a transaction rather than a revelation of God's grace. Naaman presses (*va-yiftzer bo*) but Elisha is immovable (*va-yema'en*, 'he refused'). The prophet's refusal will make Gehazi's later acceptance all the more criminal.
17. Naaman's request for *massa tzemed peradim adamah* ('a load of a pair of mules of earth') reflects the ancient Near Eastern belief that deities were connected to specific territories. To worship the LORD properly in Damascus, Naaman believes he needs Israelite soil to stand on. His commitment — *lo ya'aseh od avdekha olah va-zevach le-elohim acherim ki im la-YHWH* ('your servant will no longer make burnt offering or sacrifice to other gods except to the LORD') — is exclusive devotion, even if his theological understanding of sacred geography is incomplete.
18. Naaman's request for pardon (*yislach YHWH le-avdekha*) reveals his theological sensitivity: he knows that bowing in the temple of Rimmon (a Syrian deity, possibly Hadad the storm god) is incompatible with exclusive devotion to the LORD. But his political role — he must accompany his king — makes avoidance impossible. He does not ask permission to worship Rimmon; he asks forgiveness for the outward act of bowing while his heart belongs to the LORD. The tension between inner conviction and outer conformity is left unresolved.
19. Elisha's response *lekh le-shalom* ('go in peace') is remarkably tolerant. He neither approves nor condemns the Rimmon arrangement — he sends Naaman away with a blessing of peace. The phrase allows Naaman to work out his new faith within his existing circumstances. The word *shalom* here carries its full weight: wholeness, well-being, right relationship. The expression *kivrat aretz* ('a stretch of land, some distance') sets up the Gehazi episode — Naaman has not yet gone far.
20. Gehazi's soliloquy reveals his inner corruption. He calls Naaman *ha-Arammi ha-zeh* ('this Aramean') with a tone of ethnic contempt. His oath *chai YHWH* ('as the LORD lives') profanes the divine name — he invokes God to justify greed. The verb *chasakh* ('he spared, he held back') frames Elisha's refusal as excessive restraint rather than principled integrity. Gehazi sees an economic opportunity where Elisha saw a theological moment.
21. Naaman's response to seeing Gehazi run after him is gracious — he gets down from his chariot (*va-yippol me'al ha-merkavah*, literally 'he fell from the chariot,' meaning he quickly dismounted) and asks *ha-shalom* ('is it peace? is everything well?'). The word *shalom* returns in Naaman's mouth — the same peace Elisha just pronounced is now the healed man's instinctive greeting.
22. Gehazi's lie is elaborate: he invents two visitors from the prophetic community and claims Elisha sent him. He asks for a *kikkar kesef* ('a talent of silver,' about 34 kilograms) and two sets of clothing — a significant but plausible amount. By invoking the sons of the prophets, he makes the request seem charitable rather than greedy. Every element is calculated to seem reasonable.
23. Naaman's generosity — *ho'el qach kikkarayim* ('be willing, take two talents') — doubles the requested amount. He is overflowing with gratitude and glad to give. He assigns two of his own servants to carry the goods before Gehazi. The irony is painful: Naaman gives freely out of genuine thankfulness, while Gehazi takes through deception out of greed.
24. The *ofel* ('hill, citadel, fortified mound') is a location near Elisha's dwelling where Gehazi can hide the goods. He dismisses Naaman's servants (*va-yeshallah et ha-anashim*) before they can report back to the prophet. Every action is concealment — taking, storing, sending away witnesses.
25. Gehazi stands before Elisha (*va-ya'amod el adonav*) as if nothing has happened. Elisha's question *me-ayin Gehazi* ('from where, Gehazi?') is not seeking information — the prophet already knows. It is an invitation to confess, a chance to tell the truth. Gehazi lies: *lo halakh avdekha aneh va-anah* ('your servant did not go anywhere'). The lie completes his fall — he has now deceived both Naaman and his own master.
26. The phrase *lo libbi halakh* expresses prophetic omniscience — Elisha's 'heart' (*lev*, the seat of perception and will) traveled with Gehazi and witnessed everything. The expanded list of items (olive groves, vineyards, sheep, oxen, servants) that Gehazi did not actually receive may represent what Gehazi intended to acquire over time, or it may be Elisha's way of naming what greed ultimately desires — not just money but an entire estate built on corruption.
27. The hereditary nature of the punishment (*u-vezar'akha le-olam*, 'and to your seed forever') is one of the harsher elements in the narrative. It raises the difficult question of whether children should bear the consequences of a parent's sin. The phrase *metzora ka-shaleg* ('skin-diseased like snow') echoes Moses' hand becoming 'leprous like snow' in Exodus 4:6, another sign of divine judgment and power.

6

Summary: *The chapter divides into three distinct episodes, each displaying the prophetic power of Elisha in escalating stakes. First, the sons of the prophets need a larger dwelling and go to the Jordan to cut timber. One of them loses a borrowed iron axe head in the water. Elisha cuts a stick, throws it in, and the iron floats — a small miracle, yet significant because iron does not float and the axe was borrowed (the loss would have been a real economic hardship). Second, Israel is at war with Aram, and the king of Aram is frustrated because his secret military plans keep being exposed. His officers tell him Elisha the prophet reports his private words to the king of Israel. The Aramean king sends horses, chariots, and a great army to Dothan to capture Elisha. Elisha's servant wakes to find the city surrounded and panics. Elisha prays that the servant's eyes be opened, and the servant sees the hills filled with horses and chariots of fire — the invisible army of God surrounding the visible army of Aram. Elisha then prays for the Arameans to be struck with blindness (sanverim), leads the blinded army to Samaria, and prays for their eyes to be opened. They find themselves inside the Israelite capital. The king of Israel asks whether to kill them, and Elisha commands a feast instead — send them home fed, not slaughtered. The Aramean raids stop. Third, Ben-hadad king of Aram besieges Samaria, producing catastrophic famine. A donkey's head sells for eighty pieces of silver; a quarter-kab of dove's dung sells for five pieces of silver. The king of Israel is walking the wall when a woman cries out for help and reveals a horrifying agreement: two women agreed to eat their children on successive days. The first child has been eaten, but the second woman has hidden her son. The king tears his robes, and those nearby see sackcloth underneath — he has already been mourning in secret. The king swears to kill Elisha, blaming the prophet for the siege. He sends a messenger, but Elisha knows the messenger is coming before he arrives and instructs the elders to hold the door shut. The chapter ends with the king's despairing cry: the disaster is from the LORD — why should he wait for the LORD any longer?*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The three episodes form a deliberate theological sequence moving from small to cosmic: a floating axe head, an invisible army revealed, and a famine that drives people to cannibalism. The opened eyes of Elisha's servant (verse 17) are the theological center — reality is not what is visible. The hills are full of divine chariots, but only prayer can open eyes to see them. Elisha's response to the captured Aramean army is extraordinary: rather than slaughter, he commands hospitality. This is one of the clearest 'love your enemies' moments in the Hebrew Bible, anticipating Jesus' teaching by centuries. The famine narrative is among the darkest passages in Scripture — a mother eating her own child — and the text does not flinch from the horror. The king's final question ('why should I wait for the LORD any longer?') is the theological crisis that chapter 7 will answer.*

Translation Friction: *The floating axe head raises obvious questions about miraculous suspension of natural law over a seemingly trivial matter. However, iron was expensive and the axe was borrowed — the loss carried real economic and social weight. The blindness (sanverim) that strikes the Aramean army echoes the blindness at Sodom (Genesis 19:11), using the same rare word, suggesting a confusion of perception rather than total loss of sight. Elisha's statement 'this is not the road and this is not the city' (verse 19) while standing in Dothan and leading them to Samaria raises questions about prophetic deception — though some argue the soldiers sought Elisha in his role as military intelligence, and he was no longer functioning in that role. The cannibalism scene fulfills the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28:53-57 and Leviticus 26:29, placing the famine firmly in the framework of covenantal judgment rather than random catastrophe.*

Connections: *The floating iron connects to Exodus 15:25 where Moses throws wood into bitter water to make it sweet — in both cases, wood cast into water produces a miraculous reversal. The chariots of fire echo Elijah's departure in 2 Kings 2:11-12 and anticipate the apocalyptic imagery of Zechariah 6:1-8 and Revelation 19. Elisha's command to feed enemies rather than kill them resonates with Proverbs 25:21-22 ('if your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat') and Romans 12:20. The cannibalism during siege fulfills Deuteronomy 28:53-57 precisely. The king's sackcloth beneath his robes echoes the hidden piety/despair motif found in other royal narratives. The king's despairing question — 'why should I wait for the LORD any longer?' — sets up the dramatic reversal in chapter 7, where the LORD acts within twenty-four hours.*

¹The sons of the prophets said to Elisha, "The place where we live under your guidance has become too small for us." ²"Let us go to the Jordan, and each of us will take a log from there, and we will build ourselves a place to live." He said, "Go." ³One of them said, "Please, be willing to come with your servants." He answered, "I will come." ⁴So he went with them. They came to the Jordan and began cutting down trees. ⁵As one of them was felling a beam, the iron axe head fell into the water. He cried out, "Oh no, my master! It was borrowed!" ⁶The man of God asked, "Where did it fall?" The man showed him the spot. Elisha cut a stick, threw it into the water, and the iron floated to the surface. ⁷He said, "Pick it up." The man reached out his hand and took it. ⁸The king of Aram was at war with Israel. He conferred with his officers, saying, "My camp will be at such-and-such a place." ⁹The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: "Be careful not to pass through that place, because the Arameans are positioned there." ¹⁰The king of Israel sent scouts to the place the man of God had indicated and warned him about, and was on guard there — not once or twice, but repeatedly. ¹¹The king of Aram was enraged over this. He summoned his officers and demanded, "Tell me — which one of us is leaking information to the king of Israel?" ¹²One of his officers said, "No one, my lord the king. It is Elisha, the prophet in Israel, who tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom." ¹³He said, "Go and find out where he is, so I can send men to capture him." The report came back: "He is in Dothan." ¹⁴He sent horses, chariots, and a large army there. They came by night and surrounded the city. ¹⁵When the servant of the man of God got up early and went outside, he saw an army with horses and chariots surrounding the city. The servant said to him, "Oh no, my master! What are we going to do?" ¹⁶Elisha said, "Do not be afraid. Those who are with us outnumber those who are with them." ¹⁷Elisha prayed, "LORD, open his eyes so he can see." The LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked — and the mountain was filled with horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. ¹⁸When the Arameans came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, "Strike these people with blindness." And he struck them with blindness, just as Elisha had asked. ¹⁹Elisha told them, "This is not the right road, and this is not the right city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for." And he led them to Samaria. ²⁰When they arrived in Samaria, Elisha said, "LORD, open the eyes of these men so they can see." The LORD opened their eyes, and they looked — and found themselves inside Samaria. ²¹When the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "Shall I strike them down? Shall I strike them down, my father?" ²²He answered, "You must not strike them down. Would you kill people you captured with your own sword and bow? Set food and water before them. Let them eat and drink, and then send them back to their master." ²³He prepared a great feast for them. After they ate and drank, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. And the Aramean raiding parties stopped coming into the land of Israel. ²⁴Some time later, Ben-hadad king of Aram assembled his entire army, marched up, and besieged Samaria. ²⁵There was a severe famine in Samaria as the siege continued, until a donkey's head was selling for eighty pieces of silver, and a quarter-kab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver. ²⁶As the king of Israel was walking along the city wall, a woman cried out to him, "Save me, my lord the king!" ²⁷He said, "If the LORD does not save you, how can I? From the threshing floor? From the winepress?" ²⁸The king asked her, "What is wrong?" She said, "This woman said to me, 'Give up your son so we can eat him today, and tomorrow we will eat my son.'" ²⁹So we boiled my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, 'Now give your son so we can eat him.' But she has hidden her son." ³⁰When the king heard the woman's words, he tore his robes. As he continued walking along the wall, the people could see that he was wearing sackcloth underneath, next to his skin. ³¹He said, "May God punish me and do worse if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat stays on his shoulders by the end of this day!" ³²Elisha was sitting in his house with the elders when the king sent a messenger ahead. But before the messenger arrived, Elisha said to the elders, "Do you see how this son of a murderer has sent someone to cut off my head? When the messenger comes, shut the door and hold it shut against him. The sound of his master's footsteps is right behind him." ³³While he was still speaking to them, the messenger arrived. And the king said, "This disaster is from the LORD. Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?"

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The *benei ha-nevi'im* ('sons of the prophets') are the prophetic guild or community under Elisha's authority. The phrase *lefanekha* ('before you, in your presence') indicates they live under his oversight. The word *tsar* ('narrow, constricted') shows the community is growing — a sign of Elisha's flourishing ministry.

2. The Jordan river area had abundant trees suitable for building. Each man would take ish qorah achat ('each man one beam') — showing communal labor. Elisha's response is a single word: lekhu ('go') — terse permission.
3. The request ho'el na ('please be willing, please consent') is deferential — they want the master present for the work. Elisha agrees personally: ani elekh ('I myself will go'). The prophetic leader participates in manual labor alongside his community.
4. The verb va-yigzeru ('they cut') from gazar indicates felling trees. The scene is ordinary labor — prophetic communities are not above physical work.
5. The ha-barzel ('the iron') refers to the axe head. The man's distress — ahah adoni ('alas, my lord!') — is intensified by the explanation ve-hu sha'ul ('and it was borrowed'). Losing borrowed property created a debt obligation. Iron was valuable; replacing it would be a serious burden for a member of an ascetic prophetic community.
6. Elisha is called ish ha-Elohim ('man of God') — the title used for prophets performing signs. The verb va-yatsef ('it floated') describes iron doing what iron cannot do. The stick (ets, 'wood, tree') thrown into the water recalls Moses throwing wood into the bitter waters of Marah (Exodus 15:25). Wood cast into water produces reversal — a pattern of prophetic sign-acts.
7. Elisha's command harem lakh ('lift it for yourself') requires the man to act on the miracle — reach out and take what God has restored. The miracle creates the opportunity; the man must respond.
8. The phrase peloni almoni ('such-and-such, a certain place') is a Hebrew idiom for an unnamed location — the narrator withholds the specific site. The king's strategy sessions are private military councils, yet their content keeps reaching Israel.
9. Elisha functions as divine intelligence — he knows the enemy's deployments before they happen. The verb nechittim ('positioned, descended') suggests the Arameans have taken up ambush positions.
10. The phrase lo achat ve-lo shtayim ('not once and not twice') is an idiom meaning 'many times, repeatedly.' This was not a single incident but an ongoing pattern of Elisha providing intelligence that thwarted Aramean strategy.
11. The verb va-yissa'er ('was stormy, was agitated') describes the king's heart in turmoil — a storm inside him. He suspects a spy within his own command. The question mi mi-shellanu ('who from among us?') assumes betrayal from within the inner circle.
12. The officer's answer eliminates espionage and points to prophecy. The phrase ba-chadar mishkavekha ('in the room of your lying down, in your bedroom') emphasizes the intimacy of the intelligence — even private conversations behind closed doors reach Elisha. Elisha's reputation has crossed international borders.
13. Dothan (Dotan) is about twelve miles north of Samaria, on a main route. The king's plan to 'fetch' (eqqachehu) Elisha — a single prophet — requires the massive force described in the next verse, revealing both the king's fear and his military mindset.
14. The Aramean king deploys a full military force — susim ve-rekhev ve-chayil kaved ('horses and chariotry and a heavy army') — to capture one man. The nighttime approach (laylah) is tactical; they surround the city (va-yaqqifu) to prevent escape. The disproportion between the force and the target is the narrator's ironic point.
15. The meshareit ('attendant, servant') — likely Gehazi's successor — wakes to a terrifying sight. His cry ahah adoni eikhah na'aseh ('alas my lord, what shall we do?') echoes the axe-head man's cry in verse 5 (ahah adoni). Both crises begin with the same words; both will be resolved by the prophet.
16. Elisha's calm response — al tira ('do not fear') — is the standard divine encouragement formula used throughout Scripture (Genesis 15:1, Isaiah 41:10). His claim — rabbim asher ittanu me-asher otam ('more are those with us than those with them') — makes no sense to natural sight. The servant sees an army; Elisha sees a greater one.
17. The susim ve-rekhev esh ('horses and chariotry of fire') represent the divine army — the same celestial military force that escorted Elijah in 2:11. The word sevivot ('all around') Elisha means the prophet is at the center of a protective ring of divine power. The mountain is unnamed but presumably the hill on which Dothan sits.
18. The word sanverim ('blindness, dazzling, confusion of sight') is extremely rare — it appears only here and in Genesis 19:11 (the men of Sodom struck blind at Lot's door). The word likely describes a perceptual disorientation rather than total loss of vision, since the soldiers can still walk and follow Elisha. The same word linking this to Sodom places the Aramean aggression in the category of hostile forces that assault God's protected ones.
19. Elisha's statement raises questions about prophetic truthfulness. One interpretation: since they sought him as a military intelligence target and he was now acting as something else entirely, the statement is functionally true in its redirecting sense. Another: the disorientation means they cannot recognize either the road or the city, so his claim operates within their distorted perception. He leads them directly into Israel's capital — the most vulnerable position possible for an invading army.
20. The second prayer mirrors verse 17 exactly: peqach et einei elleh ve-yir'u ('open the eyes of these and let them see'). In verse 17 opening eyes revealed the invisible army; here it reveals the visible trap. Both moments are about seeing reality. The Aramean soldiers, who came to capture one prophet, find themselves captive inside the enemy capital.
21. The king's excited repetition — ha-akkeh akkeh ('shall I strike, shall I strike?') — reveals eagerness to slaughter the helpless enemy. His address avi ('my father') is the respectful title for a prophetic master (compare 2:12). The question assumes the answer will be yes.

22. The command to feed rather than kill prisoners goes beyond normal ancient Near Eastern warfare conventions. Elisha redirects the king from military logic to covenantal generosity. The phrase *ve-yelkhu el adoneihem* ('and let them go to their master') sends the army home as witnesses to Israel's God-given power and mercy.
23. The *kerah gedolah* ('great feast, great preparation') transforms a military encounter into a banquet. The result — *ve-lo yasfu od gedudei Aram lavo be-erets Yisrael* ('the raiding bands of Aram did not again come into the land of Israel') — proves that mercy accomplished what military force could not. The narrative makes its point without moralizing.
24. The phrase *acharei khen* ('after this') marks a time gap. The raiding bands have stopped, but now Ben-hadad escalates to full siege warfare. The verb *va-yatsar* ('he besieged, he pressed') indicates a tight encirclement designed to starve the city into surrender.
25. The prices indicate catastrophic inflation from starvation. A donkey's head — normally inedible and from an unclean animal — sells for eighty silver pieces (*shemonim kesef*). The *chareyonim* ('dove's dung') may be literal or may refer to a type of wild plant (star of Bethlehem bulbs) used as food in desperate times. Either way, the prices demonstrate total economic collapse under siege.
26. The king walks the wall inspecting defenses. The woman's cry *hoshi'ah adoni ha-melekh* ('save, my lord the king!') uses the verb for salvation/deliverance (*yasha*) — she is appealing to royal authority for justice.
27. The king's bitter response — *al yoshiakh YHWH me-ayin oshi'ekh* ('if the LORD does not save you, from where shall I save you?') — could be read as despair or as blasphemous deflection. The rhetorical questions about the threshing floor (*goren*) and winepress (*yeqev*) point to the absence of grain and wine — the siege has emptied both.
28. The horror is reported in plain language without any narrative commentary or emotional framing. The woman recounts the agreement as a business arrangement — *teni et benekh ve-nokhlennu ha-yom* ('give your son and we will eat him today'). The matter-of-fact tone is itself the horror. This fulfills the covenant curse of Deuteronomy 28:53-57 with nauseating precision.
29. The woman's complaint is not about the cannibalism itself but about the other woman's breach of agreement — *va-tachbi et benah* ('she hid her son'). She has been cheated. The moral universe has collapsed so completely that a mother reports eating her child as a contractual matter. The narrative lets this speak for itself.
30. The tearing of robes reveals what was hidden beneath: *saq al besaro mibayit* ('sackcloth on his flesh underneath'). The king has been wearing sackcloth — a sign of mourning and possibly penitence — under his royal garments, in secret. This detail complicates any simple reading of the king as faithless; he has been grieving privately. Yet his response in the next verse turns grief into violence against the prophet.
31. The oath formula *koh ya'aseh li Elohim ve-koh yosif* ('thus may God do to me and more') is the standard self-cursing oath. The king swears to behead Elisha — blaming the prophet for the siege, either because Elisha counseled against surrender or because the king holds Elisha responsible as God's representative. The irony is that the king wears sackcloth (mourning before God) while swearing to kill God's prophet.
32. Elisha's prophetic knowledge is again on display — he knows the messenger is coming before he arrives. He calls the king *ben ha-meratstsech* ('son of a murderer'), likely referring to Ahab's murder of Naboth or to the royal house's general violence. The instruction to the elders — *sigru ha-delet u-lachatstem oto ba-dalet* ('shut the door and press him at the door') — is practical: delay the executioner until the king himself arrives, since the king may relent. Elisha also detects the king following: *qol raglei adonav acharav* ('the sound of his master's feet behind him').
33. The final verse is textually complex — the speaker appears to shift from the messenger to the king himself (who has arrived close behind). The king's statement — *hinneh zot ha-ra'ah me-et YHWH* ('this evil/disaster is from the LORD') — correctly identifies the source but draws the wrong conclusion. His question *mah ochil la-YHWH od* ('why should I wait/hope in the LORD any longer?') expresses the collapse of faith: if God sent this suffering, what is the point of continuing to trust? Chapter 7 will answer this question within twenty-four hours.

7

Summary: *Elisha answers the king's despair from the end of chapter 6 with an astonishing prophecy: by this time tomorrow, fine flour will sell for a shekel and barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria. A royal officer leaning on the king's arm scoffs: even if the LORD made windows in heaven, could this happen? Elisha replies that the officer will see it with his own eyes but will not eat any of it. The scene then shifts to four men with a skin disease sitting at the city gate, reasoning that they will die whether they stay or go, so they might as well surrender to the Aramean camp. At twilight they enter the camp and find it deserted. The LORD had caused the Aramean army to hear the sound of a massive approaching force — chariots, horses, a great army — and they fled in panic, leaving everything behind: tents, horses, donkeys, the entire camp intact. The four men eat and drink, take silver and gold and clothing, and hide it. Then their conscience strikes them: this is a day of good news and they are keeping silent. If they wait until morning light, punishment will find them. They go back and report to the city gatekeepers, who report to the king's household. The king suspects a trap — the Arameans have hidden in the field and are waiting for the city to open. His servants suggest sending scouts with some of the remaining horses. Two chariot teams are sent and follow the*

Aramean trail all the way to the Jordan, finding the road strewn with clothing and equipment dropped in the panic. They report back. The people rush out and plunder the Aramean camp. The prices Elisha prophesied are fulfilled exactly: a seah of fine flour for a shekel, two seahs of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria. The king assigns the scoffing officer to manage the gate, and the crowd tramples him to death — he sees the abundance with his own eyes but never eats any of it, exactly as Elisha said.

What Makes This Remarkable: *The chapter is structured around exact prophetic fulfillment. Elisha's double prophecy — the prices will drop and the officer will see but not eat — is verified down to the smallest detail. The instrument of deliverance is spectacularly unexpected: four men with skin disease, social outcasts sitting outside the gate, become the discoverers of God's provision. The LORD defeats the Aramean army not with a visible army but with sound — qol rekhev qol sus qol chayil gadol ('the sound of chariotry, the sound of horses, the sound of a great army'). The Arameans hear what Elisha's servant saw in 6:17: the divine military force. But where the servant saw and was reassured, the Arameans hear and are terrified. The same heavenly army that protects Israel destroys Aram's courage. The scoffing officer's death at the gate is not arbitrary punishment but precise fulfillment: the gate (sha'ar) is where prices are set and commerce happens, so the prophecy about prices at the gate is fulfilled at the gate, and the man who doubted the gate-prophecy dies at the gate.*

Translation Friction: *The four men with skin disease (metsora'im) are traditionally identified as 'lepers,' though the biblical term tsara'at covers a wider range of conditions than modern leprosy. Their marginal status — outside the gate, between the city and the enemy — makes them the perfect agents of discovery: they have nothing to lose. Their moral reasoning (verse 9) raises the question of whether their initial silence about the good news constitutes sin — they themselves conclude it does. The officer's death by trampling raises questions about proportionality: he expressed doubt, not defiance, and his skepticism was humanly reasonable. The text presents his death as prophetic fulfillment rather than divine punishment per se — Elisha described what would happen without framing it as retribution. The Aramean panic caused by divine sound parallels other holy-war texts where God fights by creating confusion (Judges 7, 1 Samuel 14).*

Connections: *The divine sound that routs the Arameans connects to Judges 7 (Gideon's trumpets and jars), 1 Samuel 7:10 (thunder against the Philistines), and 2 Chronicles 20:22-23 (the singers and ambushers). The four outcasts discovering provision for the starving city anticipates the gospel pattern where salvation comes through the marginalized. The 'windows of heaven' reference by the scoffing officer echoes Genesis 7:11 (the flood) and Malachi 3:10 (God opening heaven's windows to pour out blessing). Elisha's prophecy of exact market prices connects to the Joseph narrative (Genesis 41-47), where divinely revealed famine knowledge saves nations. The trampling at the gate fulfills the prophetic word with the specificity that characterizes Kings' theology of the prophetic word: every detail matters, every prediction lands.*

¹Elisha said, "Hear the word of the LORD. This is what the LORD says: By this time tomorrow, a seah of fine flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria." ²The officer on whose arm the king was leaning answered the man of God, "Even if the LORD made windows in the sky, could such a thing happen?" Elisha said, "You will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat any of it." ³Now four men with a skin disease were sitting at the entrance to the city gate. They said to each other, "Why are we sitting here waiting to die?" ⁴"If we go into the city, the famine is there and we will die. If we stay here, we will also die. So let us go over to the Aramean camp. If they let us live, we live. If they kill us, we just die." ⁵They got up at twilight and went to the edge of the Aramean camp. When they arrived, no one was there. ⁶The Lord had caused the Aramean army to hear the sound of chariots, the sound of horses, the sound of a massive army. They said to one another, "The king of Israel has hired the Hittite kings and the Egyptian kings to attack us!" ⁷They got up and fled at twilight, abandoning their tents, their horses, and their donkeys — the whole camp just as it was — and ran for their lives. ⁸When these men with skin disease reached the edge of the camp, they went into one tent, ate and drank, then carried away silver, gold, and clothing and went and hid it. They came back, entered another tent, carried off more, and hid that too. ⁹Then they said to each other, "What we are doing is not right. This is a day of good news, and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until morning light, punishment will overtake us. Come, let us go and report this to the king's household." ¹⁰They went and called out to the city gatekeepers and reported: "We went to the Aramean camp, and no one is there — not a person, not a human voice. Only horses tied up, donkeys tied up, and the tents standing just as they were." ¹¹The gatekeepers

called out, and the news was reported inside the king's palace. ¹²The king got up in the night and said to his officials, "Let me tell you what the Arameans are doing to us. They know we are starving, so they left their camp and hid in the field, thinking: 'When they come out of the city, we will capture them alive and then enter the city.'" ¹³One of his officials answered, "Let them take five of the remaining horses still left in the city — they are no worse off than the rest of Israel's population left here, who are as good as dead anyway. Let us send them and find out." ¹⁴They took two chariot teams, and the king sent them after the Aramean army, saying, "Go and see." ¹⁵They followed the trail all the way to the Jordan, and the entire road was littered with clothing and equipment that the Arameans had thrown away in their panic. The scouts returned and reported to the king. ¹⁶The people rushed out and plundered the Aramean camp. A seah of fine flour sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel — exactly as the LORD had spoken. ¹⁷The king had put the officer on whose arm he leaned in charge of the gate. The crowd trampled him in the gateway, and he died — just as the man of God had spoken when the king came down to him. ¹⁸It happened just as the man of God had told the king: "Two seahs of barley for a shekel, and a seah of fine flour for a shekel, by this time tomorrow at the gate of Samaria." ¹⁹The officer had answered the man of God, "Even if the LORD made windows in the sky, could such a thing happen?" And Elisha had said, "You will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat any of it." ²⁰And that is exactly what happened to him: the people trampled him in the gateway, and he died.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The prophecy is astonishingly precise: specific commodities (solet, 'fine flour'; se'orim, 'barley'), specific prices (sheqel for each measure), a specific location (sha'ar Shomron, 'gate of Samaria'), and a specific timeframe (ka-et machar, 'about this time tomorrow'). The prices represent normal or even cheap market rates — a total reversal from the famine prices of 6:25. The formula koh amar YHWH ('thus says the LORD') marks this as direct prophetic oracle.
2. The shalish ('third man, officer, adjutant') is a high-ranking military official who serves as the king's personal support. His skepticism — hinneh YHWH oseh arubbot ba-shamayim ('even if the LORD made windows in heaven') — references the 'windows of heaven' from the flood narrative (Genesis 7:11) and the blessing promise of Malachi 3:10. He uses the most dramatic divine intervention he can imagine and still dismisses the prophecy. Elisha's response is not a curse but a prediction: hinnekha ro'eh be-einekha u-misham lo tokhel ('you will be seeing with your eyes but from there you will not eat'). Seeing without eating — witness without participation.
3. The metsora'im ('those with tsara'at') sit at petach ha-sha'ar ('the opening of the gate') — the boundary between city and outside. Their skin condition excludes them from the city but the siege traps them near it. Their reasoning — mah anachnu yoshvim poh ad matnu ('why are we sitting here until we die?') — is the logic of people with nothing left to lose.
4. The logic is a three-option calculation where two options produce certain death and the third offers a chance of survival. The phrase niplah el machaneh Aram ('let us fall to the camp of Aram') uses the verb nafal ('to fall, to surrender, to defect'). Their final reasoning — im yechayunu nichyeh ve-im yemitunu vamatnu ('if they keep us alive we live, if they kill us we die') — has a resigned simplicity. They are already dead men choosing the direction of their death.
5. The neshef ('twilight, dusk') is the transition time — between day and night, between despair and discovery. They come to qetseh machaneh Aram ('the edge of the Aramean camp') expecting interrogation or execution. Instead: ein sham ish ('there was no man there'). The three-word discovery changes everything.
6. The 'Hittite kings' refers to the neo-Hittite kingdoms of northern Syria and southern Anatolia that survived the Bronze Age collapse — Carchemish, Hamath, and others. The 'kings of Egypt' may refer to local rulers of the fragmented Egyptian delta. The Arameans construct a plausible military scenario to explain the supernatural sound. God fights not by sending an army but by creating the perception of one.
7. The phrase va-yanusu el nafsham ('they fled for their lives, toward their own souls') emphasizes the totality of their panic. They left everything — ohaleihem, suseihem, chamoreihem ('their tents, their horses, their donkeys') — the camp ka-asher hi ('just as it is'), frozen in place. An entire army abandoned its equipment, animals, and supplies out of sheer terror at a sound.
8. The verbs pile up in rapid sequence: va-yokhlu va-yishtu va-yis'u va-yelkhu va-yatminu va-yashuvu va-yavo'u ('they ate, drank, carried, went, hid, returned, entered') — the breathless pace of men gorging after starvation and hoarding after deprivation. The pattern of eating first, then looting, then hiding, reflects survival instinct followed by opportunism.
9. The phrase yom besorah hu ('it is a day of good news') uses besorah, the Hebrew word for 'good tidings, gospel' — the same root behind the later concept of evangelion. The men recognize a moral obligation: good news of deliverance must be shared. Their warning — u-metsaanu avon ('and guilt/punishment will find us') — acknowledges that hoarding salvation is itself a sin. The verb machshim ('being silent, keeping quiet') is the same word used in 1 Kings 22:3 of Israel 'sitting idle' regarding Ramoth-gilead.

10. The report to the sho'er ha-ir ('gatekeeper of the city') is detailed and factual: no people, no sound, only tied animals and intact tents. The horses and donkeys still tethered (asur, 'bound, tied') confirms the abandonment was panicked — they did not even take their animals.
11. The chain of communication: the four men report to the gatekeepers, the gatekeepers report to beit ha-melekh penimah ('the king's house inside'). The news travels from the social margin (diseased outcasts at the gate) inward to the center of power.
12. The king's suspicion is tactically reasonable — a feigned retreat to draw out a starving garrison is a known military strategy. His analysis — yadu ki re'evim anachnu ('they know that we are hungry') — shows he reads the situation as a trap. His caution, while wrong, is not foolish; it takes the counsel of his servants to overcome it.
13. The servant's reasoning is pragmatic: the horses remaining are nearly dead from starvation anyway — hinnam ke-khol hamon Yisrael asher nish'aru vah ('they are like the whole multitude of Israel remaining in it') — so risking them costs nothing. The repetition emphasizes the point: everything in the city, human and animal, is on the edge of death. Five horses for a scouting mission is minimal risk for maximum information.
14. The shenei rekhev susim ('two chariot-teams of horses') is a minimal reconnaissance force. The king's command lekhu u-re'u ('go and see') commits to investigation without committing to exposure. The caution balances the potential gain.
15. The evidence trail stretches from the camp to the Jordan — kol ha-derekh mele'ah begadim ve-khelim ('the whole road was full of garments and vessels/equipment'). The verb hishlikhu ('they threw away') and the adverb be-hechafzam ('in their panicking, in their haste') paints a picture of soldiers shedding weight as they run. This is not an orderly withdrawal but a rout. The scouts have their answer.
16. The phrase ki-dvar YHWH ('according to the word of the LORD') is the narrator's theological verdict: the exact prices Elisha prophesied in verse 1 have come true. The prophetic word is not approximate but precise. The abundance is so great that market prices collapse from famine levels to normal rates in a single day.
17. The shalish is assigned to manage the gate (sha'ar) — the very location of the prophesied price fulfillment. The starving people rushing out to plunder trample him: va-yirmesuhu ha-am ba-sha'ar ('the people trampled him in the gate'). The phrase ka-asher dibber ish ha-Elohim ('as the man of God had spoken') connects back to verse 2. The officer sees the abundance (the prices are real) but dies before eating any of it.
18. The narrator recapitulates the prophecy in full, repeating the exact terms — commodities, prices, timing, location — to demonstrate complete fulfillment. This repetition is characteristic of Kings' narrative theology: the prophetic word is spoken, then the fulfillment is narrated, then the connection is explicitly stated.
19. The exchange from verse 2 is quoted verbatim — another instance of the narrator's technique of repeating the prophetic word to frame its fulfillment. The officer's skepticism and Elisha's response are now read in light of what has already happened, transforming doubt into dramatic irony.
20. The final verse — va-yehi lo ken ('and so it was to him') — closes the chapter with absolute fulfillment. Both halves of Elisha's double prophecy have come true: the prices dropped as predicted, and the officer saw it but did not eat. The word of the LORD spoken through the prophet is the controlling force of the narrative.

8

Summary: The chapter weaves together three narrative strands that span the final years of Elisha's public ministry and the deepening crisis of both Israelite kingdoms. First, the Shunammite woman whose son Elisha raised from the dead (chapter 4) returns after seven years abroad. Elisha had warned her of a coming famine, and she had taken her household to live among the Philistines. Now she returns and appeals to the king for the restoration of her land. At the very moment she arrives, Gehazi is telling the king the story of Elisha's miracles, including the raising of her son. The king, astonished by the timing, orders all her property and its accumulated produce restored. Second, Elisha travels to Damascus where Ben-hadad king of Aram is sick. Ben-hadad sends Hazael to inquire of Elisha whether he will recover. Elisha tells Hazael to say the king will recover, but reveals privately that the LORD has shown him the king will certainly die. Elisha then stares at Hazael until the prophet weeps openly. When Hazael asks why, Elisha describes the horrors Hazael will inflict on Israel: burning fortresses, slaughtering young men, dashing infants, ripping open pregnant women. Hazael protests — 'What is your servant, a dog, that he should do this great thing?' — but Elisha replies that the LORD has shown him Hazael will become king of Aram. Hazael returns, tells Ben-hadad the prophet said he would recover, and the next day smothers the king with a wet cloth and takes the throne. Third, the chapter provides regnal summaries for two kings of Judah: Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat, who married into Ahab's family and did evil, though God preserved Judah for the sake of his servant David; and Ahaziah son of Jehoram, who also followed the ways of Ahab's house because his mother was Ahab's daughter. In Jehoram's reign Edom revolted and established its own king, and Libnah also revolted. Ahaziah joins with Joram son of Ahab to fight Hazael at Ramoth-gilead — the same battlefield where Ahab died — setting the stage for chapter 9.

What Makes This Remarkable: Elisha's weeping before Hazael is one of the most emotionally complex moments in the prophetic literature. The prophet sees the future — every burning fortress, every murdered child — and weeps for the victims before the crimes have been committed. He knows Hazael will become king and cannot prevent it; he knows what Hazael will do and can only grieve. This is prophetic knowledge as burden rather than privilege. The Shunammite's perfectly timed arrival while Gehazi is mid-story is presented without comment as divine orchestration — the narrator lets the coincidence speak for itself. The regnal formulas for Jehoram and Ahaziah of Judah show the house of David being corrupted by intermarriage with Ahab's dynasty, yet God preserves Judah for David's sake — the covenant promise overrides the current king's failure.

Translation Friction: Elisha's instruction to tell Ben-hadad 'you will certainly recover' while knowing the king will die presents a moral difficulty. The Hebrew can be read as 'say to him: you will live' (the illness is not fatal) alongside 'but the LORD has shown me that he will certainly die' (something else will kill him). This makes the statement technically true — the disease would not kill him — while concealing the real danger (Hazael). Whether Elisha intends to facilitate the assassination or merely reports what he sees is debated. The Gehazi appearance is surprising since he was struck with skin disease in 5:27; some scholars suggest the Shunammite episode occurred before Gehazi's punishment, and the narrator has arranged material thematically rather than chronologically. The phrase 'for David's sake' (verse 19) introduces a theological tension: God preserves a wicked king's kingdom because of an ancestor's faithfulness, raising questions about merit, covenant, and inherited grace.

Connections: The Shunammite narrative connects back to chapter 4 (Elisha's miracles for her) and forward to the theme of land restoration that runs through Kings. The seven-year famine echoes the seven years of famine in Joseph's Egypt (Genesis 41). Elisha's weeping anticipates Jesus weeping over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44) — both prophets see destruction coming and grieve for the people who will suffer. Hazael's rise fulfills the commission given to Elijah at Horeb (1 Kings 19:15): 'anoint Hazael as king over Aram.' The intermarriage between Judah's and Israel's royal houses creates the political conditions for Jehu's revolution in chapter 9. Edom's revolt under Jehoram partially fulfills Isaac's blessing to Esau: 'when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from your neck' (Genesis 27:40). The convergence at Ramoth-gilead — where Ahab died (1 Kings 22) and where Joram is now wounded — links the two battlefields of Ahab's dynasty's doom.

¹Elisha had spoken to the woman whose son he had brought back to life: "Get up and go — you and your household — and settle wherever you can, because the LORD has summoned a famine, and it will come upon the land for seven years." ²The woman got up and did as the man of God said. She and her household went and lived in the land of the Philistines for seven years. ³At the end of seven years, the woman returned from the land of the Philistines and went to appeal to the king for the return of her house and her land. ⁴Now the king was speaking with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, "Tell me about all the great things Elisha has done." ⁵Just as he was telling the king how Elisha had brought the dead child back to life, the very woman whose son Elisha had revived appeared, appealing to the king for her house and land. Gehazi said, "My lord the king, this is the woman! And this is her son — the one Elisha brought back to life!" ⁶The king questioned the woman, and she told him her story. Then the king assigned an official to her case, ordering, "Restore everything that belongs to her, including all the produce from her fields from the day she left the land until now." ⁷Elisha went to Damascus. Ben-hadad king of Aram was ill, and someone told him, "The man of God has come here." ⁸The king told Hazael, "Take a gift with you and go meet the man of God. Inquire of the LORD through him: 'Will I recover from this illness?'" ⁹Hazael went to meet him, taking as a gift every kind of fine goods from Damascus — forty camel-loads. He stood before Elisha and said, "Your son Ben-hadad king of Aram has sent me to you to ask: 'Will I recover from this illness?'" ¹⁰Elisha told him, "Go, tell him, 'You will certainly recover.' But the LORD has shown me that he will certainly die." ¹¹Elisha held his gaze steady on Hazael until the man became uncomfortable. Then the man of God wept. ¹²Hazael asked, "Why is my lord weeping?" Elisha answered, "Because I know the evil you will do to the people of Israel. You will set their fortresses on fire. You will kill their young men with the sword. You will dash their children to pieces. You will rip open their pregnant women." ¹³Hazael said, "What is your servant — a mere dog — that he could do such a monstrous thing?" Elisha answered, "The LORD has shown me that you will be king over Aram." ¹⁴Hazael left Elisha and returned to his master, who asked, "What did Elisha tell you?" He said, "He told me you would certainly recover." ¹⁵The next day, Hazael took a thick cloth, soaked it in water, and spread it over the king's

face. Ben-hadad died, and Hazael reigned in his place. ¹⁶In the fifth year of Joram son of Ahab king of Israel, while Jehoshaphat was still king of Judah, Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat became king of Judah. ¹⁷He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. ¹⁸He followed the ways of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, because Ahab's daughter was his wife. He did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD. ¹⁹Yet the LORD was not willing to destroy Judah, for the sake of his servant David, since he had promised to give David a lamp for his descendants for all time. ²⁰During his reign, Edom revolted against Judah's control and set up their own king. ²¹Jehoram crossed over to Zair with all his chariots. He rose at night and struck the Edomites who had surrounded him, along with the chariot commanders. But his own troops fled to their tents. ²²So Edom has remained independent of Judah to this day. Libnah also revolted at that time. ²³The rest of Jehoram's acts and everything he did — are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ²⁴Jehoram slept with his fathers and was buried with them in the City of David. His son Ahaziah reigned in his place. ²⁵In the twelfth year of Joram son of Ahab king of Israel, Ahaziah son of Jehoram became king of Judah. ²⁶Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, granddaughter of Omri king of Israel. ²⁷He followed the ways of the house of Ahab and did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD, like the house of Ahab — for he was related to Ahab's family by marriage. ²⁸He went with Joram son of Ahab to fight against Hazael king of Aram at Ramoth-gilead, and the Arameans wounded Joram. ²⁹King Joram returned to Jezreel to recover from the wounds the Arameans had inflicted on him at Ramah when he fought Hazael king of Aram. And Ahaziah son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to visit Joram son of Ahab in Jezreel, because Joram was wounded.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *hecheyah* ('brought to life, restored to life') recalls the miracle of chapter 4. Elisha's warning — *ki qara YHWH la-ra'av* ('for the LORD has called for the famine') — personifies famine as something summoned by divine command. The phrase *guri ba-asher taguri* ('sojourn wherever you may sojourn') gives her complete freedom of destination. The seven-year duration echoes the Egyptian famine under Joseph.
2. She obeys *ki-dvar ish ha-Elohim* ('according to the word of the man of God') — a pattern of trust established through her previous encounters with Elisha. The Philistine coastal plain would have been less affected by inland famine conditions. Her sojourning (*gur*) carries the resonance of Abraham and Isaac sojourning in foreign lands during famine.
3. The verb *lits'oq* ('to cry out, to appeal') is the standard term for legal petition to the king. During her seven-year absence, her property had apparently been seized or reassigned. She needs royal intervention to recover *beitah ve-sadah* ('her house and her field').
4. The timing is extraordinary — the king is already in conversation with Gehazi about Elisha's miracles when the Shunammite arrives. Gehazi is called *na'ar ish ha-Elohim* ('servant of the man of God'). The king's request — *sapperah na li et kol ha-gedolot* ('tell me all the great things') — shows royal interest in prophetic power.
5. The convergence — Gehazi telling the story at the exact moment the woman arrives — is presented as seamless divine orchestration. Gehazi's excited identification — *zot ha-ishah ve-zeh benah* ('this is the woman and this is her son') — provides a living witness to the very miracle he is narrating. The son, now older, stands as proof.
6. The king's order goes beyond restoring the property — he orders restoration of *kol tevuot ha-sadeh* ('all the produce of the field') for the entire seven-year absence. This is full restitution with accumulated interest. The *saris* ('official, officer') is assigned as her advocate to ensure the order is carried out.
7. Elisha's journey to Damascus is unexplained — whether he went deliberately or incidentally is not stated. Ben-hadad is *choleh* ('sick, ill'). The report of Elisha's arrival — *ba ish ha-Elohim ad hennah* ('the man of God has come as far as here') — shows Elisha's reputation reaches even the Aramean court.
8. Ben-hadad sends Hazael with a *minchah* ('gift, tribute') — a pagan king seeking the Israelite prophet's God for a medical oracle. The verb *darashta* ('you shall inquire') is the same used for prophetic consultation throughout Kings. The question *ha-echyeh me-choli zeh* ('will I live from this illness?') is direct and desperate.
9. The gift is extravagant: *kol tuv Dammeseq massa arba'im gamal* ('all the good things of Damascus, the burden of forty camels'). Ben-hadad addresses Elisha as a superior, calling himself *binkha* ('your son') — a diplomatic term of deference. The lavishness of the gift reflects both the king's desperation and Damascus's wealth.
10. The double statement creates a deliberate tension. The first clause — *chayoh tichyeh* ('living you will live, you will certainly recover') — uses the infinitive absolute for emphasis: the illness itself is not fatal. The second — *mot yamut* ('dying he will die, he will certainly die') — uses the same emphatic construction for the opposite conclusion. The illness will not kill him, but death is coming by another means. Elisha knows what Hazael will do.

11. The verb *va-ya'amed et panav* ('he set his face, he fixed his countenance') describes an unbroken, penetrating stare. The phrase *ad bosh* ('until shame, until embarrassment') indicates Hazael was unnerved by the intensity. Then *va-yevk ish ha-Elohim* ('the man of God wept') — Elisha breaks down in tears. He is looking at the future destroyer of Israel and seeing every atrocity that will follow.
12. The four-fold catalog of atrocities moves from military to personal horror: fortresses burned, warriors slain, infants dashed, pregnant women sliced open. Each verb is more graphic: *teshalach ba-esh* ('you will send in fire'), *taharog ba-cherav* ('you will kill with the sword'), *teratesh* ('you will dash/shatter'), *tevaq'e'a* ('you will rip open/split'). This is not hypothetical — Elisha sees it as settled future. Hazael's conquests in 10:32-33 and 13:3-7 confirm these prophecies.
13. Hazael's protest — *mah avdekha ha-kelev ki ya'aseh ha-davar ha-gadol ha-zeh* ('what is your servant, the dog, that he should do this great thing?') — uses 'dog' as a self-deprecating term common in diplomatic language (meaning 'nobody, insignificant person'). The irony: he calls himself too insignificant for such a 'great thing' (*davar gadol*), but the word *gadol* here means 'enormous, terrible.' Elisha's reply is devastating in its simplicity: *hir'ani YHWH otkha melekh al Aram* ('the LORD has shown me you as king over Aram'). Power makes the atrocities possible.
14. Hazael delivers only the first half of Elisha's message — *chayah tichyeh* ('you will certainly live') — omitting the second half about certain death. The selective report is technically accurate but functionally deceptive. Whether this omission constitutes Hazael's first act of treachery — withholding the full truth to set up the murder — is left for the reader to infer.
15. The murder method is clinical: the *makhber* ('thick cloth, netted cover') is dipped in water and placed over the sick king's face — suffocation disguised as a cool compress. The brevity of the narrative — *va-yamot va-yimlokh Chaza'el tachtav* ('and he died and Hazael reigned in his place') — gives the regicide the flat tone of a political transition. The very thing Elisha foresaw has begun.
16. The regnal synchronism ties Judah's king to Israel's timeline. The near-identical names create confusion: Joram (Yoram) rules Israel as son of Ahab, while Jehoram (Yehoram) rules Judah as son of Jehoshaphat. The names are essentially the same ('the LORD is exalted'), highlighting the intertwined fates of the two kingdoms.
17. The standard regnal data: accession age and reign length. Eight years is a relatively short reign, during which significant territorial losses occur.
18. The reason for Jehoram's apostasy is specified: *bat Achav haytav lo le-ishah* ('a daughter of Ahab was his wife'). The marriage alliance that politically united the two kingdoms also imported Ahab's religious corruption into Judah. The Deuteronomistic verdict — *va-ya'as ha-ra be-einei YHWH* ('he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD') — is the formulaic condemnation.
19. The theological principle: *le-ma'an David avdo* ('for the sake of David his servant'). Despite the current king's evil, God preserves Judah because of the Davidic covenant. The word *nir* ('lamp') symbolizes dynastic continuity — a light that must not go out. The promise *latet lo nir levanav kol ha-yamim* ('to give him a lamp for his sons all the days') echoes 1 Kings 11:36 and 15:4.
20. The verb *pasha* ('to rebel, to transgress, to revolt') is the standard term for political rebellion. Edom had been a vassal of Judah since David's conquests. The statement *va-yamlikhu aleihem melekh* ('they made a king over themselves') indicates full independence — Edom establishes its own monarchy.
21. The battle at Zair (Tsa'irah) is ambiguous in outcome. Jehoram breaks through the Edomite encirclement by night — *va-yakkeh et Edom ha-sovev elav* ('he struck Edom surrounding him') — but the result is that *ha-am nas le-ohalav* ('the people fled to their tents'). The flight suggests the campaign failed despite the tactical breakthrough.
22. The narrator confirms the revolt's permanence: *ad ha-yom ha-zeh* ('until this day'). *Libnah* (Livnah), a city in the Judean lowlands near Philistine territory, also revolted — suggesting broader territorial disintegration. The double revolt signals divine judgment on Jehoram's faithless reign.
23. The standard source citation: *sefer divrei ha-yamim le-malkhei Yehudah* ('the book of the chronicles/annals of the kings of Judah'). This lost court record is the narrator's archive for Judean kings.
24. The death and burial formula: *va-yishkav im avotav* ('he lay down with his ancestors'). Burial in the *ir David* ('City of David') confirms he receives a proper royal burial despite his evil. *Ahaziah* (Achazyahu, 'the LORD has grasped') succeeds him.
25. The synchronism ties Ahaziah's accession to Israel's calendar. The patronymic chain — Ahaziah son of Jehoram, synchronized with Joram son of Ahab — highlights the intertwined dynasties that will both fall in chapter 9.
26. *Athaliah* (Atalyahu) is called *bat Omri* ('daughter of Omri') — meaning granddaughter or descendant, since she was actually Ahab's daughter (and thus Omri's granddaughter). The identification through Omri rather than Ahab may emphasize the dynastic line. Her influence will prove devastating: after Ahaziah's death, she will seize the throne of Judah (chapter 11). One year of reign is the shortest for any Judean king.
27. The phrase *chatan beit Achav hu* ('he was a son-in-law/relative of the house of Ahab') explains the religious corruption. The marriage alliance that was supposed to strengthen Judah politically instead corrupted it spiritually. The Deuteronomistic evaluation — *va-ya'as ha-ra be-einei YHWH ke-veit Achav* ('he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD like the house of Ahab') — makes Judah's king indistinguishable from Israel's.
28. The location — *Ramot Gil'ad* — is the same battlefield where Ahab was killed (1 Kings 22). History repeats: another Ahab-dynasty king goes to Ramoth-gilead and suffers at Aramean hands. Hazael, whose rise Elisha foresaw and wept over, is now the adversary. The wounding of Joram sets the stage for chapter 9.

29. The wounded king recovers in Jezreel (Yizre'el) — the city associated with Naboth's vineyard and Elijah's prophecy against Ahab's house. Ahaziah of Judah visits his ally there. Both kings are now in Jezreel at the same time — the exact convergence that chapter 9 will exploit. The Judean king's visit to the Israelite king in the city of Ahab's crime places both dynasties in the crosshairs of divine judgment.

9

Summary: *This chapter narrates the violent overthrow of the house of Ahab through Jehu son of Nimshi. Elisha sends one of the sons of the prophets to Ramoth-gilead with a flask of oil and specific instructions: find Jehu among the army commanders, take him into an inner room, pour the oil on his head, declare him anointed as king over Israel by the LORD, then open the door and flee without delay. The young prophet does exactly this, adding an oracle of total destruction: the LORD will strike down the entire house of Ahab in vengeance for the blood of the prophets and all the servants of the LORD killed by Jezebel. Every male of Ahab's line will be cut off. Jezebel's body will be eaten by dogs in the plot of ground at Jezreel, with no one to bury her. Jehu returns to his fellow officers, who press him to explain what the 'madman' wanted. When he tells them, they immediately spread their cloaks on the bare steps and blow the ram's horn, declaring 'Jehu is king!' Jehu rides furiously toward Jezreel, where Joram is recovering from his wounds and Ahaziah of Judah is visiting. The watchman on the tower reports a company approaching and identifies the driving as Jehu's — 'he drives like a madman.' Joram sends two mounted messengers in succession, each asking 'Is it peace?' Jehu refuses to answer and the messengers fall in behind him. Joram and Ahaziah ride out to meet Jehu personally, and the meeting occurs at the plot of Naboth the Jezreelite — the very land Ahab seized. Joram asks 'Is there peace, Jehu?' and Jehu answers: 'What peace, so long as the prostitution and sorcery of your mother Jezebel continue?' Joram turns to flee, shouting 'Treachery, Ahaziah!' Jehu draws his bow and strikes Joram between the shoulders; the arrow pierces his heart, and he collapses in his chariot. Jehu orders Bidkar his officer to throw the body into the field of Naboth, recalling the LORD's oracle against Ahab: 'I saw the blood of Naboth and his sons yesterday, and I will repay you on this plot.' Ahaziah flees but is struck on the ascent of Gur near Ibleam and dies at Megiddo; his servants carry his body to Jerusalem for burial. The chapter climaxes with Jezebel's death. When Jehu enters Jezreel, Jezebel paints her eyes, arranges her hair, and looks down from a window. She taunts him: 'Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of his master?' — comparing him to the usurper who lasted only seven days. Jehu looks up and calls: 'Who is on my side?' Two or three court officials look down. He orders them to throw her down. They do. Her blood spatters on the wall and on the horses, and the horses trample her. Jehu goes inside to eat and drink, then orders her burial since she is a king's daughter. But the burial party finds nothing but her skull, feet, and palms — the dogs have eaten her. Jehu declares this fulfills the word of the LORD through Elijah: dogs will eat Jezebel's flesh in the plot of Jezreel, and her body will be like dung on the surface of the field, so that no one can say 'This is Jezebel's grave.'*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The chapter is the most dramatically violent in Kings, yet every act of violence is framed as prophetic fulfillment. Jehu is an instrument of divine judgment — anointed for this purpose — yet his methods are brutal and politically calculated. The repeated question 'Is it peace?' (ha-shalom) runs through the chapter as a thematic refrain: the messengers ask it (verses 17-19), Joram asks it (verse 22), and Jezebel weaponizes it as a taunt (verse 31). The answer is always no — there can be no peace while Ahab's house stands. The convergence at Naboth's field is the narrative's theological climax: Joram dies on the exact ground his father stole from Naboth, fulfilling 1 Kings 21:19 with geographic precision. Jezebel's death scene is unforgettable in its details — the painted eyes, the historical taunt, the defenestration, the dogs, the incomplete remains. She dies as she lived: composed, defiant, and politically astute to the end. Her comparison of Jehu to Zimri is both an insult and a prophecy (Zimri's coup lasted seven days), but Jehu's dynasty will last longer. The irony of her final dignity — painting her face for death — is among the most complex character moments in the Hebrew Bible.*

Translation Friction: *Jehu's violence raises acute moral questions. He is anointed by prophetic authority and carries out declared divine judgment, yet his methods — deception, mass killing, and political opportunism — are later condemned by the prophet Hosea (Hosea 1:4: 'I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel'). The text of 2 Kings 9-10 presents Jehu's actions as fulfillment of divine word without explicit moral commentary, but the Hosea passage retroactively complicates the picture: was the judgment just but the instrument excessive? The killing of Ahaziah of Judah extends the judgment beyond the house of Ahab to the house of David — Ahaziah dies because of his family connection to Ahab, raising questions*

about collateral judgment. Jezebel's death-scene dignity and her historically accurate taunt about Zimri make her a more complex figure than simple villainy would allow. The narrator does not celebrate her death; the tone is closer to terrible fulfillment than triumph.

Connections: The anointing of Jehu fulfills the commission given to Elijah at Horeb in 1 Kings 19:16: 'anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel.' Elijah did not perform this anointing himself; it passes through Elisha to an unnamed prophetic disciple — three generations of prophetic succession to accomplish one divine command. Joram's death in Naboth's field fulfills 1 Kings 21:19-24 with precise geographic detail. Jezebel's consumption by dogs fulfills 1 Kings 21:23. The 'Is it peace?' refrain connects to the broader biblical theology of shalom — true peace requires the removal of the systemic evil that Ahab's house represents. Jehu's 'furious driving' (verse 20) has become proverbial. The defenestration of Jezebel connects typologically to the fate of proud rulers brought low (Daniel 4, Isaiah 14). Hosea 1:4's condemnation of the blood of Jezreel creates a deliberate tension with this chapter, suggesting that divine judgment executed with excessive violence becomes its own sin.

¹Elisha the prophet summoned one of the sons of the prophets and told him, "Tuck your cloak into your belt, take this flask of oil in your hand, and go to Ramoth-gilead." ²When you get there, find Jehu son of Jehoshaphat son of Nimshi. Go in, get him to stand up from among his fellow officers, and bring him into an inner room. ³Take the flask of oil, pour it on his head, and say, 'This is what the LORD says: I anoint you king over Israel.' Then open the door and run — do not wait!" ⁴So the young man — the young prophet — went to Ramoth-gilead. ⁵When he arrived, the army commanders were sitting together. He said, "I have a message for you, commander." Jehu asked, "For which one of us?" He said, "For you, commander." ⁶Jehu stood up and went inside. The prophet poured the oil on his head and said to him, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anoint you king over the LORD's people, over Israel.'" ⁷You are to strike down the house of Ahab your master, so that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets and the blood of all the LORD's servants shed by Jezebel. ⁸The entire house of Ahab will perish. I will cut off from Ahab every male — whether protected or abandoned — in Israel. ⁹I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha son of Ahijah." ¹⁰As for Jezebel — the dogs will eat her in the plot of land at Jezreel, and no one will bury her." Then the prophet opened the door and fled. ¹¹When Jehu came back out to his master's officers, they asked him, "Is everything all right? Why did that madman come to you?" He said to them, "You know the type — and the kind of thing they say." ¹²They said, "That is not true! Tell us what he really said." He told them, "This is what he said to me, word for word: 'This is what the LORD says: I anoint you king over Israel.'" ¹³They hurried, each man taking his cloak and spreading it under Jehu on the bare steps. They blew the ram's horn and proclaimed, "Jehu is king!" ¹⁴So Jehu son of Jehoshaphat son of Nimshi conspired against Joram. Now Joram had been defending Ramoth-gilead — he and all Israel — against Hazael king of Aram. ¹⁵King Joram had returned to Jezreel to recover from the wounds the Arameans had inflicted when he fought Hazael king of Aram. Jehu said, "If this is truly your will, then do not let anyone escape from the city to go and report this in Jezreel." ¹⁶Jehu mounted his chariot and rode to Jezreel, because Joram was lying there recovering. Ahaziah king of Judah had also come down to visit Joram. ¹⁷The watchman standing on the tower in Jezreel saw Jehu's company approaching and called out, "I see a troop coming!" Joram said, "Send a rider to meet them and ask, 'Is it peace?'" ¹⁸A rider went out to meet him and said, "The king asks: 'Is it peace?'" Jehu said, "What do you have to do with peace? Fall in behind me." The watchman reported, "The messenger reached them but has not come back." ¹⁹He sent a second rider, who reached them and said, "The king asks: 'Is it peace?'" Jehu said, "What do you have to do with peace? Fall in behind me." ²⁰The watchman reported, "He reached them but has not come back. And the driving — it is like the driving of Jehu son of Nimshi. He drives like a madman!" ²¹Joram ordered, "Hitch up my chariot!" When it was ready, Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah rode out, each in his own chariot, to meet Jehu. They met him at the plot of land that had belonged to Naboth the Jezreelite. ²²When Joram saw Jehu, he said, "Is it peace, Jehu?" Jehu answered, "What peace can there be as long as the prostitution and sorcery of your mother Jezebel go on?" ²³Joram turned his chariot to flee and shouted to Ahaziah, "Treachery, Ahaziah!" ²⁴Jehu drew his bow with full force and struck Joram between the shoulder blades. The arrow went through his heart, and he slumped in his chariot. ²⁵Jehu said to Bidkar his officer, "Pick him up and throw him into the field that belonged to Naboth the Jezreelite. Remember — you and I were riding together behind his father Ahab when the LORD pronounced this judgment against him:" ²⁶"I saw the blood of

Naboth and the blood of his sons yesterday,' declares the LORD. 'I will repay you on this very plot of ground,' declares the LORD." So now — pick him up and throw him on the plot, according to the word of the LORD." ²⁷When Ahaziah king of Judah saw this, he fled toward Beth-haggan. Jehu pursued him and ordered, "Strike him down too — in the chariot!" They struck him on the ascent of Gur, near Ibleam. He escaped to Megiddo and died there. ²⁸His servants carried him by chariot to Jerusalem and buried him in his tomb with his ancestors in the City of David. ²⁹Ahaziah had become king of Judah in the eleventh year of Joram son of Ahab. ³⁰When Jehu entered Jezreel, Jezebel heard about it. She painted her eyes, arranged her hair, and looked down from a window. ³¹As Jehu came through the gate, she called out, "Is it peace, Zimri — you who murdered your master?" ³²He looked up at the window and called out, "Who is on my side? Who?" Two or three court officials looked down at him. ³³He said, "Throw her down!" They threw her down. Her blood splattered on the wall and on the horses, and they trampled her. ³⁴Jehu went inside, ate and drank, and then said, "Attend to that cursed woman and bury her — she is, after all, a king's daughter." ³⁵They went to bury her, but all they found of her were the skull, the feet, and the palms of her hands. ³⁶They came back and told him. He said, "This is the word of the LORD, which he spoke through his servant Elijah the Tishbite: 'In the plot at Jezreel, the dogs will eat Jezebel's flesh.'" ³⁷"Jezebel's remains will be like dung on the surface of the field in the plot at Jezreel, so that no one will be able to say, 'This is Jezebel's grave.'"

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The instruction *chagor motnekha* ('gird your loins') means to prepare for urgent action by tucking the robe into the belt for speed. The *pak ha-shemen* ('flask of oil') is a small vessel — the instrument of anointing. Elisha sends a proxy rather than going himself, extending the prophetic chain from Elijah (who received the commission) to Elisha to an unnamed young prophet.
2. Jehu is identified by full patronymic: Yehu ben Yehoshafat ben Nimshi. He is among his *echav* ('brothers, fellow officers') — the military commanders at Ramoth-gilead. The instruction *cheder be-chader* ('room within a room, an inner chamber') ensures privacy for the anointing. The revolution must begin in secret.
3. The anointing formula — *meshachtikha le-melekh el Yisrael* ('I have anointed you as king over Israel') — uses the verb *mashach*, the root of *mashiach* ('anointed one, messiah'). The instruction to flee immediately — *ve-nastah ve-lo techakkeh* ('flee and do not wait') — suggests the act is dangerous: if discovered prematurely, the young prophet's life is at risk.
4. The phrase *ha-na'ar ha-na'ar ha-navi* ('the young man, the young man the prophet') doubles the word *na'ar* for emphasis, perhaps distinguishing him as both young in age and in prophetic rank. He carries one of the most consequential missions in Israelite history.
5. The scene is a military council — *sarei ha-chayil yoshvim* ('the commanders of the army sitting'). The young prophet's announcement *davar li elekha ha-sar* ('I have a word for you, the commander') does not specify which commander. Jehu's question *el mi mi-kullanu* ('to whom, from all of us?') prompts the specification: *elekha ha-sar* ('to you, commander').
6. The anointing formula is expanded from Elisha's instructions: *meshachtikha le-melekh el am YHWH el Yisrael* ('I anoint you king over the people of the LORD, over Israel'). The addition of *am YHWH* ('people of the LORD') frames the kingship as stewardship over God's own people. The young prophet then adds the oracle of judgment that Elisha did not explicitly instruct him to deliver.
7. The oracle charges Jehu with the destruction of *beit Achav* ('the house of Ahab'). The motive is vengeance for blood: *demei avadai ha-nevi'im* ('the blood of my servants the prophets') — referring to Jezebel's systematic killing of prophets (1 Kings 18:4, 13). The phrase *mi-yad Izevel* ('from the hand of Jezebel') places primary responsibility on the queen.
8. The phrase *mashtin be-qir* ('one who urinates against a wall') is a crude idiom meaning 'every male.' The pair *atsur ve-azuv* ('shut up and abandoned, restrained and released') is a merism covering all males regardless of status — those in custody and those at liberty, those under protection and those on their own. No male descendant of Ahab will survive.
9. Both Jeroboam's and Baasha's dynasties were completely exterminated — Jeroboam's by Baasha (1 Kings 15:29) and Baasha's by Zimri (1 Kings 16:11-12). The comparison promises the same: total dynastic annihilation. The three destroyed dynasties form a pattern in the book of Kings: sin leads to prophetic sentence, which leads to total destruction through a new king.
10. The prophecy against Jezebel — *yokhlu ha-kelavim be-cheleq Yizre'el* ('the dogs will eat in the portion/plot of Jezreel') — will be fulfilled with precise detail in verses 35-37. The young prophet follows his instructions exactly: *va-yiftach ha-delet va-yanos* ('he opened the door and fled'). The anointing is complete; the revolution has begun.
11. The officers' question *ha-shalom* ('is it peace/is everything well?') begins the chapter's refrain of the *shalom* question. They call the prophet *ha-meshugga ha-zeh* ('this madman') — the term *meshugga* was sometimes applied to ecstatic prophets, reflecting the thin line between prophetic behavior and perceived madness. Jehu's deflection — *attem yedatem et ha-ish ve-et sicho* ('you know the man and his talk') — is evasive: he tests whether to trust them.

12. The officers' insistence — sheqer hagged na lanu ('falsehood! tell us, please') — means they do not accept his evasion. Jehu relents: kazot ve-khazot amar elai ('thus and thus he said to me'). He shares the core message — the anointing — which immediately triggers the officers' response in the next verse.
13. The officers' response is instantaneous: va-yemaharu ('they hurried'). Spreading garments (bigdo, 'his garment') creates an impromptu throne on the gerem ha-ma'alot ('the bare/bone steps') — perhaps the steps of the building. The ram's horn (shofar) and the declaration malakh Yehu ('Jehu reigns/is king!') constitute a formal acclamation. The military coup is declared.
14. The verb va-yitqasher ('he conspired, he bound himself') is the standard term for political conspiracy in Kings. The parenthetical note explains the military situation: the army is at Ramoth-gilead facing Hazeel, while the wounded king has gone to Jezreel to recover. The army is thus separated from the king — the ideal condition for a coup.
15. Jehu's command — al yetse falit min ha-ir ('let no fugitive go out from the city') — seals the city to prevent news from reaching Joram. Speed and surprise are essential. The phrase im yesh nafshekhem ('if it is your desire/will, if your soul is in it') tests the officers' commitment before proceeding.
16. Both target kings are in one place: Joram shokhev shamah ('lying there, resting there') and Ahaziah yarad lir'ot ('had come down to visit'). The convergence that 8:29 set up now becomes the trap. Jehu rides toward both kings simultaneously.
17. The tsofeh ('watchman') on the migdal ('tower') spots the shif'at Yehu ('the company/multitude of Jehu'). Joram's response — qach rakkav u-shelach liqratam ve-yomar ha-shalom ('take a horseman and send to meet them and let him say: is it peace?') — initiates the 'Is it peace?' sequence. The question ha-shalom literally asks about the state of affairs: is all well, or is something wrong?
18. Jehu's response — mah lekha u-le-shalom ('what is it to you and to peace?') — dismisses the question entirely. His command sov el acharai ('turn to behind me') co-opts the messenger. The watchman's observation — ba ha-mal'akh ad hem ve-lo shav ('the messenger came to them and did not return') — signals trouble.
19. The identical exchange with the second messenger heightens the tension. Both messengers are absorbed into Jehu's company. The repetition creates a pattern that the reader recognizes: Jehu is not answering because the answer will be delivered in person.
20. The watchman identifies Jehu by his driving style: ha-minhag ke-minhag Yehu ben Nimshi ('the driving is like the driving of Jehu son of Nimshi'). The phrase ki ve-shigga'on yinhag ('for he drives in madness/fury') has become proverbial in Hebrew. The word shigga'on ('madness, frenzy') echoes the meshugga ('madman') used for the young prophet in verse 11. Madness frames the chapter — the prophet is called mad, the driving is called mad, yet both carry divine purpose.
21. The convergence at Naboth's field is one of the most dramatic fulfillments in the Hebrew Bible. The narrator specifies the location with precision — chelqat Navot ha-Yizre'eli — because this is where Elijah pronounced judgment on Ahab (1 Kings 21:17-24). The son now dies where the father sinned.
22. Joram's question — ha-shalom Yehu ('is it peace, Jehu?') — finally receives a direct answer. Jehu's response — mah ha-shalom ad zenunei Izevel immekha u-kheshafeiha ha-rabbim ('what is the peace while the harlotries of Jezebel your mother and her many sorceries continue?') — redefines the conversation. The zenunei ('harlotries, prostitution') refers to both literal cultic prostitution associated with Baal worship and the metaphorical 'prostitution' of idolatry. The keshafeiha ('her sorceries') adds the charge of occult practice. Jehu declares that shalom is structurally impossible while Jezebel's influence persists.
23. The phrase va-yahafokh Yehoram yadav ('Joram turned his hands') means he wrenched the reins to reverse the chariot. His cry mirmah Achazyahu ('treachery, Ahaziah!') warns the Judean king. The word mirmah ('deception, treachery') recognizes too late that Jehu's approach was not diplomatic but military.
24. The phrase mille yado va-qeshet ('he filled his hand with the bow') means he drew the bow to its full extent. The arrow strikes bein zero'av ('between his arms/shoulders') — a shot from behind as Joram flees — and exits through the heart: va-yetse ha-chitsi mi-libbo ('the arrow came out from his heart'). Joram collapses: va-yikhra be-rikhbo ('he sank/collapsed in his chariot'). Like his father Ahab, who was struck in his chariot at Ramoth-gilead, the son is struck in his chariot fleeing from Jezreel.
25. Jehu addresses Bidkar (his shalish, 'officer, third man') with a personal memory: they both rode as Ahab's escort when the prophetic oracle was delivered. The verb nasa ('lifted, bore') with massa ('burden, oracle') means the LORD 'raised this pronouncement against him.' Jehu witnessed Elijah's oracle against Ahab firsthand.
26. The oracle quotes a prophetic word connecting Naboth's blood — and significantly, the blood of his sons (demei vanav) — to retribution on this exact chelqah ('plot'). The detail about Naboth's sons dying is not in 1 Kings 21 but is preserved here, revealing that Ahab's crime was even worse than the earlier account narrated: the sons were also killed to prevent inheritance claims. The word emesh ('yesterday') does not mean literally yesterday but 'recently, in the past' — from God's perspective, the crime is fresh.
27. Ahaziah flees derekh beit ha-gan ('the road to Beth-haggan, the garden house') — a town south of Jezreel. Jehu's order gam oto hakkuhu ('also him, strike him!') extends the judgment to the Judean king because of his family ties to Ahab's house. Ahaziah is struck at the ma'aleh Gur ('the ascent of Gur') near Ibleam but manages to reach Megiddo before dying. The 2 Chronicles 22:9 account provides additional details about his capture.
28. Ahaziah receives proper royal burial in Jerusalem — biqurato im avotav be-ir David ('in his burial place with his ancestors in the city of David'). Despite his alliance with Ahab's house, his Davidic lineage secures him a burial among the kings of Judah.

29. This retrospective synchronism places Ahaziah's accession in context. The eleventh year here differs from the twelfth year stated in 8:25, a well-known chronological difficulty in Kings that likely reflects different counting methods (accession-year vs. non-accession-year systems).
30. Jezebel's preparations are deliberate and regal: va-tasem ba-pukh eineiha ('she put antimony/kohl on her eyes') — cosmetic eye-paint — and va-teitiv et roshah ('she made her head good, she arranged her hair'). She does not hide or flee; she adorns herself for the confrontation. Whether this is royal dignity in the face of death, an attempt at seduction, or a calculated display of power is debated. The window (challon) becomes the site of her death.
31. Jezebel's taunt is brilliant and cutting. She calls Jehu 'Zimri' — the usurper who assassinated King Elah but lasted only seven days before being overthrown and dying in a fire (1 Kings 16:9-18). The implied message: your coup will fail as Zimri's did. The question ha-shalom ('is it peace?') — the chapter's refrain — is weaponized as mockery. She simultaneously insults him, prophesies his failure, and demonstrates her own fearlessness. The phrase horeg adonav ('killer of his master') is factually accurate and morally damning.
32. Jehu's question mi itti mi ('who is with me? who?') bypasses Jezebel entirely and addresses the palace staff directly. The sarisim ('officials, eunuchs, court attendants') who look out are members of Jezebel's own household. Jehu appeals to their self-interest: declare your loyalty now or share her fate.
33. The command shimtuha ('let her drop, throw her down') is one word. The execution is immediate: va-yishmetuha ('they threw her down'). The blood spattering — va-yiz mi-damah el ha-qir ve-el ha-susim ('some of her blood splashed on the wall and on the horses') — is graphic. The horses trample her: va-yirmesenah ('they trampled her'). Jezebel's death is violent, public, and degrading.
34. Jehu eats and drinks first — a display of calm control. Only afterward does he order burial: piqdu na et ha-arurah ha-zot ve-qivruha ('attend to this cursed woman and bury her'). He calls her ha-arurah ('the cursed one') but acknowledges her status: ki vat melekh hi ('for she is a king's daughter') — Jezebel was a Sidonian princess, daughter of Ethbaal. Even in judgment, royal dignity requires burial.
35. The burial party finds only fragments: ha-gulgolet ve-ha-raglayim ve-khappot ha-yadayim ('the skull and the feet and the palms of the hands') — the parts dogs typically leave because they are bone with minimal flesh. The rest of Jezebel's body has been consumed. The detail is both forensic and theological: even her remains are almost entirely erased.
36. Jehu recognizes the fulfillment: dvar YHWH hu asher dibber be-yad avdo Eliyahu ha-Tishbi ('it is the word of the LORD that he spoke by the hand of his servant Elijah the Tishbite'). The prophecy from 1 Kings 21:23 has been accomplished. The word spoken years ago through Elijah has materialized in flesh-and-blood detail.
37. The final verse denies Jezebel even the dignity of a marked grave. Her nevelat ('carcass, corpse') will be ke-domen al penei ha-sadeh ('like dung on the face of the field') — a comparison that reduces her body to fertilizer. The concluding phrase — asher lo yomru zot Izevel ('so that they will not say this is Jezebel') — means there will be no memorial, no tomb, no pilgrimage site. The queen who filled the land with her presence leaves no trace on it. The prophetic word has the last word.

10

Summary: Jehu completes the destruction of Ahab's house and the eradication of Baal worship in Israel through a series of calculated and ruthless actions. Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria under the care of the city's leading men. Jehu writes to these guardians challenging them to choose a successor and fight for the dynasty. The terrified guardians reply that they will do whatever Jehu commands. Jehu's second letter demands the heads of the seventy sons by the next day. The guardians comply, slaughtering all seventy and sending the heads in baskets to Jezreel. Jehu has the heads piled in two heaps at the city gate and addresses the people the next morning: he acknowledges that he conspired against his master Joram, but asks who killed all of these? He implies that the guardians' willingness to behead their own charges proves that the entire establishment recognized the justice of God's sentence — the word the LORD spoke against the house of Ahab has been fulfilled. Jehu then kills all remaining relatives of Ahab in Jezreel, as well as his officials, close associates, and priests, until none are left. Traveling toward Samaria, Jehu encounters relatives of Ahaziah king of Judah at Beth-eked of the Shepherds. They are going to visit the royal family, unaware of recent events. Jehu orders them seized and killed — forty-two men — at the pit of Beth-eked. Next, Jehu meets Jehonadab son of Rechab and invites him to witness his 'zeal for the LORD.' They ride together to Samaria, where Jehu kills all remaining members of Ahab's house. Then Jehu announces a great sacrifice to Baal and assembles all the Baal prophets, priests, and worshippers in the temple of Baal. He ensures no worshipper of the LORD is mixed in, then orders eighty soldiers to enter and kill everyone. They destroy the Baal pillar and the temple itself, turning it into a latrine — a place that endures to the narrator's time. The chapter's conclusion is ambivalent: the LORD commends Jehu for executing judgment on Ahab's house and grants his dynasty four generations. Yet the narrator immediately notes that Jehu did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam — the golden calves at Bethel and Dan remained. In Jehu's days, the LORD begins to trim Israel's territory: Hazael conquers all

the land east of the Jordan — Gilead, Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh — from the Arnon to Bashan. The chapter closes with the standard regnal summary: Jehu reigned twenty-eight years and was buried in Samaria; his son Jehoahaz succeeded him.

What Makes This Remarkable: *The chapter exposes the moral complexity at the heart of divinely sanctioned violence. Jehu's destruction of Ahab's seventy sons through the guardians' own hands is a masterpiece of political manipulation: by making others do the killing, he distributes guilt and consolidates power simultaneously. His speech at the gate (verse 9) is theologically astute — he invites the people to see the fulfillment of God's word rather than merely human conspiracy. The Baal-temple massacre is similarly calculated: by posing as a Baal devotee, Jehu draws every worshipper into one location for efficient destruction. Yet the narrator's verdict is split. God approves the destruction of Ahab's house (verse 30) but the text immediately notes Jehu's failure: he perpetuated Jeroboam's golden calves. The revolution purged Baal worship but left the older Israelite apostasy intact. Hazael's territorial conquests (verses 32-33) function as divine judgment on Jehu's Israel despite the dynasty's divine approval — obedience in one area does not cancel disobedience in another.*

Translation Friction: *The moral problem intensifies in this chapter. Jehu's actions are divinely commissioned (9:7-10) and divinely approved (10:30), yet the methods are manipulative and the scale of killing extends far beyond the named targets. The forty-two relatives of Ahaziah at Beth-eked are arguably innocent — they are visiting family and know nothing of the revolution. Hosea 1:4, written later, explicitly condemns 'the blood of Jezreel,' suggesting that even divinely authorized judgment can be executed sinfully. The Baal-temple deception (posing as a worshipper) raises questions about whether holy ends justify deceptive means. The narrator's own ambivalence shows in the split verdict: approval for destroying Ahab's house, criticism for maintaining Jeroboam's calves. This is not simple moral storytelling but a text wrestling with the relationship between divine sovereignty, human agency, and moral accountability.*

Connections: *The destruction of Ahab's seventy sons connects to the pattern of dynastic extermination in Kings (Jeroboam's house by Baasha, Baasha's house by Zimri). The heads piled at the gate echo Assyrian siege practices and the psychological warfare common in ancient Near Eastern political transitions. Jehonadab son of Rechab is the ancestor of the Rechabites praised in Jeremiah 35 for maintaining their ancestral vows — his presence as witness lends ascetic legitimacy to Jehu's campaign. The destruction of the Baal temple fulfills the implicit promise of Elijah's victory on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18): the contest proved YHWH is God; now the institutional infrastructure of Baal worship is physically destroyed. Hazael's conquests fulfill Elisha's weeping prophecy in 8:12. The four-generation promise to Jehu's dynasty (verse 30) is fulfilled precisely: Jehoahaz, Joash, Jeroboam II, and Zechariah — after which the line ends (15:12). The golden calves at Bethel and Dan trace back to Jeroboam I (1 Kings 12:28-29), showing that Israel's foundational sin persists through every regime change.*

1Now Ahab had seventy descendants in Samaria. Jehu wrote letters and sent them to Samaria, to the officials of Jezreel, to the elders, and to the guardians of Ahab's sons, saying: 2"As soon as this letter reaches you — you who have your master's sons with you, as well as chariots, horses, a fortified city, and weapons — 3select the best and most worthy of your master's sons, set him on his father's throne, and fight for your master's house." 4They were absolutely terrified and said, "Two kings could not stand against him — how can we?" 5The palace administrator, the city governor, the elders, and the guardians sent word to Jehu: "We are your servants. Whatever you tell us, we will do. We will not make anyone king. Do whatever you think best." 6He wrote them a second letter: "If you are on my side and are willing to obey me, take the heads of your master's sons and bring them to me at Jezreel by this time tomorrow." Now the seventy royal sons were being raised by the leading men of the city. 7When the letter arrived, they seized the royal sons and slaughtered all seventy of them. They put their heads in baskets and sent them to Jehu at Jezreel. 8A messenger came and told him, "They have brought the heads of the king's sons." He ordered, "Pile them in two heaps at the entrance of the gate until morning." 9In the morning he went out, stood before all the people, and said, "You are the righteous judges here. I conspired against my master and killed him — but who killed all of these?" 10Know, then, that not a single word the LORD spoke against the house of Ahab will fall to the ground unfulfilled. The LORD has carried out what he declared through his servant Elijah." 11Jehu then struck down everyone remaining of Ahab's house in Jezreel — all his leading men, his close associates, and his priests — until he left no survivor. 12He set out for

Samaria. On the way, at Beth-eked of the Shepherds, ¹³Jehu encountered the relatives of Ahaziah king of Judah. He asked, "Who are you?" They said, "We are relatives of Ahaziah. We are going to pay our respects to the king's sons and the queen mother's sons." ¹⁴He ordered, "Take them alive!" They seized them alive and slaughtered them at the pit of Beth-eked — forty-two men. He did not spare a single one of them. ¹⁵Moving on from there, he encountered Jehonadab son of Rechab coming to meet him. He greeted him and asked, "Is your heart true toward me, as my heart is toward yours?" Jehonadab answered, "It is." "Then give me your hand." He gave him his hand, and Jehu pulled him up into the chariot. ¹⁶Jehu said, "Come with me and see my zeal for the LORD." And they rode together in his chariot. ¹⁷When he arrived in Samaria, he struck down everyone remaining of Ahab's line in Samaria, until he had destroyed them all — according to the word the LORD had spoken to Elijah. ¹⁸Jehu assembled all the people and announced, "Ahab served Baal only a little. Jehu will serve him much more!" ¹⁹"Now summon all the prophets of Baal, all his worshippers, and all his priests to me. No one is to be absent, because I have a great sacrifice for Baal. Anyone who fails to come will not live." Jehu was acting with cunning, intending to destroy the worshippers of Baal. ²⁰Jehu ordered, "Proclaim a sacred assembly for Baal!" They proclaimed it. ²¹Jehu sent word throughout all Israel, and every worshipper of Baal came — not one stayed away. They entered the temple of Baal, and it was filled wall to wall. ²²He told the keeper of the wardrobe, "Bring out robes for all the worshippers of Baal." He brought out robes for them. ²³Jehu and Jehonadab son of Rechab entered the temple of Baal. He said to the Baal worshippers, "Search carefully and make sure there are no worshippers of the LORD here among you — only worshippers of Baal." ²⁴They went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings. Jehu had stationed eighty men outside and warned them, "If anyone lets a single man escape from those I am delivering into your hands, it will be his life for that man's life." ²⁵As soon as the burnt offering was finished, Jehu ordered the guards and officers, "Go in and strike them down! Let no one escape!" They struck them down with the sword. The guards and officers threw the bodies out and then went into the inner shrine of the Baal temple. ²⁶They brought out the sacred pillar from the temple of Baal and burned it. ²⁷They demolished the pillar of Baal, tore down the temple of Baal, and turned it into a latrine — which it remains to this day. ²⁸So Jehu wiped out Baal worship from Israel. ²⁹However, Jehu did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had led Israel into sin — the golden calves at Bethel and at Dan. ³⁰The LORD said to Jehu, "Because you have done well in carrying out what is right in my sight — you have done to the house of Ahab everything that was in my heart — your descendants to the fourth generation will sit on the throne of Israel." ³¹But Jehu was not careful to follow the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam, who had led Israel into sin. ³²In those days the LORD began to reduce Israel's territory. Hazael struck them throughout all the borders of Israel: ³³from the Jordan eastward — all the land of Gilead, the territory of Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh, from Aroer on the Arnon gorge through Gilead and into Bashan. ³⁴The rest of Jehu's acts, everything he did, and all his military achievements — are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? ³⁵Jehu slept with his fathers and was buried in Samaria. His son Jehoahaz reigned in his place. ³⁶The total time Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria was twenty-eight years.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The shiv'im banim ('seventy sons') likely includes grandsons and great-grandsons — the entire male line of Ahab. The letters go to sarei Yizre'el ('officials of Jezreel'), ha-zeqenim ('the elders'), and ha-omnim ('the guardians/tutors') — every authority figure responsible for the princes. Jehu addresses the entire establishment with a demand they cannot refuse.
2. Jehu lists their assets: the princes (benei adoneikhem, 'the sons of your masters'), military resources (rekhev, susim, 'chariots, horses'), the fortified city (ir mivtsar), and weapons (nesheq). He is reminding them they have the means to resist — making their eventual capitulation all the more significant.
3. The challenge — re'item ha-tov ve-ha-yashar mi-bnei adoneikhem ('see the good and upright from among the sons of your masters') — dares them to mount a defense of the dynasty. Jehu is not making a genuine offer; he is forcing them to acknowledge they cannot or will not resist. The demand to fight (hilachamu) exposes their impotence.
4. Their fear — va-yir'u me'od me'od ('they feared greatly, greatly') — uses double intensification. Their reasoning is sound: hinneh shenei ha-melakhim lo amdu lefanav ('behold, two kings did not stand before him'). If Joram of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah both fell, city officials have no chance.

5. Total capitulation. The four groups — asher al ha-bayit ('over the house'), asher al ha-ir ('over the city'), ha-zeqenim ('the elders'), ha-omnim ('the guardians') — respond in unison. Their declaration avadekha anachnu ('we are your servants') transfers their loyalty. The phrase lo namlikh ish ('we will not make any man king') concedes the dynastic claim.
6. The second letter demands action: qechu et rashei anshei benei adoneikhem ('take the heads of the men, the sons of your masters'). The word rashei ('heads') is brutally literal. The parenthetical note — the seventy sons were im gedolei ha-ir megaddelim otam ('with the great men of the city, raising them') — emphasizes that their guardians are being asked to kill their own wards.
7. The execution is immediate and total: va-yishchatu shiv'im ish ('they slaughtered seventy men'). The verb shachat ('to slaughter') is the same used for animal sacrifice, adding a grim resonance. The heads are packed in duddim ('baskets, pots') — the practical detail makes the horror concrete.
8. Jehu orders a public display: shenei tsiburim petach ha-sha'ar ('two heaps at the opening of the gate'). The gate is the public forum — the place of judgment, commerce, and assembly. The seventy heads arranged in two heaps serve as both evidence and warning. The delay ad ha-boqer ('until morning') ensures maximum public visibility.
9. Jehu's speech is a masterpiece of political rhetoric. He declares the crowd tsaddiqim ('righteous ones, just judges') — placing them in the role of moral arbiters. He confesses his own conspiracy openly: ani qasharti al adoni va-ehregehu ('I conspired against my master and killed him'). Then the devastating question: u-mi hikkah et kol elleh ('and who struck all of these?'). The guardians of Samaria killed them — the establishment itself executed the dynasty. Jehu distributes the moral weight.
10. Jehu frames the massacre as prophetic fulfillment: lo yippol mi-dvar YHWH artsah ('not one word of the LORD will fall to the ground'). The metaphor of a word 'falling to the ground' means failing or going unfulfilled. Jehu positions himself as the instrument of divine speech — the word spoken by Elijah (be-yad avdo Eliyahu, 'by the hand of his servant Elijah') has been accomplished. The theological claim is valid; the political exploitation of it is Jehu's addition.
11. The scope extends beyond bloodline: gedolav ('his great ones'), meyudda'av ('his acquaintances, close associates'), kohanav ('his priests'). The phrase ad bilti hish'ir lo sarid ('until not leaving him a survivor') indicates total purge — not just the dynasty but its entire support network.
12. Beth-eked ha-ro'im ('the binding-house of the shepherds') is likely a sheep-shearing station along the road. The location becomes the site of another mass killing.
13. The achei Achazyahu ('brothers/relatives of Ahaziah') are traveling to visit the royal family, unaware of the revolution. Their stated purpose — li-shelom benei ha-melekh u-vnei ha-gevurah ('for the peace/welfare of the king's sons and the queen mother's sons') — is innocent. The gevurah ('queen mother, great lady') likely refers to Jezebel or Athaliah. Their ignorance makes their fate tragic.
14. The forty-two men are captured alive first — tifsum chayyim ('seize them alive') — then executed at the bor ('pit, cistern'). The number arba'im u-shenayim ('forty-two') is specific. The phrase ve-lo hish'ir ish mehem ('he did not leave a man from them') completes the pattern of total destruction. These are Judean royals, extending the purge beyond Israel to the allied dynasty.
15. Jehonadab (Yonadav ben Rekhav) is the ancestor of the Rechabites, a group known for austere lifestyle and strict YHWH loyalty (Jeremiah 35). His presence gives Jehu's campaign religious legitimacy beyond the prophetic anointing. The question ha-yesh et levavkha yashar ('is your heart upright/true?') tests loyalty. The handclasp and ascent into the chariot formalize the alliance.
16. The phrase re'eh be-qin'ati la-YHWH ('see my zeal/jealousy for the LORD') uses qin'ah, the same word used for God's jealousy and for Elijah's zeal (1 Kings 19:10, 14). Jehu explicitly claims the mantle of zealous loyalty to YHWH. Whether this is genuine devotion or political calculation — or both — the narrator leaves ambiguous.
17. The formula ki-dvar YHWH asher dibber el Eliyahu ('according to the word of the LORD which he spoke to Elijah') frames the killing as prophetic fulfillment. The word ad hishmido ('until he destroyed him') uses the verb shamad — total destruction. The prophetic word from 1 Kings 21 has now been fully executed.
18. Jehu's announcement — Achav avad et ha-Ba'al me'at, Yehu ya'avdennu harbeh ('Ahab served Baal a little, Jehu will serve him much') — is a deliberate deception. He poses as an even more devoted Baal worshipper than Ahab in order to draw all Baal devotees into a trap. The irony is extreme: the man anointed to destroy Baal worship claims to champion it.
19. The trap is set: zevach gadol li la-Ba'al ('a great sacrifice for me to Baal') is the bait. The threat — kol asher yipaqqed lo yichyeh ('whoever is missing will not live') — ensures full attendance. The narrator reveals the strategy: Yehu asah be-oqvah ('Jehu acted with cunning/craftiness'). The word oqvah ('craftiness, heel-work') comes from the same root as Ya'aqov ('Jacob') — the supplanter.
20. The phrase qaddeshu atsarah la-Ba'al ('sanctify/proclaim an assembly for Baal') uses vocabulary normally reserved for YHWH worship. The atsarah ('solemn assembly, sacred gathering') is a term for a holy convocation (Joel 1:14, 2:15). Applying it to Baal worship is deliberate sacrilege designed to ensure the worshippers believe Jehu is sincere.
21. The phrase peh la-peh ('mouth to mouth, edge to edge') describes the temple packed to capacity. Every Baal worshipper in Israel is now inside a single building. The word ve-lo nish'ar ish asher lo va ('not a man remained who did not come') ensures no Baal devotee escaped the net.
22. The meltachah ('wardrobe, vestry') is the storeroom for ceremonial garments. The levush ('clothing, garment') distributed to the Baal worshippers serves a dual purpose: it marks them visually as Baal devotees and ensures they can be distinguished from any YHWH worshipper who might have been swept up in the assembly.

- 23.** The instruction *chappesu u-re'u* ('search and see') ensures that only Baal worshippers are present: *ki im ovdei ha-Ba'al levaddam* ('only worshippers of Baal alone'). Jehonadab's presence as witness adds religious credibility. The search protects any YHWH worshipper who might accidentally be present — Jehu's violence is targeted, not indiscriminate.
- 24.** The trap is sprung: eighty soldiers wait outside. Jehu's threat — *nafsho tachat nafsho* ('his life instead of his life') — echoes the formula used against Ahab in 1 Kings 20:42 for releasing Ben-hadad. The phrase *ani mevi al yedeikhem* ('I am bringing into your hands') frames the worshippers as prisoners delivered for execution.
- 25.** The timing is precise: *ke-khalloto la'asot ha-olah* ('when he finished making the burnt offering'). The sacrifice completes the deception. The *ratsim* ('runners, guards') and *shalishim* ('officers') enter and execute everyone: *va-yakkum le-fi cherev* ('they struck them with the mouth of the sword'). The *ir beit ha-Ba'al* ('the city/inner precinct of the Baal temple') suggests an inner sanctuary area.
- 26.** The *matstseivot* ('pillars, standing stones') were sacred objects in Baal worship — stone or wooden pillars representing the deity or commemorating worship. Burning them (*va-yisrefuha*) destroys their sacred status permanently.
- 27.** The destruction moves from objects to the structure itself: *va-yittetsu et beit ha-Ba'al* ('they tore down the temple of Baal'). The final degradation — *va-yesimuhu le-machara'ot* ('they made it into latrines') — is the ultimate desecration: a temple becomes a public toilet. The phrase *ad ha-yom* ('to this day') indicates the narrator writes when this use is still current. The transformation from sacred space to waste space is deliberate theological statement.
- 28.** The summary statement — *va-yashmeid Yehu et ha-Ba'al mi-Yisrael* ('Jehu destroyed Baal from Israel') — uses the verb *shamad* ('to annihilate, to destroy completely'). The achievement is real: organized Baal worship in Israel ends with Jehu. But the next verse immediately qualifies this victory.
- 29.** The critical qualification: *raq* ('however, only, but') introduces the limitation. Jehu destroyed Baal worship but preserved the *eglei ha-zahav* ('the golden calves') — the rival worship centers Jeroboam I established (1 Kings 12:28-29). The Deuteronomistic narrator's judgment is clear: purging one form of apostasy while maintaining another is insufficient. The sins of Jeroboam ben Nevat are the baseline sin of the northern kingdom that no king ever addresses.
- 30.** God's approval — *ya'an asher hetivota la'asot ha-yashar be-einai* ('because you did well to do the upright in my eyes') — specifically concerns the destruction of Ahab's house: *ke-khol asher bi-lvavi asita le-veit Achav* ('according to all that was in my heart you did to the house of Ahab'). The reward is a four-generation dynasty: *benei revi'im* ('sons of four generations'). This promise is precisely fulfilled: Jehoahaz, Joash, Jeroboam II, and Zechariah occupy the throne before the line ends (15:12).
- 31.** The narrator's summary judgment: *lo shamar lalekhet be-torat YHWH Elohei Yisrael be-khol levavo* ('he did not keep to walk in the instruction of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart'). The phrase *be-khol levavo* ('with all his heart') echoes the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:5) — Jehu's obedience was partial, not wholehearted. The split verdict is the chapter's theological core: approved for one thing, condemned for another.
- 32.** The phrase *hechel YHWH le-qatsot be-Yisrael* ('the LORD began to cut off in Israel') uses *qatsah* ('to cut, to trim, to reduce'). The instrument is Hazael — the very king whose atrocities Elisha foresaw and wept over (8:12). God's judgment on Israel's remaining sin operates through the enemy Elisha prophesied.
- 33.** The territorial losses are comprehensive: everything east of the Jordan, from the Arnon (the southern boundary of Reuben's territory, modern Wadi Mujib in Jordan) northward through Gilead to Bashan (the Golan Heights region). Three tribal territories — Gad, Reuben, and the eastern half of Manasseh — are lost. This fulfills Elisha's prophecy of Hazael's devastating conquests (8:12).
- 34.** The standard closing formula: *yeter divrei Yehu ve-khol asher asah ve-khol gevurato* ('the rest of the acts of Jehu and all that he did and all his might'). The word *gevurato* ('his might, his valor') acknowledges military accomplishment despite the theological criticism. The *sefer divrei ha-yamim le-malkhei Yisrael* is the now-lost royal annals.
- 35.** The death and burial formula: *va-yishkav Yehu im avotav* ('Jehu lay down with his ancestors'). Burial in Samaria — the Israelite capital — is appropriate for the king who purged it of Baal worship. Jehoahaz (*Yeho'achaz*, 'the LORD has grasped') begins the four-generation dynasty promised in verse 30.
- 36.** Twenty-eight years is a substantial reign, validating Jehu's dynasty beyond the mere seven days of Zimri, whom Jezebel compared him to (9:31). Her taunt proved wrong: Jehu's coup succeeded and endured. The reign length is given as the final data point, closing the Jehu narrative that began with his anointing in 9:1.

11

Summary: *Athaliah, the queen mother, seizes the throne of Judah after the death of her son Ahaziah by massacring the entire royal family. But Jehosheba, sister of Ahaziah and wife of the priest Jehoiada, hides the infant Joash in the Temple for six years while Athaliah rules. In the seventh year, Jehoiada organizes a coup with the Temple guards and the Carites, stationing armed men around the young king. Joash is brought out, crowned, anointed, and proclaimed king. Athaliah hears the commotion, enters the Temple, and cries "Treason! Treason!" She is seized and executed outside the Temple grounds. Jehoiada then makes a covenant between the LORD, the king, and the people — and a second covenant between the king and the people. The people tear down the temple of Baal and kill Mattan the priest of Baal. Joash is enthroned at seven years old, and the city is at peace.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter preserves the most precarious moment in the Davidic line. The entire royal house of David in Judah is reduced to a single infant hidden in a storeroom of the Temple. The survival of God's covenant promise to David (2 Samuel 7) hangs by a thread — one child, one faithful woman, one faithful priest. Jehoiada's coup is remarkable for its careful planning: he divides the guards into three groups, arms them with David's own ceremonial spears and shields stored in the Temple, and choreographs the coronation with military precision. The double covenant in verse 17 is theologically significant: Jehoiada renews the covenant relationship between the LORD and the nation, and simultaneously establishes the political bond between king and people. This is the only place in Kings where a priest initiates both religious and political covenant renewal.*

Translation Friction: *The identity of the Carites (ha-Kari) in verse 4 is debated — they may be Carian mercenaries from Asia Minor, Cherethites (Cretan bodyguards who served David), or a distinct Temple guard corps. The relationship between Jehosheba and Jehoiada is stated only in 2 Chronicles 22:11, not in Kings, though it is implied by her access to Temple chambers. The phrase 'the testimony' (ha-edut) placed on Joash during the coronation (verse 12) is unclear — it may refer to a copy of the Torah, a covenant document, or royal insignia. The text's claim that Athaliah destroyed 'all the royal seed' (kol zera ha-mamlakhah) is clearly hyperbolic since Joash survived, but it communicates the totality of her intent.*

Connections: *Athaliah's massacre directly continues the Omride legacy — she is the daughter (or granddaughter) of Ahab and Jezebel (8:26), and her destruction of the Davidic line is Jezebel's ideology transplanted into Judah. The rescue of one child from royal massacre connects to Moses in the basket (Exodus 2) and the later preservation of the messianic line. The covenant renewal in verse 17 echoes the covenant at Sinai (Exodus 24:3-8) and anticipates Josiah's covenant renewal in 2 Kings 23:1-3. Tearing down the Baal temple and killing Mattan reverses the Baal worship introduced through Athaliah's Omride connections. The coronation formula — anointing, clapping, shouting 'Long live the king!' — follows the pattern established for Solomon's coronation in 1 Kings 1:34-39.*

¹When Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead, she set about destroying the entire royal family. ²But Jehosheba, daughter of King Joram and sister of Ahaziah, took Joash son of Ahaziah and smuggled him away from among the king's sons who were being killed. She hid him and his nurse in a bedroom, and they concealed him from Athaliah so that he was not put to death. ³He remained hidden with her in the house of the LORD for six years, while Athaliah ruled over the land. ⁴In the seventh year, Jehoiada sent for the commanders of hundreds — of the Carites and the royal guard — and brought them to himself in the house of the LORD. He made a covenant with them and put them under oath in the house of the LORD, then showed them the king's son. ⁵He gave them orders: "This is what you are to do. A third of you who come on duty on the Sabbath shall guard the royal palace. ⁶A third shall be at the Gate of Sur, and a third at the gate behind the guards. You shall guard the house as a barrier. ⁷The two divisions among you — all who go off duty on the Sabbath — shall guard the house of the LORD, surrounding the king. ⁸You shall surround the king on every side, each man with his weapons in hand. Anyone who approaches the ranks is to be killed. Stay with the king wherever he goes — when he goes out and when he comes in." ⁹The commanders of hundreds did everything that Jehoiada the priest commanded. Each took his men — those coming on duty on the Sabbath and those going off duty — and came to Jehoiada the priest. ¹⁰The priest gave the commanders of hundreds the spears and shields that had belonged to King David, which were kept in the house of the

LORD. ¹¹The guards stood in formation, each man with his weapons in hand, from the south side of the house to the north side, flanking the altar and the Temple, surrounding the king on every side. ¹²Then he brought out the king's son and placed the crown on him and gave him the testimony. They proclaimed him king and anointed him. The people clapped their hands and shouted, "Long live the king!" ¹³When Athaliah heard the noise of the guards and the people, she went to the people at the house of the LORD. ¹⁴She looked, and there was the king standing by the pillar according to custom, with the officers and trumpeters beside the king. All the people of the land were rejoicing and blowing trumpets. Athaliah tore her robes and cried out, "Treason! Treason!" ¹⁵Jehoiada the priest commanded the commanders of hundreds who were in charge of the troops: "Bring her out between the ranks, and put to the sword anyone who follows her." For the priest had said, "She must not be killed in the house of the LORD." ¹⁶They seized her, and she was taken through the horses' entrance to the royal palace. There she was put to death. ¹⁷Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD, the king, and the people — that they would be the LORD's people — and also a covenant between the king and the people. ¹⁸Then all the people of the land went to the temple of Baal and tore it down. They smashed its altars and images to pieces and killed Mattan, the priest of Baal, in front of the altars. The priest stationed guards over the house of the LORD. ¹⁹He took the commanders of hundreds, the Carites, the guards, and all the people of the land, and they brought the king down from the house of the LORD. They entered the palace through the gate of the guards, and the king sat on the royal throne. ²⁰All the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was at peace. As for Athaliah, they had put her to death by the sword at the royal palace.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Athaliah acts immediately — the verb *va-taqom* ('she rose up') signals decisive, violent initiative. The phrase *kol zera ha-mamlakhah* ('all the seed of the kingdom') refers to every potential Davidic heir. Her motive is pure power: with her son dead, only she can hold the throne if no Davidic heir survives.
2. The verb *va-tignov* ('she stole') is striking — Jehosheba literally steals the child from among the corpses of the princes. The 'bedroom' (*chadar ha-mittot*) likely refers to a storage room for bedding within the Temple complex, a place Athaliah would not search. This single act of courage preserves the Davidic line and, with it, the covenant promise of 2 Samuel 7.
3. For six years the true king is hidden in God's house while a usurper occupies the throne. The contrast is sharp: the legitimate Davidic heir lives in the Temple; the illegitimate queen rules in the palace. The narrator's use of *molekhet* ('ruling') for Athaliah is technically neutral but contextually loaded — she is the only woman to reign over Judah, and her rule is unauthorized.
4. The Carites (*ha-Kari*) are likely foreign mercenaries serving as royal bodyguards, similar to David's Cherethites and Pelethites. Jehoiada's decision to bring military commanders into the Temple and bind them by covenant there shows that he understands the coup requires both priestly authority and military force. The phrase 'he showed them the king's son' is the narrative's revelation moment — six years of secrecy end in a single dramatic disclosure.
5. Jehoiada exploits the Sabbath shift change to double the available guards — the departing shift stays while the incoming shift arrives. The plan is detailed and methodical: each third has a specific station, ensuring complete coverage of the Temple compound where the coronation will take place.
6. The Gate of Sur is otherwise unknown; it may be the same as the Foundation Gate mentioned in 2 Chronicles 23:5. The term *massach* ('barrier, defense') indicates the guards are to form a protective perimeter — no one enters or exits without authorization.
7. The outgoing Sabbath shift, instead of going home, stays to provide additional protection around the king. This doubles the available manpower without raising suspicion — a normal shift change conceals the mobilization.
8. The instruction is lethal: *ha-ba el ha-sderot yumat* ('whoever enters the ranks shall be put to death'). Jehoiada anticipates resistance and authorizes deadly force. The ring of armed men around the child-king creates a living fortress.
9. The obedience is total: *ke-khol asher tsivah* ('according to everything he commanded'). The military follows the priest without question, a remarkable alignment of Temple and military authority that legitimizes the coup as a religious act, not merely a political one.
10. David's own weapons — stored in the Temple as sacred relics — arm the men who will restore David's line. The symbolism is potent: the dynasty's founder equips the dynasty's rescue. These ceremonial weapons bridge the centuries between David and his endangered descendant.
11. The guards form a semicircle stretching from one corner of the Temple to the other, with the altar in the center of the formation. The king stands at the focal point of the armed crescent, protected on all sides. The scene is both a military operation and a liturgical moment — an armed coronation in God's house.
12. The *nezer* ('crown') is the royal diadem. The *edut* ('testimony') is debated — it may be a Torah scroll, a covenant document, or royal insignia attesting legitimacy. Whatever its form, it signifies that kingship in Judah is covenantal: the king receives authority with obligations attached. The acclamation *yechi ha-melekh* echoes Solomon's coronation (1 Kings 1:39).

13. Athaliah comes to investigate the commotion — she does not yet know what has happened. Her approach to the Temple is both bold and foolish: she walks directly into the place where her replacement has already been crowned. The noise that draws her is the sound of her own overthrow.
14. Athaliah finds a fully realized coronation in progress. The king stands by the pillar (ha-ammud) — a designated spot for royal ceremonies, possibly one of the great pillars flanking the Temple entrance. Her cry of *qesher qesher* ('conspiracy! conspiracy!') is darkly ironic: she who seized the throne by murdering children now accuses others of treason.
15. Jehoiada's command is both ruthless and reverent: Athaliah must die, but not in the Temple. The sacred space must not be polluted with the blood of execution. The instruction to kill anyone who follows her anticipates that she may have loyalists who will try to intervene.
16. Athaliah is led out through the horses' gate — a utilitarian entrance, not the ceremonial one. She exits royal life through a service door. The execution at the palace rather than the Temple maintains the sanctity of sacred space while delivering justice at the seat of her usurped power.
17. The phrase *va-yikhrot et ha-berit* ('he cut the covenant') uses the standard covenant-making verb. The three-way structure — LORD, king, people — is unique in Kings and creates a triangular obligation: the people belong to the LORD, the king mediates between God and people, and the people owe loyalty to the king who upholds the covenant. This double covenant is Jehoiada's greatest act of statesmanship.
18. The destruction is thorough: the verb *shibberu hetev* ('they smashed thoroughly') indicates deliberate, complete demolition. Mattan the Baal priest is killed before the very altars where he served — a symmetrical justice. Jehoiada then posts guards (*pequddot*) at the Temple, restoring proper security and worship order.
19. The procession from Temple to palace completes the transfer of power. Joash moves from the place where he was hidden and crowned to the seat where he will rule. The phrase *kisse ha-melakhim* ('the throne of the kings') uses the plural — it is the throne that has held David's line for generations, and now holds his line again.
20. The chapter ends with a two-word summary of the new order: *ha-ir shaqatah* ('the city was quiet, at peace'). After six years of usurpation and one day of revolution, Jerusalem is calm. The narrator circles back to confirm Athaliah's execution, closing her story with finality. Joy and silence stand together — the people celebrate, and the city rests.

12

Summary: Joash begins to reign at seven years old in the seventh year of Jehu, and he reigns forty years in Jerusalem. He does what is right in the eyes of the LORD all the days that Jehoiada the priest instructs him, though the high places are not removed. Joash initiates repairs to the Temple, directing the priests to use the incoming silver — from assessments, personal vows, and freewill offerings — for the repair work. By the twenty-third year of his reign, the priests have not carried out the repairs. Joash confronts Jehoiada and the priests, removing them from the collection process. Instead, Jehoiada places a chest with a bored hole beside the altar, and the priests at the entrance deposit all incoming silver there. When the chest is full, the royal secretary and the high priest count the silver and give it to the foremen overseeing the Temple work. The workers — carpenters, builders, masons, and stonecutters — are paid directly and are so trustworthy that no accounting is demanded of them. However, the silver is not used for Temple vessels; it all goes to the workmen. The chapter closes with a crisis: Hazael of Aram campaigns against Gath and threatens Jerusalem. Joash buys him off by sending all the sacred treasures — the dedicated gifts of his ancestors Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, and Ahaziah, along with his own gifts and all the gold from the Temple and palace treasuries. Hazael withdraws. Joash's servants conspire against him and assassinate him at Beth-millo. His son Amaziah succeeds him.

What Makes This Remarkable: The Temple repair narrative is one of the most detailed administrative accounts in the Hebrew Bible, providing a window into the fiscal mechanics of ancient Israelite worship. The system Joash creates — a public collection chest, royal oversight, direct payment to workers — represents an institutional reform that removes priestly middlemen from financial management. The trust extended to the workers (verse 16: 'they did not demand an accounting') stands in sharp contrast to the priestly failure that necessitated the reform. The chapter also demonstrates the fragility of Joash's righteousness: he does right 'all the days that Jehoiada the priest instructed him' (verse 3), implying that without priestly mentorship his faithfulness is not self-sustaining. The ending confirms this: Joash who repaired the Temple also strips it to pay off Hazael, and the king who was saved from assassination as an infant dies by assassination as an adult.

Translation Friction: The WLC versification for this chapter differs from the English versions: WLC has 22 verses (beginning the chapter with Joash's age and accession, which English versions place as 12:1), while English Bibles typically have 21 verses. We follow the Hebrew (WLC) 22-verse structure. The relationship between 2 Kings 12 and 2 Chronicles 24 raises difficulties: Chronicles adds the apostasy of Joash after Jehoiada's death, the murder of Jehoiada's son Zechariah, and an Aramean invasion as divine punishment — details entirely absent from Kings. The silence of Kings on Joash's later apostasy may reflect the Deuteronomistic Historian's different editorial concerns, or Chronicles may supplement from independent sources. The assassination account is terse in Kings; Chronicles provides theological motivation (vengeance for Zechariah's blood).

Connections: The Temple repair anticipates Josiah's more dramatic Temple restoration in 2 Kings 22, where the discovery of the book of the law triggers national reformation. Both episodes involve a collection chest, royal initiative, and faithful workers. Joash's payment of tribute to Hazael from Temple treasures echoes Asa's similar action in 1 Kings 15:18-19 and establishes a pattern repeated by Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:15-16). The conditional nature of Joash's righteousness — dependent on Jehoiada's guidance — connects to the broader Deuteronomistic theme that kings need prophetic or priestly counsel to maintain covenant faithfulness. The assassination of Joash fulfills the pattern of violent succession that haunts the Davidic line after David's own sins of violence.

¹In the seventh year of Jehu, Joash became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. ²Joash was seven years old when he became king. His mother's name was Zibiah, from Beersheba. ³Joash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD all the days that Jehoiada the priest instructed him. ⁴However, the high places were not removed. The people continued sacrificing and burning incense at the high places. ⁵Joash said to the priests, "All the silver from the sacred donations brought into the house of the LORD — the silver collected in the census, the silver from personal assessments, and all the silver that anyone is moved to bring to the house of the LORD — ⁶let the priests receive it, each from his own donors, and let them repair whatever damage is found in the house." ⁷But by the twenty-third year of King Joash, the priests had still not repaired the damage to the house. ⁸King Joash summoned Jehoiada the priest and the other priests and said to them, "Why have you not repaired the damage to the house? From now on, do not take silver from your donors. Hand it over for the repair of the house." ⁹The priests agreed not to collect silver from the people and not to be responsible for repairing the house. ¹⁰Jehoiada the priest took a chest, bored a hole in its lid, and set it beside the altar on the right side as one enters the house of the LORD. The priests who guarded the threshold deposited in it all the silver that was brought into the house of the LORD. ¹¹Whenever they saw that the silver in the chest was plentiful, the king's secretary and the high priest would come, bag it up, and count the silver that had been brought to the house of the LORD. ¹²They gave the weighed-out silver to the foremen in charge of the work on the house of the LORD, who paid it out to the carpenters and builders working on the house of the LORD, ¹³and to the masons and stonecutters, and for purchasing timber and dressed stone to repair the damage to the house of the LORD — for every expense needed to restore the house. ¹⁴However, no silver basins, wick trimmers, sprinkling bowls, trumpets, or any gold or silver vessels were made for the house of the LORD from the silver brought in. ¹⁵It was given to the workers, and they used it to repair the house of the LORD. ¹⁶They did not demand an accounting from the men to whom they gave the silver to pay the workers, because they acted with complete integrity. ¹⁷The silver from guilt offerings and the silver from sin offerings was not brought into the house of the LORD; it belonged to the priests. ¹⁸At that time, Hazael king of Aram marched against Gath and captured it. Then Hazael set his face toward Jerusalem. ¹⁹Joash king of Judah took all the sacred objects that his ancestors Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, and Ahaziah, kings of Judah, had dedicated, along with his own dedicated gifts, and all the gold found in the treasuries of the house of the LORD and the royal palace. He sent everything to Hazael king of Aram, and Hazael withdrew from Jerusalem. ²⁰As for the remaining deeds of Joash and all that he did — are they not recorded in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ²¹His servants rose up and formed a conspiracy. They struck down Joash at Beth-millo, on the road that goes down to Silla. ²²Jozabad son of Shimeath and Jehozabad son of Shomer, his servants, struck him down and he died. They buried him with his ancestors in the City of David, and his son Amaziah reigned in his place.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The WLC begins chapter 12 with the synchronism tying Joash's accession to Jehu's reign in Israel. Forty years is one of the longest reigns in Judah, spanning most of the ninth century BCE. The synchronism anchors Joash's reign to the northern revolution that brought Jehu to power — the same upheaval that created the vacuum Athaliah exploited.
2. The regnal formula provides the king's age at accession and the queen mother's name and city of origin. Zibiah from Beersheba — the southernmost significant city of Judah — locates the king's maternal lineage firmly within Judean territory, contrasting with Athaliah's foreign Omride origins.
3. The evaluation is positive but qualified. The clause *asher horahu Yehoyada ha-kohen* ('in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him') limits the duration of his righteousness to the lifetime of his mentor. The verb *horahu* ('instructed him') comes from the root *yarah*, the same root that gives us *torah* — Jehoiada literally 'torah-ed' the king, shaping his conduct by teaching.
4. This is the standard Deuteronomistic caveat applied to otherwise faithful Judean kings. The high places (*bamot*) — local worship sites outside Jerusalem — persist throughout most of Judah's history until Hezekiah and Josiah act against them. Their survival qualifies every positive evaluation: even good kings tolerate decentralized worship.
5. Three categories of silver income are listed: (1) *kesepher* ('the silver of those who pass through'), likely a census or head tax; (2) *kesepher nafshot* ('silver of persons according to valuation'), referring to the personal vow valuations described in Leviticus 27; and (3) voluntary offerings prompted by personal devotion. Joash attempts to channel all three streams toward Temple repair.
6. The initial system depends on each priest collecting from his established donors (*makkaro*, 'his acquaintance, his contact') and applying the funds to repairs. The term *bedeq ha-bayit* ('damage of the house, breaches of the house') becomes the technical phrase for Temple maintenance throughout this passage.
7. Sixteen years have passed since Joash's accession and the priests have done nothing. The narrator states the failure flatly, without accusation or excuse. Whether the priests spent the money on themselves or simply lacked organizational capacity, the result is the same: the Temple remains in disrepair.
8. Joash confronts his own mentor — a remarkable assertion of royal authority by a king raised under priestly tutelage. The question *maddua* ('why?') demands accountability. The reform removes priests from the collection chain entirely: they are no longer to receive silver from their contacts but must redirect everything to the repair fund.
9. The priests accept both terms: they lose the income stream but also shed the repair obligation. The verb *va-ye'otu* ('they consented, they agreed') suggests a negotiated settlement rather than a unilateral decree — the priests accept diminished financial authority in exchange for reduced accountability.
10. The collection chest (*aron echad*) is a practical innovation — a locked box with a slot, preventing misappropriation. Its placement beside the altar ensures maximum visibility and associates the donation with worship. The threshold priests (*shomrei ha-saf*) serve as the new collection agents, funneling all income into a single, secure container.
11. A dual-authority counting system: the royal secretary (representing the crown) and the high priest (representing the Temple) jointly handle the funds. Neither party acts alone — this built-in accountability reflects Joash's learned distrust of unmonitored priestly finances.
12. The silver is *ha-metukkan* ('weighed, reckoned') — precisely measured before distribution. The foremen (*osei ha-melakhah*, 'doers of the work') serve as project managers who distribute funds to individual tradesmen. The chain of custody is clear: chest to officials to foremen to workers.
13. Four categories of workers are listed: carpenters (*v12*), builders (*v12*), masons (*godrim*), and stonecutters (*chotzevei ha-even*). The materials — timber and dressed stone (*avnei machtzev*) — match the original Temple construction materials. The repair recapitulates the original building project.
14. This restriction ensures that all funds go to structural repair, not to liturgical furnishings. The list of excluded items — *sippot* (basins), *mezammerot* (wick trimmers), *mizraqot* (sprinkling bowls), *chatozotrot* (trumpets) — catalogs the standard Temple implements. Utility comes before beauty; the building must stand before it can be adorned.
15. This verse restates the principle succinctly: the silver goes to workers, and the workers repair the house. The simplicity of the statement emphasizes the directness of the new system — no intermediaries, no diversions.
16. The phrase *ki ve-emunah hem osim* ('because in faithfulness they were working') is the narrator's commendation: these foremen are so trustworthy that auditing is unnecessary. The word *emunah* ('faithfulness, integrity') shares its root with *amen* — their reliability is as solid as the word that seals a prayer.
17. This verse preserves a priestly prerogative: the silver associated with *asham* (guilt offering) and *chattat* (sin offering) remains priestly income, as legislated in Leviticus and Numbers. Joash's reform redirects voluntary and assessment income but respects the Torah's allocation of sacrificial fees to the priesthood.
18. The narrative shifts abruptly from administrative reform to military crisis. Hazael's capture of Gath — a Philistine city — demonstrates Aram's expansive power. The phrase *va-yasem panav* ('he set his face') toward Jerusalem signals determined intent: Hazael will march on Judah's capital next.

19. The irony is devastating: the king who spent years restoring the Temple now empties it to buy off an invader. Three generations of royal offerings — his father's, grandfather's, and great-grandfather's sacred gifts — are surrendered in a single transaction. The verb *va-ya'al me'al* ('he went up from') indicates Hazael accepted the tribute and departed.
20. The standard closing formula refers readers to the now-lost royal annals of Judah. This source citation recurs for nearly every king and indicates the Deuteronomistic Historian worked from archival materials.
21. The king saved from assassination in infancy dies by assassination as an adult. The verb *va-yiqsheru qesher* ('they conspired a conspiracy') uses the same root as Athaliah's cry in 11:14 — the cycle of conspiracy continues. Beth-millo's exact location is uncertain; Silla is otherwise unknown.
22. The assassins are named — Jozabad (or Jozachar in some manuscripts) and Jehozabad — both bearing names compounded with the divine element. Their motives are not stated in Kings; 2 Chronicles 24:25 attributes the assassination to vengeance for the blood of Jehoiada's son Zechariah. Despite the violent death, Joash receives proper burial in the City of David, maintaining his place in the Davidic succession.

13

Summary: *The chapter covers two Israelite kings — Jehoahaz and Jehoash (Joash) son of Jehoahaz — and includes the death of Elisha. Jehoahaz son of Jehu reigns seventeen years and does evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat. The LORD's anger burns against Israel, and He gives them over to Hazael and Ben-hadad of Aram repeatedly. Jehoahaz pleads with the LORD, and the LORD gives Israel a deliverer so that they escape Aramean domination, yet Israel does not turn from its sins. Hazael reduces Israel's army to almost nothing. Jehoahaz dies and his son Joash succeeds him. Joash of Israel also does evil, continuing in Jeroboam's ways. He reigns sixteen years. Elisha falls ill with his final sickness. Joash visits him weeping and cries out the same words Elisha once cried for Elijah: 'My father! My father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!' Elisha instructs Joash to take a bow and arrows, places his hands on the king's hands, and tells him to shoot eastward — declaring it 'the arrow of the LORD's victory over Aram.' Then Elisha tells Joash to strike the ground with the arrows. Joash strikes three times and stops. Elisha is furious: had Joash struck five or six times, he would have completely destroyed Aram; now he will defeat them only three times. Elisha dies and is buried. Later, Moabite raiders are burying a man when they see a raiding party. They throw the corpse into Elisha's tomb, and when it touches Elisha's bones, the dead man revives and stands up. The chapter concludes noting that Hazael oppressed Israel throughout Jehoahaz's reign, but the LORD was gracious to Israel because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Hazael dies, and Joash recaptures from Ben-hadad the cities Israel had lost — defeating him three times, exactly as Elisha had indicated.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The arrow oracle (verses 14-19) is one of the most dramatic prophetic sign-acts in the Hebrew Bible. Elisha, dying, summons his remaining strength to perform a final prophetic act that will determine the scope of Israel's military recovery. The prophet's hands cover the king's hands on the bow — a physical transmission of prophetic authority and divine power. But the act requires the king's faith and energy to complete: when Joash strikes only three times, his halfheartedness limits God's victory. The scene reveals a theology of divine-human cooperation where God's gift is shaped by human receptivity. The resurrection at Elisha's tomb (verses 20-21) is equally remarkable — even in death, the prophet's bones carry life-giving power. This is the only instance in the Hebrew Bible of a postmortem miracle, and it forms a literary capstone to Elisha's career: he who received a double portion of Elijah's spirit performs miracles beyond the grave.*

Translation Friction: *The identity of the 'deliverer' (moshia) in verse 5 is debated: candidates include Joash of Israel, Jeroboam II, an Assyrian king whose campaigns weakened Aram, or an unnamed figure. The text does not identify the deliverer, and the ambiguity may be intentional — the LORD provides deliverance through various means. The arrow oracle raises questions about the relationship between prophetic sign-acts and their outcomes: does Joash's limited striking cause the limited victory, or does Elisha discern through the act what will happen? The bones miracle in verses 20-21 stands without theological commentary from the narrator — it simply happens, leaving readers to draw their own conclusions about prophetic power, the sanctity of burial sites, and life after death.*

Connections: *Joash's cry 'My father! My father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!' (verse 14) directly quotes Elisha's own cry at Elijah's ascension (2:12), creating a literary bookend for Elisha's entire prophetic career. The arrow oracle connects to other prophetic sign-acts: Isaiah walking naked (Isaiah 20), Jeremiah breaking a pot (Jeremiah 19), Ezekiel lying on his side (Ezekiel 4). The bones miracle anticipates the resurrection theology of*

Ezekiel 37 (the valley of dry bones). The LORD's remembrance of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (verse 23) reaches back to the patriarchal promises of Genesis and forward to every future act of covenant faithfulness — God's commitment to Israel persists despite Israel's persistent unfaithfulness. The three victories over Ben-hadad in verse 25 fulfill Elisha's oracle exactly, demonstrating that prophetic words determine historical outcomes.

¹In the twenty-third year of Joash son of Ahaziah, king of Judah, Jehoahaz son of Jehu became king over Israel in Samaria and reigned seventeen years. ²He did evil in the eyes of the LORD and followed the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had caused Israel to sin. He did not turn away from them. ³The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hand of Hazael king of Aram and into the hand of Ben-hadad son of Hazael, throughout that period. ⁴Jehoahaz pleaded with the LORD, and the LORD listened to him because He saw the oppression of Israel — how the king of Aram was crushing them. ⁵The LORD gave Israel a deliverer, and they escaped from under Aram's power. The people of Israel lived in their homes as before. ⁶Yet they did not turn away from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, who had caused Israel to sin — they persisted in them. Even the Asherah pole remained standing in Samaria. ⁷For Hazael had left Jehoahaz with no more than fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand foot soldiers. The king of Aram had destroyed them and ground them to dust like chaff on a threshing floor. ⁸The rest of the acts of Jehoahaz, all that he did, and his military exploits — are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? ⁹Jehoahaz slept with his fathers and was buried in Samaria. His son Joash reigned in his place. ¹⁰In the thirty-seventh year of Joash king of Judah, Jehoash son of Jehoahaz became king over Israel in Samaria and reigned sixteen years. ¹¹He did evil in the eyes of the LORD. He did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had caused Israel to sin — he persisted in them. ¹²The rest of the acts of Joash, all that he did, and the military exploits with which he fought against Amaziah king of Judah — are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? ¹³Joash slept with his fathers, and Jeroboam sat on his throne. Joash they buried him in Samaria with the kings of Israel. ¹⁴Now Elisha had fallen ill with the sickness from which he would die. Joash king of Israel went down to him and wept over him, saying, "My father! My father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" ¹⁵Elisha said to him, "Get a bow and arrows." So he brought a bow and arrows. ¹⁶He told the king of Israel, "Place your hand on the bow." The king placed his hand on it, and Elisha put his hands over the king's hands. ¹⁷He said, "Open the window toward the east." He opened it. Elisha said, "Shoot!" He shot. Then Elisha declared, "The arrow of the LORD's victory! The arrow of victory over Aram! You will strike Aram at Aphek until you have finished them off." ¹⁸Then he said, "Take the arrows." He took them. He told the king of Israel, "Strike the ground!" The king struck three times and stopped. ¹⁹The man of God was furious with him. "You should have struck five or six times! Then you would have struck Aram until you had destroyed them completely. But now — you will strike Aram only three times." ²⁰Elisha died and was buried. Now Moabite raiding bands used to invade the land at the turn of each year. ²¹Once, as they were burying a man, they caught sight of a raiding party. They threw the body into Elisha's tomb, and when the man touched Elisha's bones, he came back to life and stood on his feet. ²²Hazael king of Aram had oppressed Israel throughout the reign of Jehoahaz. ²³But the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion on them. He turned toward them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was not willing to destroy them, and He had not yet cast them from His presence. ²⁴Hazael king of Aram died, and his son Ben-hadad reigned in his place. ²⁵Jehoash son of Jehoahaz recaptured from Ben-hadad son of Hazael the cities that Hazael had taken from his father Jehoahaz in war. Three times Joash defeated him, and he recovered the cities of Israel.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The synchronism ties the northern king to the southern chronological framework. Jehoahaz inherits the Jehu dynasty's throne but also inherits the Jehu dynasty's spiritual failure — religious reform was never completed under Jehu, and his son makes no attempt to finish it.
2. The standard negative evaluation for northern kings: Jeroboam's sins — the golden calves at Bethel and Dan, the non-Levitical priesthood — function as the fixed benchmark against which every Israelite king is measured. The phrase *lo sar mimmenah* ('he did not turn from it') emphasizes continuity of apostasy across generations.

3. Two generations of Aramean kings oppress Israel — Hazael and his son Ben-hadad (III). The phrase kol ha-yamim ('all the days') indicates sustained domination, not a single campaign. Israel's suffering is presented as divine discipline: the LORD actively 'gave them' (va-yittenem) into Aramean hands.
4. The verb va-yechal ('he pleaded, he softened the face of') implies earnest, perhaps desperate prayer. Despite Jehoahaz's evil reign, the LORD responds — not because the king deserves it, but because God sees the suffering of the people. The theological pattern is Judges-like: sin, oppression, cry, deliverance.
5. The moshia ('deliverer, savior') is unnamed — deliberately so, perhaps, because the emphasis falls on the LORD as the true source of deliverance. The phrase be-oholehem ki-tmol shilshom ('in their tents as yesterday and the day before') is an idiom for normal life restored: people return to their homes and live without fear.
6. Deliverance does not produce repentance. Despite being rescued from Aramean oppression, Israel continues in Jeroboam's cult practices. The Asherah (a wooden cult pole representing the goddess Asherah) standing in Samaria signals that Canaanite worship persists at the very capital of the northern kingdom.
7. The military inventory is devastating: fifty cavalry, ten chariots, ten thousand infantry — a skeleton force for a nation. The simile va-yesimem ke-afar la-dush ('he made them like dust for threshing') pictures Israel's army as grain beaten and scattered on the threshing floor. Aram has reduced Israel to near-helplessness.
8. The mention of gevurato ('his might, his military exploits') alongside a reign of devastating military losses is either formulaic or ironic — perhaps both. The annals presumably recorded whatever resistance Jehoahaz managed despite his diminished forces.
9. The death formula 'slept with his fathers' (va-yishkav im avotav) is the standard expression for a natural, non-violent death. Burial in Samaria confirms his status as a legitimate northern king. The Jehu dynasty continues through a third generation.
10. Two kings named Joash now reign simultaneously — one in Judah, one in Israel. The synchronism ties the northern Joash to the southern Joash's chronological framework. The Jehu dynasty enters its third generation with a sixteen-year reign.
11. The evaluation is identical to his father's: the same formula, the same failure, the same Jeroboam benchmark. The repetition across generations emphasizes that sin in Israel is systemic, not personal — it is embedded in the kingdom's institutional worship practices.
12. The closing formula for Joash of Israel anticipates the north-south conflict detailed in chapter 14. The mention of war with Amaziah — a Judean king — reminds readers that the divided kingdoms are not merely separate; they are sometimes enemies.
13. Jeroboam (II) succeeds his father — the fourth generation of the Jehu dynasty, fulfilling the LORD's promise that Jehu's sons would sit on the throne to the fourth generation (10:30). Burial 'with the kings of Israel' indicates an established royal cemetery in Samaria.
14. The phrase cholyo asher yamut bo ('his sickness from which he would die') signals that this is Elisha's final scene. The king's visit to a dying prophet — going down to him, weeping over his face — shows genuine reverence. Elisha's career, which began with Elijah's ascent, now ends with the same words that marked that beginning.
15. The dying prophet initiates a sign-act — a prophetic performance that enacts and determines future reality. The bow and arrows are not metaphorical; they are the instruments of the oracle that follows. Joash obeys without question.
16. The physical contact — Elisha's hands covering the king's hands — transmits prophetic authority into a military act. The prophet's power flows through the king's body into the weapon. This is the last act of a prophetic career that began when Elijah threw his mantle over Elisha's shoulders (1 Kings 19:19).
17. The arrow functions as a prophetic sign-act: Elisha interprets the shot as a divine oracle of victory. Aphek (east of the Kinnereth/Sea of Galilee) was a recurring battle site between Israel and Aram. The phrase ad kalleh ('until finishing, until destruction') promises complete victory — a promise that will be tragically limited in the next verses.
18. The second sign-act: striking the ground with arrows. The command hakh artzah ('strike the ground!') is open-ended — Elisha does not specify how many times to strike. Joash strikes three times and stops (va-ya'amod, 'he stood still, he ceased'). His restraint will prove costly.
19. Elisha's anger (va-yiqtzof) is fierce — the verb describes hot, overflowing rage. The king's lack of intensity in the sign-act has limited God's gift. Five or six strikes would have meant total victory; three strikes means three partial victories. The oracle reveals a theology where divine promise and human response together shape the outcome. God's generosity is real but not automatic — it requires matching human energy.
20. Elisha's death is reported with stark brevity: va-yamot Elisha va-yiqberuhu ('Elisha died and they buried him'). No eulogy, no mourning narrative — just two verbs and a burial. The Moabite raids are mentioned to set up the miracle that follows: even Elisha's burial site is a place of conflict and danger.
21. The rushed burial — they throw the corpse into the nearest available tomb — results from panic at seeing raiders. The contact with Elisha's bones (va-yigga ha-ish be-atzmot Elisha) triggers resurrection: va-yechi va-yaqom al raglav ('he lived and stood on his feet'). The miracle is Elisha's final sign, performed without volition or consciousness, demonstrating that the power of God in the prophet outlasts the prophet himself.
22. The narrator returns to the political summary, recapping the Aramean oppression that defined Jehoahaz's reign. The verb lachatz ('oppressed, pressed') is the same word used for Egypt's oppression of Israel in Exodus, creating an implied parallel between Aramean dominance and Egyptian

slavery.

- 23.** This verse is the theological center of the chapter. God's faithfulness to Israel is grounded entirely in covenant loyalty to the patriarchs. The three patriarchal names — Abraham, Isaac, Jacob — invoke the full scope of God's promissory history. The warning note *ad attah* ('until now') foreshadows the Assyrian exile of 722 BCE: divine patience is real but not infinite.
- 24.** Hazael's death is the turning point for Israel's fortunes. His son Ben-hadad (III) will prove a weaker ruler, allowing Israel to recover lost territory. The death of an enemy king is, in this context, an act of divine deliverance.
- 25.** The three victories correspond exactly to the three strikes of the arrow oracle (v18-19). Elisha's word determines the scope of military success: no more, no less. The verb *va-yashev* ('he returned, he recovered') indicates restoration — cities that had been Israelite are Israelite again. The prophecy is fulfilled, but incompletely: had Joash struck five or six times, the recovery would have been total.

14

Summary: *Amaziah son of Joash becomes king of Judah at twenty-five and reigns twenty-nine years. He does what is right in the eyes of the LORD, though not like David — and the high places remain. He executes his father's assassins but spares their children, following the Torah's principle that children shall not be put to death for their parents' sins. Amaziah achieves a military victory over Edom, killing ten thousand in the Valley of Salt and capturing Sela. Emboldened, he challenges Jehoash king of Israel to battle. Jehoash responds with a mocking fable: a thistle in Lebanon asks a cedar for his daughter in marriage, but a wild animal tramples the thistle. The message is clear — Amaziah is overreaching. Amaziah will not listen. They meet at Beth-shemesh, Judah is routed, and Jehoash captures Amaziah. Jehoash then marches on Jerusalem, breaks down four hundred cubits of the city wall, and plunders the Temple and palace treasuries, taking hostages back to Samaria. Amaziah outlives Jehoash by fifteen years. Eventually a conspiracy forms against Amaziah in Jerusalem. He flees to Lachish, but they pursue and kill him there. His body is brought back on horses and buried in Jerusalem. The people of Judah make his sixteen-year-old son Azariah (Uzziah) king. Azariah rebuilds Elath and restores it to Judah. The chapter concludes with Jeroboam II of Israel, who reigns forty-one years, does evil, yet restores Israel's borders from Lebo-hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, fulfilling the word of the LORD through the prophet Jonah son of Amittai.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The thistle-and-cedar fable (verse 9) is one of only two fables in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Judges 9:8-15, Jotham's fable). Jehoash uses it to devastating rhetorical effect: Amaziah is the thistle, Israel the cedar, and the wild beast represents the unpredictable consequences of hubris. The fable warns that a minor victory (over Edom) does not qualify someone for a major war. Amaziah's refusal to heed the warning proves the fable's point — the thistle gets trampled. The mention of Jonah son of Amittai (verse 25) provides the historical anchor for the prophetic book of Jonah: the same prophet who predicted Israel's territorial expansion is the one sent to preach to Nineveh. This note transforms our understanding of the Book of Jonah by situating it in a specific political context.*

Translation Friction: *The chronological relationship between Amaziah's twenty-nine-year reign (verse 2), his survival fifteen years after Jehoash's death (verse 17), and the accession of Azariah (verse 21) creates difficulties for precise dating. Some scholars posit a co-regency period. The identification of Sela in verse 7 is debated — it may be Petra in Edom or another site. The abruptness of Amaziah's defeat and humiliation after his Edomite success raises narrative questions: 2 Chronicles 25 fills the gap by explaining that Amaziah brought back Edomite gods and worshiped them, provoking divine judgment through the Israelite defeat. Kings omits this theological explanation, leaving the reversal of fortune unexplained within the chapter itself. Jeroboam II's positive military achievements (v25-27) stand in tension with his negative theological evaluation (v24), creating the paradox of a sinful king who restores national greatness.*

Connections: *Amaziah's obedience to Deuteronomy 24:16 (verse 6, 'children shall not die for their fathers') is a rare explicit Torah citation in Kings, demonstrating that the written law functions as operative legislation. The Edomite conflict continues the ancient Jacob-Esau rivalry that runs from Genesis 25 through Obadiah. The thistle fable connects to the wisdom tradition's use of nature imagery for moral instruction. Jehoash's breach of Jerusalem's wall (verse 13) prefigures the Babylonian destruction of the walls in 587 BCE. Jeroboam II's restoration of borders 'from Lebo-hamath to the Sea of the Arabah' (verse 25) echoes the idealized Solomonic boundaries (1 Kings 8:65), suggesting a brief return to imperial-scale territory. The prophet Jonah son of Amittai links this chapter to the Book of Jonah, where the same prophet is called to Nineveh — the capital of the Assyrian empire*

that will eventually destroy the northern kingdom Jonah had blessed.

¹In the second year of Joash son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel, Amaziah son of Joash became king of Judah. ²He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddan, from Jerusalem. ³He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, though not like his ancestor David. He did everything his father Joash had done. ⁴However, the high places were not removed. The people continued sacrificing and burning incense at the high places. ⁵As soon as the kingdom was firmly in his hand, he executed the servants who had assassinated his father the king. ⁶But he did not put the sons of the assassins to death, in accordance with what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, where the LORD commanded: 'Parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their parents. Each person shall be put to death only for his own sin.' ⁷He struck down ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt and captured Sela in battle, renaming it Joktheel — a name it bears to this day. ⁸Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, "Come, let us face each other in battle." ⁹Jehoash king of Israel sent back to Amaziah king of Judah: "A thistle in Lebanon sent a message to a cedar in Lebanon: 'Give your daughter to my son in marriage.' But a wild animal of Lebanon came passing by and trampled the thistle. ¹⁰You have indeed defeated Edom, and your heart has become proud. Enjoy your glory and stay home! Why provoke disaster? You will fall — you and Judah with you." ¹¹But Amaziah would not listen. So Jehoash king of Israel advanced, and he and Amaziah king of Judah faced each other at Beth-shemesh in Judah. ¹²Judah was routed by Israel, and every man fled to his home. ¹³Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, son of Jehoash son of Ahaziah, at Beth-shemesh. Then he came to Jerusalem and broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate — four hundred cubits. ¹⁴He seized all the gold and silver and all the vessels found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace, along with hostages, and returned to Samaria. ¹⁵The rest of the acts of Jehoash — what he did and his military exploits, and how he fought against Amaziah king of Judah — are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? ¹⁶Jehoash slept with his fathers and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel. His son Jeroboam reigned in his place. ¹⁷Amaziah son of Joash, king of Judah, survived Jehoash son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel, by fifteen years. ¹⁸As for the remaining deeds of Amaziah — are they not recorded in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ¹⁹A conspiracy was formed against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish. But they sent men after him to Lachish and killed him there. ²⁰They carried his body back on horses and buried him in Jerusalem with his ancestors in the City of David. ²¹The entire populace of Judah chose Azariah — then sixteen years old — and installed him as king to succeed his father Amaziah. ²²He rebuilt Elath, returning it to Judah after the king slept with his fathers. ²³In the fifteenth year of Amaziah son of Joash, king of Judah, Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel, became king in Samaria and reigned forty-one years. ²⁴He did evil in the eyes of the LORD. He did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had caused Israel to sin. ²⁵He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath-hepher. ²⁶For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter — there was no one left, whether bond or free, and no one to help Israel. ²⁷The LORD had not decreed that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so He delivered them through Jeroboam son of Joash. ²⁸The rest of the acts of Jeroboam — all that he did, his military exploits, how he fought, and how he recovered Damascus and Hamath for Israel — are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? ²⁹Jeroboam slept with his fathers, the kings of Israel, and his son Zechariah reigned in his place.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

- Both kingdoms now have kings named Joash (or Jehoash). The synchronism ties Amaziah's accession to the northern Joash's second year. The parallel naming creates potential confusion that the narrator manages through patronymics and kingdom designations.
- The standard regnal formula: age at accession, length of reign, queen mother's name and origin. Jehoaddan ('the LORD is delight') is from Jerusalem itself — a native Judean queen mother, unlike the foreign-born mothers who imported alien worship.

3. A qualified positive evaluation with two comparisons: Amaziah falls short of David (the gold standard) but matches his father Joash (a conditional faithful king). The phrase *raq lo ke-David* ('only not like David') establishes David as the permanent benchmark for Judean kings — a standard none of them fully meets.
4. The identical high-places caveat that qualified Joash's reign (12:4). The persistence of this note across multiple kings underscores the systemic nature of the problem: decentralized worship is not a single king's failure but a national habit no king before Hezekiah will break.
5. Amaziah waits until his power is consolidated (*ka-asher chazqah ha-mamlakhah be-yado*, 'when the kingdom was strong in his hand') before acting against the assassins. This is political prudence: premature justice against well-connected conspirators could destabilize a new reign.
6. The explicit quotation from Deuteronomy 24:16 is introduced with the full authority formula: *ka-katuv be-sefer torat Mosheh asher tsivah YHWH* ('as written in the Book of the Law of Moses which the LORD commanded'). This is prescriptive Torah being applied as positive law — one of the clearest demonstrations in Kings that the Deuteronomic code functions as the kingdom's constitutional document.
7. The Valley of Salt (south of the Dead Sea) was a traditional site of Israelite-Edomite battles (cf. 2 Samuel 8:13). Sela ('rock, cliff') is likely a fortified Edomite city — possibly Petra or another elevated stronghold. The renaming of Joktheel ('God's obedience' or 'God has subdued') marks the conquest as divinely aided.
8. The challenge *lekhah nitreh fanim* ('come, let us see faces') is a polite idiom for a military confrontation — literally 'let us meet face to face.' Amaziah's Edomite victory has inflated his confidence. The full patronymic chain — 'Jehoash son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu' — emphasizes the northern king's dynastic pedigree.
9. The fable is devastatingly concise. The thistle (*choach*, a thorny weed) represents Amaziah; the cedar represents Israel; the proposed marriage represents Amaziah's pretension to equality with a greater power. The wild animal that casually destroys the thistle represents the unintended consequences of overreach. Jehoash does not threaten directly — the fable makes the threat for him.
10. Jehoash drops the fable and speaks plainly: *nesaakha libbkha* ('your heart has lifted you up') diagnoses Amaziah's problem as pride inflated by a limited victory. The warning is both political and prophetic: *tithgareh be-ra'ah* ('you are provoking trouble') and *venafalta* ('you will fall'). The prediction that Judah will fall with its king proves exactly correct.
11. The terse *ve-lo shama Amatzياهو* ('and Amaziah did not listen') is the narrative's verdict: refusal to hear wisdom leads to catastrophe. Beth-shemesh — a Judean town west of Jerusalem — indicates that the battle takes place on Judean soil. Israel is the invader, responding to Judah's provocation.
12. The verb *va-yinnagef* ('was struck, was defeated') describes a comprehensive military collapse. The phrase *va-yanusu ish le-ohalav* ('each fled to his tent') indicates total dissolution of the army — not an orderly retreat but a panicked dispersal.
13. The Judean king is captured on the battlefield — a profound humiliation. Jehoash then breaches Jerusalem's northern wall across a four-hundred-cubit stretch (roughly six hundred feet), leaving the capital defenseless against future attack. The breach runs between two named gates on the northern wall, the side most vulnerable to approach.
14. The plunder is comprehensive: Temple vessels, palace treasury, and hostages (*benei ha-ta'aruvot*, 'sons of the pledges' — persons held as security for future compliance). For the second time in two chapters, the Temple that Joash repaired is stripped of its wealth. The hostages ensure Judah's continued submission.
15. The closing formula for Jehoash of Israel. The war with Amaziah is singled out as a notable achievement, reflecting the fact that defeating the Judean king and breaching Jerusalem's walls was an unprecedented northern triumph.
16. Jehoash receives the standard peaceful death formula. Jeroboam II succeeds him — the fourth generation of the Jehu dynasty, fulfilling the LORD's promise of four generations on the throne (10:30).
17. This chronological note creates the unusual situation of a defeated, humiliated king continuing to reign for fifteen more years. Amaziah's survival is physical but his kingdom has been diminished — its walls breached, its treasury plundered, its pride broken.
18. The standard source citation for a Judean king. The formula directs readers to a more detailed account that is now lost.
19. Like his father Joash before him, Amaziah dies by conspiracy. Flight to Lachish — a major fortified city in the Judean lowlands — suggests he hoped to find loyal forces there. The pursuit and assassination at Lachish shows the conspirators' determination: distance from Jerusalem does not save him.
20. Despite the violent death, Amaziah receives a proper royal burial in the Davidic cemetery. The conspirators are not revolutionaries seeking to end the dynasty — they remove one king but preserve the institution. The transport on horses (*al ha-susim*) indicates a ceremonial return of the king's body.
21. The people (*kol am Yehudah*) — not the court, not the priests — select the next king. Azariah (also called Uzziah) is young but becomes one of Judah's most capable rulers. The popular selection echoes the installation of Joash by 'all the people of the land' in chapter 11.
22. Elath (modern Eilat/Aqaba), at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba, was strategically vital for Red Sea trade. Its restoration to Judah indicates Azariah's military and economic ambitions. This brief note anticipates the fuller account of Azariah's reign in chapter 15.

23. Jeroboam II's forty-one-year reign is the longest of any northern king and coincides with one of Israel's most prosperous periods. The synchronism creates a confusing situation: both Judah and Israel recently had kings named Joash, and now both patronymics read 'son of Joash' — but they are different men.
24. The standard negative formula for northern kings. The irony of naming this Jeroboam after the dynasty's founding sinner is compounded by the fact that Jeroboam II is the most politically successful northern king since the original Jeroboam. Military greatness and religious faithfulness move in opposite directions.
25. Lebo-hamath ('the entrance of Hamath') marks the northernmost extent of the promised land (Numbers 34:8). The Sea of the Arabah is the Dead Sea. Jonah son of Amittai from Gath-hepher (a town in Zebulun, near Nazareth) is the historical prophet behind the Book of Jonah. This verse anchors the literary Jonah in a specific historical moment and political context.
26. The phrase *efes atzur ve-efes azuv* ('there was no one restrained and no one released') is a merism — it means 'absolutely no one,' covering every category of person. Israel's suffering was total and without human remedy. God's response through Jeroboam II is again motivated by compassion for suffering, not approval of the king's character.
27. God delivers Israel through an evil king because His purpose is not yet to destroy the nation. The phrase *limchot et shem Yisra'el mitachat ha-shamayim* ('to blot out the name of Israel from under heaven') is the language of total annihilation — and the LORD has not yet spoken that word. The deliverance through Jeroboam is an act of patient grace, not an endorsement of his reign.
28. The recovery of Damascus and Hamath represents extraordinary territorial expansion — these were Aramean capitals, not merely border towns. The phrase 'for Israel' (*le-Yisra'el*) is textually difficult; some manuscripts read 'which had belonged to Judah, for Israel,' suggesting Jeroboam reclaimed territories that had once been part of the united monarchy under David and Solomon.
29. Zechariah's accession fulfills the LORD's promise to Jehu that four generations of his descendants would sit on Israel's throne (10:30) — Jehu, Jehoahaz, Joash, Jeroboam II, and now briefly Zechariah as the fifth generation, though his reign will be cut violently short (15:8-12). The Jehu dynasty has reached its end.

15

Summary: This chapter accelerates through multiple reigns in both kingdoms, covering a period of rapid succession and political violence. In Judah, Azariah (Uzziah) reigns fifty-two years and does right in the eyes of the LORD, though the high places remain. The LORD strikes him with a skin disease, and he lives in a separate house while his son Jotham governs. Jotham then reigns sixteen years and also does right, though again the high places persist. In Israel, the chapter narrates a dizzying sequence of kings. Zechariah son of Jeroboam reigns only six months before Shallum son of Jabesh conspires against him and kills him publicly, ending the Jehu dynasty after five generations — fulfilling the LORD's word that Jehu's sons would sit on the throne to the fourth generation. Shallum himself reigns only one month before Menahem son of Gadi strikes him down and seizes the throne. Menahem's reign of ten years is marked by brutal violence — he sacks Tiphshah and rips open its pregnant women — and by submission to Assyria: when Pul (Tiglath-pileser III) invades, Menahem pays a thousand talents of silver to secure Assyrian backing for his throne. Menahem's son Pekahiah reigns two years before his officer Pekah son of Remaliah conspires against him and assassinates him in the citadel of Samaria. Pekah reigns twenty years and does evil. During his reign, Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria conquers large portions of northern Israel — Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, Galilee, and all the land of Naphtali — and departs the population to Assyria. This is the beginning of the Assyrian exile. Finally, Hoshea son of Elah conspires against Pekah, kills him, and takes the throne. The chapter ends with synchronistic notes tying Hoshea's accession to Jotham's reign in Judah.

What Makes This Remarkable: The chapter's most striking feature is the sheer velocity of political collapse in the northern kingdom. In the space of roughly twenty years, Israel cycles through five kings, three of whom seize power by assassination. The contrast with Judah is stark: the south has two stable, long-reigning kings (Azariah's fifty-two years and Jotham's sixteen) while the north disintegrates into violence and instability. The mention of Tiglath-pileser III (Pul) introduces the Assyrian superpower that will eventually destroy the northern kingdom entirely. Menahem's payment of tribute (verse 19-20) and Pekah's territorial losses (verse 29) mark the stages of Israel's absorption into the Assyrian sphere — from vassalage to amputation to, eventually, extinction. Azariah's skin disease (verse 5) is reported without moral explanation in Kings, though 2 Chronicles 26:16-21 attributes it to his presumptuous entry into the Temple to burn incense.

Translation Friction: The chronology of this chapter is among the most difficult in Kings. Pekah's twenty-year reign (verse 27) is particularly problematic: if taken at face value alongside the synchronisms, it creates overlaps that are hard to resolve without positing co-regencies or rival kingdoms within Israel. Some scholars suggest Pekah ruled a competing government in Gilead before seizing Samaria. Azariah's fifty-two-year reign creates similar difficulties when correlated with the northern chronology. The identification of Pul with Tiglath-pileser III (verse 19) is confirmed by Assyrian records but represents a conflation of throne name and personal name. The phrase 'the LORD struck the king' with skin disease (verse 5) raises the question of divine causation — Kings offers no reason for the affliction, while Chronicles provides a specific act of sacrilege. The deportation in verse 29 represents the first wave of what will become a total exile, but the text does not editorialize on its significance.

Connections: Azariah/Uzziah's long reign provides the historical backdrop for the early ministries of Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1, 'In the year that King Uzziah died') and Amos (Amos 1:1). His skin disease connects to the Levitical legislation on skin afflictions (Leviticus 13-14) and to other instances of divinely inflicted disease in Kings (Naaman in 2 Kings 5, Gehazi in 2 Kings 5:27). The fulfillment of the Jehu dynasty's four-generation limit (verse 12, citing 10:30) demonstrates the Deuteronomistic theme that prophetic words determine historical outcomes. Menahem's tribute to Assyria anticipates Hezekiah's later tribute (18:14-16) and the broader pattern of Israelite kings emptying treasuries to buy off imperial powers. The Assyrian deportations (verse 29) begin the process that culminates in the fall of Samaria in chapter 17 — the theological climax of the northern kingdom narrative. Pekah's alliance with Rezin of Aram against Judah (referenced in Isaiah 7:1-9) sets up the Syro-Ephraimite crisis that dominates Isaiah's early prophecy.

¹In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Azariah son of Amaziah became king of Judah. ²He was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah, from Jerusalem. ³He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father Amaziah had done. ⁴However, the high places were not removed. The people continued sacrificing and burning incense at the high places. ⁵The LORD struck the king so that he had a skin disease until the day of his death. He lived in a separate house, while Jotham the king's son administered the palace and governed the people of the land. ⁶As for the remaining deeds of Azariah and all that he did — are they not recorded in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ⁷Azariah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his ancestors in the City of David. His son Jotham reigned in his place. ⁸In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah king of Judah, Zechariah son of Jeroboam became king over Israel in Samaria. He reigned six months. ⁹He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, as his ancestors had done. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had caused Israel to sin. ¹⁰Shallum son of Jabesh conspired against him and struck him down publicly, killing him. He reigned in his place. ¹¹The rest of the acts of Zechariah — they are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel. ¹²This fulfilled the word of the LORD that He had spoken to Jehu: "Your descendants shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation." And so it was. ¹³Shallum son of Jabesh became king in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah king of Judah, and he reigned one month in Samaria. ¹⁴Menahem son of Gadi marched up from Tirzah, came to Samaria, struck down Shallum son of Jabesh in Samaria, killed him, and reigned in his place. ¹⁵The rest of the acts of Shallum and the conspiracy he organized — they are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel. ¹⁶At that time Menahem attacked Tiphshah and everyone in it and its territory, starting from Tirzah, because they did not open their gates to him. He attacked it and ripped open all its pregnant women. ¹⁷In the thirty-ninth year of Azariah king of Judah, Menahem son of Gadi became king over Israel. He reigned ten years in Samaria. ¹⁸He did evil in the eyes of the LORD. Throughout his reign he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had caused Israel to sin. ¹⁹Pul king of Assyria invaded the land. Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver so that Pul would support him and secure the kingdom in his hand. ²⁰Menahem raised the silver from Israel, levying fifty shekels of silver on every man of wealth, to pay the king of Assyria. The king of Assyria then withdrew and did not remain in the land. ²¹As for the remaining deeds of Menahem and all that he did — are they not recorded in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? ²²Menahem slept with his fathers, and his son Pekahiah reigned in his place. ²³In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekahiah son of Menahem became king over Israel in Samaria. He reigned two years. ²⁴He did evil in the eyes of the LORD. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had caused Israel to sin. ²⁵Pekah son of Remaliah,

his officer, conspired against him and struck him down in Samaria, in the citadel of the royal palace — along with Argob and Arieah — with fifty men from Gilead. He killed him and reigned in his place. ²⁶The rest of the acts of Pekahiah and all that he did — they are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel. ²⁷In the fifty-second year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekah son of Remaliah became king over Israel in Samaria. He reigned twenty years. ²⁸He did evil in the eyes of the LORD. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had caused Israel to sin. ²⁹In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee — all the land of Naphtali — and deported the people to Assyria. ³⁰Hoshea son of Elah formed a conspiracy against Pekah son of Remaliah. He struck him down and killed him, and reigned in his place in the twentieth year of Jotham son of Uzziah. ³¹The rest of the acts of Pekah and all that he did — they are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel. ³²In the second year of Pekah son of Remaliah, king of Israel, Jotham son of Uzziah became king of Judah. ³³He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerusha, daughter of Zadok. ³⁴He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father Uzziah had done. ³⁵However, the high places were not removed. The people continued sacrificing and burning incense at the high places. He built the Upper Gate of the house of the LORD. ³⁶As for the remaining deeds of Jotham and all that he did — are they not recorded in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ³⁷In those days the LORD began to send Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah against Judah. ³⁸Jotham slept with his fathers and was buried with his ancestors in the City of David, his ancestor. His son Ahaz reigned in his place.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The synchronism links Azariah's accession to Jeroboam II's twenty-seventh year. Azariah is also known as Uzziah — both names are used in the Hebrew Bible, with Uzziah predominating in Isaiah and Chronicles. The dual naming may reflect a throne name versus a personal name.
2. Fifty-two years is the longest reign recorded for any king of Judah. The queen mother Jecoliah (Yekholyahu, 'the LORD is able') is again a Jerusalemite, continuing the pattern of native Judean maternal lineage for the more successful kings.
3. The positive evaluation is measured against his father Amaziah — qualified righteousness rather than Davidic perfection. The comparison formula creates a chain of partially faithful kings, each doing right but not completely.
4. The recurrence of this identical formula — now for the fourth consecutive Judean king — has the effect of a drumbeat. Each repetition reinforces the systemic nature of the failure and builds anticipation for the king who will finally act (Hezekiah, chapter 18).
5. The term *metzora* ('one with a skin disease') triggers the Levitical quarantine laws: the afflicted person must live apart. The 'separate house' (*beit ha-chofshit*, literally 'house of freedom' or 'house of separation') may be a quarantine residence or a designation for the king's withdrawal from public duties. Jotham functions as regent — *al ha-bayit* ('over the house') is the title of the palace administrator, and *shofet et am ha-aretz* ('judging the people of the land') indicates full governing authority.
6. The closing formula for Azariah is remarkably brief for a king who reigned fifty-two years. Kings compresses his entire reign into five verses, suggesting the Deuteronomistic Historian had limited interest in this period — or that the Chronicler's much fuller account (2 Chronicles 26) draws on sources Kings did not use.
7. Despite his skin disease, Azariah receives the standard honorable burial formula in the City of David. 2 Chronicles 26:23 adds that he was buried 'in the field of the burial that belonged to the kings' rather than in the royal tombs themselves, suggesting his condition affected even his burial location.
8. Six months — the Jehu dynasty's final generation barely holds power. After four generations of kings ruling for decades, the fifth collapses almost immediately. The brevity of the reign signals the dynasty's exhaustion.
9. The formula applies now to the last of the Jehu line. Five generations of identical spiritual failure: the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat persist unbroken from the kingdom's founding to its approaching collapse.
10. The assassination is public — *qovel am* ('before the people') indicates a brazen, open killing rather than a palace conspiracy. Shallum does not hide his violence; it is a public execution disguised as regime change. The Jehu dynasty, which began with Jehu's violent purge, ends with the same kind of violence.
11. The closing formula for a six-month reign — there can have been little to record beyond the brief, violent end.
12. The narrator pauses to connect Zechariah's fall to prophecy. The promise to Jehu (10:30) was both a blessing (four generations) and an implicit limit (only four). The phrase *va-yehi khen* ('and so it was') is the Deuteronomistic Historian's signature verification: prophetic word and historical outcome align perfectly.

13. One month — the shortest reign in Israelite history. The synchronism uses 'Uzziah' rather than 'Azariah,' illustrating the interchangeable use of both names for the same Judean king. Shallum's month-long rule shows that assassinating a king does not guarantee the ability to hold a kingdom.
14. Menahem comes from Tirzah — the old northern capital before Omri built Samaria. His march from Tirzah to Samaria may indicate a rival power base. The cycle of assassination continues: the assassin is himself assassinated, and the new assassin takes the throne.
15. Even a one-month king merits the closing formula and a source citation. The annals presumably recorded the circumstances of both his conspiracy and his defeat.
16. The atrocity — ripping open pregnant women (biquea, 'he split open') — is reported without commentary but with full horror. Tiphah's refusal to submit provoked a savagery that the narrator records as bare fact. This act places Menahem alongside the worst of Israel's enemies; the same atrocity is attributed to Aram's Hazael in 8:12 and condemned as a war crime by Amos (Amos 1:13).
17. Ten years is a relatively stable reign given the chaos surrounding it. Menahem achieves this stability partly through terror (verse 16) and partly through Assyrian backing (verse 19). His power rests on violence and foreign support, not legitimacy.
18. The phrase kol yamav ('all his days') adds emphasis to the standard formula — not merely habitual sin but lifelong, uninterrupted commitment to the apostate worship system. Every northern king since Jeroboam I receives this identical verdict.
19. Pul is identified in Assyrian records as the throne name of Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 BCE), one of the most powerful Assyrian rulers. A thousand talents of silver is staggering — for comparison, Solomon's annual gold income was 666 talents (1 Kings 10:14). Menahem's payment makes Israel a vassal state: independence is traded for personal political survival.
20. The tax falls on gibborei ha-chayil ('the mighty men of substance, the wealthy landowners') — fifty shekels each. If a thousand talents equals three million shekels, the levy on sixty thousand wealthy households reveals Israel's remaining economic base. The Assyrian withdrawal confirms the transaction: tribute paid, protection granted.
21. The standard closing formula. The annals presumably recorded more detail about Menahem's decade of rule, including whatever additional military campaigns and administrative actions are summarized by 'all that he did.'
22. Menahem is one of the few usurper-kings to die naturally and pass the throne to his son. His brutal methods and Assyrian sponsorship gave him stability that his predecessors lacked, but his son will not enjoy the same protection.
23. Two years — the throne purchased by Menahem's violence and Assyrian silver lasts barely into the next generation. The rapid succession resumes.
24. The formula repeats yet again — unchanged, unchangeable. The narrator's relentless repetition drives home the point: every northern king, regardless of how he came to power, maintains the same apostate worship system. The problem is structural, not personal.
25. Pekah is a shalish ('officer, third man') — a military aide. The assassination takes place in the armon ('citadel, inner fortress') of the palace, the most secure location in Samaria. Argob and Arieah may be co-conspirators or additional victims; the text is ambiguous. The fifty Gileadites indicate Pekah's power base is in the Transjordan, east of the Jordan River.
26. The closing formula for a two-year reign. The brevity of Pekahiah's rule means the annals likely contained little beyond the circumstances of his accession and death.
27. The twenty-year reign is chronologically difficult — it creates overlaps with other synchronisms that suggest Pekah may have exercised rival authority in Gilead before capturing Samaria. The figure may include a pre-Samaria period of regional control in the Transjordan.
28. The formula is unchanged. The reader has now encountered this exact evaluation for every northern king in the chapter — Zechariah, Shallum (implied), Menahem, Pekahiah, and now Pekah. The repetition is not careless; it is relentless theological argument.
29. This campaign corresponds to Tiglath-pileser III's 733-732 BCE invasion, well attested in Assyrian records. The deportation (va-yaglom Ashurah) marks the first wave of exile — entire populations relocated to Mesopotamia. Israel is being reduced to a rump state around Samaria. The cities listed trace a path from the Lebanese border southward through Galilee and eastward into the Transjordan — Assyria is consuming Israel from the edges inward.
30. The fourth assassination in this chapter. Hoshea becomes Israel's last king — though the reader does not yet know this. Assyrian records suggest Tiglath-pileser III installed Hoshea as a puppet ruler after Pekah's anti-Assyrian policies. The synchronism with Jotham's twentieth year creates chronological difficulties since Jotham's reign is recorded as only sixteen years.
31. The closing formula for Pekah. His twenty-year reign saw the most significant territorial losses in Israel's history — the Assyrian annexation that reduced the kingdom to a fraction of its former size.
32. The narrative pivots back to Judah for Jotham's regnal account. Jotham has already been functioning as regent during his father's illness (verse 5), so his formal accession marks a transition from de facto to de jure rule.
33. Jerusha bat Tzadok — if this Zadok is a priestly figure, the queen mother has priestly lineage, which would strengthen Jotham's connections to the Temple establishment. The name Jerusha ('possessed, inherited') may signal legitimacy and continuity.
34. The positive evaluation continues the pattern of qualified righteousness in Judah. Jotham is measured against his father Uzziah — himself a qualified success. The chain of 'good but not David' kings stretches across multiple generations.

35. The high-places caveat is followed by a positive note: Jotham builds the Upper Gate of the Temple. This architectural achievement signals investment in centralized worship even while decentralized worship persists — a paradox that characterizes multiple Judean reigns.
36. The standard source citation. 2 Chronicles 27 provides a fuller account of Jotham's reign, including his victory over the Ammonites and his building projects.
37. This verse introduces the Syro-Ephraimite crisis — the alliance of Aram (under Rezin) and Israel (under Pekah) against Judah. The narrator frames this as divine action: the LORD 'began to send' (hechel le-hashliach) these enemies against Judah. This crisis dominates Isaiah 7-8 and leads to Ahaz's fateful appeal to Assyria for help (chapter 16).
38. Jotham receives the full honorable death-and-burial formula. His son Ahaz will prove one of Judah's worst kings — a dramatic reversal from the qualified faithfulness of the preceding generations. The City of David burial confirms Jotham's place in the legitimate Davidic succession.

16

Summary: *Ahaz son of Jotham becomes king of Judah at age twenty and reigns sixteen years in Jerusalem. Unlike David his ancestor, he follows the practices of the northern kings, even passing his son through fire in imitation of the nations God had driven out. When Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel attack Jerusalem in the Syro-Ephraimite crisis, Ahaz refuses to trust God (as Isaiah urges in Isaiah 7) and instead strips the Temple and palace treasuries to buy Assyrian intervention. Tiglath-pileser responds, captures Damascus, and kills Rezin. But the price is catastrophic: Ahaz travels to Damascus to meet his new overlord, sees a pagan altar there, sends its design back to Jerusalem, and orders the priest Urijah to build a replica. The great bronze altar of Solomon is pushed aside, the Temple furnishings are dismantled to appease Assyria, and Judah's worship is physically reshaped to match its political submission.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter records the most deliberate liturgical vandalism in Judah's history before the exile. Ahaz does not simply neglect worship — he redesigns it. The new altar from Damascus replaces the Solomonic altar as the primary place of sacrifice, and Ahaz personally directs the priest Urijah in every detail of the rearrangement. The priest complies without recorded objection, making this a story of institutional capitulation as much as royal sin. The narrator presents Ahaz's actions with clinical precision: he lists every item moved, removed, or repurposed. The theological point emerges from the architecture — when you rearrange the altar, you rearrange the relationship with God. The Syro-Ephraimite crisis, which Isaiah treated as a test of faith (Isaiah 7:9: 'if you do not stand firm in faith, you will not stand at all'), Ahaz treats as a problem to be solved with Assyrian gold. He passes the test of political survival but fails the test of covenant trust.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase he'evir et-beno ba-esh ('he made his son pass through the fire') in verse 3 has long been debated — does it mean literal child sacrifice (as in Moabite practice) or a dedication ritual involving fire? The Hebrew Bible consistently treats it as an abomination (Deuteronomy 18:10, Leviticus 18:21), and the parallel in 2 Chronicles 28:3 confirms burning. We render it as 'made his son pass through the fire' to preserve the Hebrew idiom while noting in the translator's notes that the context demands a lethal reading. The relationship between Ahaz and Urijah the priest is unusual — the king commands and the priest obeys without prophetic consultation or legal objection, suggesting either Urijah's complicity or the monarchy's unchecked power over the priesthood at this period.*

Connections: *The Syro-Ephraimite coalition (Rezin and Pekah attacking Judah) is the same crisis addressed in Isaiah 7-8, where the prophet offers Ahaz a sign and the king refuses with false piety. The dismantling of the bronze sea from its ox-pedestals (v. 17) echoes Solomon's original construction in 1 Kings 7:23-26 — what Solomon built, Ahaz tears apart. Ahaz's appeal to Assyria for deliverance (v. 7: 'I am your servant and your son') uses covenant language — he addresses Tiglath-pileser with the same submission vocabulary used for God, effectively replacing divine suzerainty with imperial suzerainty. The 'covered way for the sabbath' (v. 18) that Ahaz removes is obscure but may refer to a royal passage used for Sabbath processions, meaning Ahaz dismantles even the physical infrastructure of Sabbath observance to placate Assyria.*

1In the seventeenth year of Pekah son of Remaliah, Ahaz son of Jotham became king of Judah. 2Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. He did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his

God, as his ancestor David had done. ³He walked in the way of the kings of Israel and even made his son pass through the fire, imitating the detestable practices of the nations that the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. ⁴He sacrificed and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops, and under every leafy tree. ⁵Then Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to Jerusalem for war. They besieged Ahaz but were unable to conquer the city. ⁶At that time Rezin king of Aram recovered Elath for Aram and expelled the Judahites from Elath. The Arameans came to Elath and have settled there to this day. ⁷Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son. Come up and rescue me from the power of the king of Aram and from the power of the king of Israel, who are attacking me." ⁸Ahaz took the silver and gold found in the house of the LORD and in the royal palace treasuries and sent it as a bribe to the king of Assyria. ⁹The king of Assyria listened to him. The king of Assyria marched against Damascus and captured it, deported its population to Kir, and put Rezin to death. ¹⁰King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria. When he saw the altar that was in Damascus, King Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest a sketch of the altar and a detailed plan of its construction — its complete design. ¹¹Urijah the priest built the altar exactly according to everything King Ahaz had sent from Damascus. Urijah the priest completed it before King Ahaz returned from Damascus. ¹²When the king arrived from Damascus, he inspected the altar. The king approached the altar and made offerings on it. ¹³He burned his burnt offering and his grain offering, poured out his drink offering, and splashed the blood of his peace offerings against the altar. ¹⁴As for the bronze altar that stood before the LORD, he moved it from the front of the Temple — from between the new altar and the house of the LORD — and placed it on the north side of the new altar. ¹⁵King Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest: "On the great altar, burn the morning burnt offering, the evening grain offering, the king's burnt offering and his grain offering, and the burnt offering of all the people of the land along with their grain offerings and their drink offerings. Splash all the blood of burnt offerings and all the blood of sacrifices against it. But the bronze altar — that will be for me to use for seeking guidance." ¹⁶Urijah the priest did exactly as King Ahaz commanded. ¹⁷King Ahaz cut off the panels from the movable stands and removed the basins from them. He also took down the Sea from the bronze oxen that supported it and set it on a stone pavement. ¹⁸He also removed the covered Sabbath walkway that had been built at the Temple and the outer royal entrance to the house of the LORD — because of the king of Assyria. ¹⁹The rest of the acts of Ahaz and what he did — are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ²⁰Ahaz slept with his fathers and was buried with his ancestors in the City of David. His son Hezekiah reigned in his place.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The standard accession formula synchronizes Ahaz's reign with the northern kingdom's calendar. The synchronism with Pekah presents chronological difficulties that scholars have long debated — the numbers do not align cleanly with Assyrian records. We render the formula as the text gives it.
2. The negative verdict formula — *velo asah hayyashar be-einei YHWH elohav* ('and he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God') — is measured against the Davidic standard. The phrase *ke-David aviv* ('like David his father') uses 'father' in the dynastic sense of ancestor. The verdict is comprehensive: Ahaz fails entirely to meet the covenant standard.
3. The phrase *he'evir et-beno ba-esh* ('he made his son pass through the fire') describes the extreme of pagan worship. The *hiphil* verb *he'evir* ('caused to pass over') combined with *ba-esh* ('in the fire') leaves the horrifying action partly veiled in Hebrew idiom, but the context — *ke-to'avot haggoyim* ('according to the detestable practices of the nations') — places it alongside practices that Deuteronomy 18:10 explicitly condemns as abomination. The 'nations that the LORD had driven out' refers to the pre-Israelite Canaanite population, meaning Ahaz has adopted the very practices that justified the conquest.
3. The phrase *vayyeelekh be-derekh malkhei Yisrael* ('he walked in the way of the kings of Israel') is devastating for a Judahite king. The 'way of the kings of Israel' is the path of Jeroboam — the pattern of covenant violation that will destroy the northern kingdom within Ahaz's own lifetime.
4. The triad of illicit worship locations — *bamot* ('high places'), *geva'ot* ('hills'), and *tachat kol ets ra'anan* ('under every green/leafy tree') — is a standard formula in Kings for comprehensive syncretistic worship. The phrase 'under every leafy tree' evokes the Asherah groves and nature-worship sites that dotted the Judean and Israelite landscape. The verb *vayyiqatter* ('and he burned incense') uses the *piel* of *qatar*, the technical term for incense offering that belongs properly to the Temple cult.
5. This is the Syro-Ephraimite crisis of approximately 735 BCE, the same event that forms the backdrop of Isaiah 7-8. Rezin and Pekah were attempting to force Judah into an anti-Assyrian coalition; Ahaz's refusal prompted their invasion. The phrase *vayyatsuru al Achaz* ('they besieged Ahaz') personalizes the siege — the city becomes the king. The phrase *velo yakhlu lehilachem* ('they could not prevail in fighting') indicates the siege failed militarily, but the political pressure succeeded in driving Ahaz toward Assyria.

6. Elath (Eilat) was the vital Red Sea port that Uzziah had rebuilt (14:22). Its loss cut Judah off from maritime trade routes. The verb *vaynashel* ('and he drove out, expelled') is forceful — a complete removal of the Judahite population. The phrase *ad hayyom hazzeh* ('to this day') is the narrator's editorial marker indicating that at the time of writing, the situation persisted. Some manuscripts read *Edomim* ('Edomites') instead of *Aramim* ('Arameans'), which would make better geographical sense — Edom is adjacent to Elath while Aram is far to the north.
7. The self-designation *avdekha uvinkha ani* ('your servant and your son am I') is formal vassal language from ancient Near Eastern treaty vocabulary. 'Servant' (*eved*) indicates political subordination; 'son' (*ben*) indicates a relationship of dependent loyalty. Ahaz is voluntarily entering the Assyrian imperial system, using the very terms — servant, son — that the covenant reserves for Israel's relationship to God. The verb *hoshi'eni* ('save me, rescue me') is from the root *yasha*, the same root used for divine salvation throughout the Psalms and prophets. Ahaz asks Assyria to perform what belongs to God.
7. The phrase *mikkaf melekham umikkaf melekham Yisrael* ('from the palm/power of the king of Aram and from the palm/power of the king of Israel') uses *kaf* ('palm, hand') for political power — he wants to be freed from their grip.
8. The word *shochad* ('gift, bribe, tribute') carries a negative connotation in biblical Hebrew — it is the standard word for a bribe that corrupts justice (Exodus 23:8, Deuteronomy 16:19). The narrator's choice of *shochad* rather than the neutral *minchah* ('gift, tribute') or *masset* ('levy') signals moral judgment. Ahaz is not merely paying tribute; he is bribing a pagan king with sacred treasury funds. The phrase *hannimtsa beit YHWH* ('found in the house of the LORD') indicates he took whatever was available — a comprehensive raiding of the Temple treasury.
9. Tiglath-pileser's campaign against Damascus in 732 BCE is confirmed by Assyrian records. The verb *vayyiglehah* ('and he exiled it/her') uses the root *galah* ('to uncover, to exile'), the standard verb for deportation. The destination *Qirah* ('Kir') is likely in Mesopotamia, possibly the region of the Kir River — ironically, Amos 9:7 identifies Kir as the original homeland of the Arameans, so they are being sent back to where they came from. Rezin's execution (*heimit*, 'he put to death') ends the Aramean kingdom of Damascus permanently.
10. The word *demut* ('likeness, image, sketch') is the same word used in Genesis 1:26 for humanity made in the 'likeness' of God. The word *tavnit* ('pattern, plan, model') is the same term used for the pattern of the tabernacle that Moses received on Sinai (Exodus 25:9). The narrator's vocabulary is charged: Ahaz sends a *demut* and *tavnit* of a pagan altar using the same terms God used for sacred construction. The altar he saw in Damascus was likely an Assyrian-style altar installed after Tiglath-pileser's conquest, making Ahaz's imitation an act of both religious and political submission.
11. The repetition of *Uriyyah hakkohen* ('Urijah the priest') twice in one verse emphasizes his role as accomplice. The phrase *kekhol asher shalach* ('according to everything he sent') stresses total compliance — no deviation, no objection. The phrase *ad bo hammelekham* ('before the king's arrival') indicates urgency: the altar was ready and waiting when Ahaz returned. This *Urijah* may be the same 'Uriah the priest' mentioned in Isaiah 8:2 as a reliable witness, making his compliance here deeply ironic.
12. The threefold repetition of *hammelekham* ('the king') in this short verse is emphatic — it is the king who sees, the king who approaches, the king who offers. The verb *vayyiqrav* ('and he drew near') is the technical term for priestly approach to the altar (the root of *qorban*, 'offering'). The verb *vayyya'al* ('and he went up/offered') could mean either 'he ascended the altar steps' or 'he offered a burnt offering.' The king is acting as priest — a prerogative that proved disastrous for Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:16-21).
13. Ahaz performs the full sacrificial repertoire on the new altar: *olah* (burnt offering — entirely consumed), *minchah* (grain offering), *neseekh* (drink offering/libation), and *shelamim* (peace/fellowship offerings). The blood-splashing (*vayyizroq*) is a specifically priestly act. By performing every category of sacrifice on the pagan-design altar, Ahaz is consecrating it as the replacement for the Solomonic altar — establishing a new liturgical norm.
14. The bronze altar (*mizbach hannechoshet*) is the original altar associated with Solomon's Temple, the legitimate place of sacrifice. Ahaz physically displaces it — *vayyaqrev* ('he moved it close, he brought it near') — from its central position *lifnei YHWH* ('before the LORD') to a marginal position on the north side. The spatial language is precise: the bronze altar was between the Temple entrance and its original position, and Ahaz pushes it to the side to make room for the new Damascus altar. This is architectural theology — the center belongs to whatever altar holds the primary position.
15. Ahaz calls the Damascus altar *hammizbeach haggadol* ('the great altar'), claiming superiority for it over the Solomonic original. He transfers every category of regular worship to the new altar: the *tamid* (daily morning and evening offerings), the royal offerings, and all public sacrifices. The phrase *umizbach hannechoshet yihyeh li levaqer* ('the bronze altar will be for me to inquire by') is obscure. The verb *baqer* can mean 'to seek, to inquire, to inspect.' Ahaz may be reserving the original altar for personal divination, or he may be saying 'I will think about what to do with it later.' Either reading diminishes the Solomonic altar from its central liturgical role to a secondary, personal instrument.
16. The sentence is brutally concise: *vayyaas Uriyyah hakkohen kekhol asher tsivvah hammelekham Achaz* ('and Urijah the priest did according to everything that King Ahaz commanded'). No protest, no prophetic consultation, no appeal to Torah. The verb *tsivvah* ('commanded') is the same verb used for God's commands. The priest obeys the king's command regarding the altar with the same totality that Torah requires for divine commands.
17. The dismantling of Solomon's Temple furnishings is described with technical precision. The *misgerot* ('panels, frames') of the *mekhanot* ('wheeled stands') were ornate bronze panels described in 1 Kings 7:27-37. The *kiyyorot* ('basins, lavers') sat atop these stands for ritual washing. The *yam* ('Sea') — the great bronze basin of 1 Kings 7:23-26 — rested on twelve bronze oxen. Ahaz removes it from its symbolic base (the oxen representing the twelve tribes supporting the purification waters) and sets it on a plain stone floor. Each removal strips the Temple of Solomonic craftsmanship and theological symbolism.

18. The musakh haShabbat ('the covered structure of the Sabbath') is an obscure architectural feature — possibly a covered colonnade or canopy used during Sabbath processions or royal Sabbath worship. The mevo hammelekh hachitsonah ('the king's outer entrance') was presumably the royal passage allowing the king direct access to the Temple. Both are removed mippenei melekh Ashshur ('because of the king of Assyria') — the narrator explicitly connects these removals to Assyrian pressure, whether as tribute payment (stripping bronze) or as political submission (removing symbols of Judahite royal-religious independence).
19. The standard source citation formula. The sefer divrei hayyamim lemalkai Yehudah ('Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah') is a now-lost court chronicle that the editors of Kings cite repeatedly as containing additional information. The formula indicates that the narrator has been selective — there is more to tell, but what has been told is what matters theologically.
20. The standard death and burial formula. The phrase vayyishkav im avotav ('he lay down with his fathers') is the dignified Hebrew idiom for death. Burial be-ir David ('in the City of David') indicates the royal cemetery, though 2 Chronicles 28:27 notes he was not placed in the tombs of the kings — a posthumous dishonor. The transition to Chizkiyahu ('Hezekiah') — whose name means 'the LORD strengthens' or 'the LORD is my strength' — signals a dramatic reversal: from the worst Davidic king to one of the best.

17

Summary: *Hoshea son of Elah becomes the last king of Israel. After conspiring with Egypt and withholding tribute from Assyria, he is arrested by Shalmaneser V. The Assyrians besiege Samaria for three years and finally capture it in 722 BCE, deporting the population to Halah, Habor, the Gozan River, and the cities of the Medes. The narrator then delivers the longest theological explanation in the entire book of Kings: Israel fell because they sinned against the God who brought them out of Egypt, feared other gods, walked in the customs of the dispossessed nations, built high places, set up pillars and Asherah poles, burned incense, and served idols — despite repeated prophetic warnings. God removed them from his presence. The chapter concludes with the resettlement: the king of Assyria imports foreign populations into Samaria. When lions attack the settlers, the Assyrians send back a deported Israelite priest to teach them how to worship the local God. The result is a syncretistic religion — the new inhabitants fear the LORD but also serve their own gods.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is the theological center of gravity in Kings. After seventeen chapters of northern kingdom narrative — the steady drumbeat of 'he walked in the way of Jeroboam son of Nebat who caused Israel to sin' — the narrator finally pauses the story to deliver his verdict. Verses 7-23 form the longest continuous editorial commentary in Kings, a sustained prosecutorial argument for why the exile was just. The structure is a covenant lawsuit: God delivered Israel from Egypt (the foundational act), Israel violated the covenant terms (the catalog of sins), God sent prophets to warn them (the appeal), Israel refused to listen (the verdict trigger), and God removed them from the land (the sentence). The narrator is not merely recording history; he is arguing a case. Every sentence in the indictment echoes Deuteronomy — this is Mosaic theology applied to historical catastrophe. The chapter's final section (vv. 24-41) on the syncretistic religion of the resettled Samaritans explains the origin of what will become the Samaritan question that persists into the New Testament period.*

Translation Friction: *The phrase vayyitgannev benei Yisrael devarim ('the children of Israel secretly did things,' v. 9) uses the rare hitpa'el of ganav ('to steal'), meaning they 'stole' or smuggled practices into their worship — acting with deliberate concealment. This is difficult to render without over-interpreting; we use 'secretly attributed to the LORD things that were not true.' The list of nations resettled in Samaria (v. 24) and their gods (vv. 30-31) presents names whose exact identifications remain debated. We transliterate them and provide what is known. The final theological statement — that the Samaritans 'feared the LORD and served their own gods' (v. 33) — presents a tension the narrator considers irreconcilable: dual allegiance is not worship but confusion.*

Connections: *The entire theological argument of vv. 7-23 is built on Deuteronomy: the exodus as foundational event (Deuteronomy 5:6), the prohibition of other gods (Deuteronomy 5:7), the warning against Canaanite practices (Deuteronomy 18:9-12), the sending of prophets (Deuteronomy 18:15-22), and the curse of exile for covenant violation (Deuteronomy 28:63-68). The phrase 'removed them from his presence' (v. 23) reverses the promise of God's presence with Israel throughout the wilderness and settlement narratives. The resettlement of foreign peoples in Samaria (v. 24) creates the historical foundation for the Samaritan community, whose tense relationship with Judah will surface in Ezra-Nehemiah and in Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman*

(John 4). The lion attacks on the new settlers (v. 25) echo the covenant curse of Leviticus 26:22: 'I will send wild animals against you.'

1In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea son of Elah became king in Samaria over Israel, and he reigned nine years. 2He did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD, though not to the degree of the kings of Israel who preceded him. 3Shalmaneser king of Assyria marched against him, and Hoshea became his vassal and paid him tribute. 4But the king of Assyria discovered a conspiracy by Hoshea — he had sent envoys to So, king of Egypt, and had stopped paying the annual tribute to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria arrested him and locked him in prison. 5The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched up to Samaria, and besieged it for three years. 6In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported Israel to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, along the Habor — the river of Gozan — and in the cities of the Medes. 7This happened because the Israelites sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up from the land of Egypt, from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They feared other gods 8and followed the customs of the nations that the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites, and the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced. 9The Israelites secretly attributed to the LORD their God things that were not true about him. They built high places in every one of their towns, from the smallest watchtower outpost to the largest fortified city. 10They set up sacred pillars and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every leafy tree. 11They burned incense at every high place, just as the nations had done — the ones the LORD had exiled before them. They did evil things that provoked the LORD. 12They served worthless idols, about which the LORD had told them, "You must not do this." 13The LORD warned Israel and Judah through every prophet and every seer: "Turn back from your evil ways. Keep my commandments and my statutes according to the entire the Law that I commanded your ancestors and that I sent to you through my servants the prophets." 14But they would not listen. They stiffened their necks like their ancestors who did not trust in the LORD their God. 15They rejected his statutes and his covenant that he had made with their ancestors, and the warnings he had given them. They pursued emptiness and became empty themselves. They imitated the nations around them, the very nations the LORD had commanded them not to copy. 16They abandoned all the commandments of the LORD their God. They made two cast metal calves for themselves, set up an Asherah pole, bowed down to the entire host of heaven, and served Baal. 17They made their sons and daughters pass through the fire. They practiced divination and read omens. They sold themselves to do what was evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him. 18The LORD became deeply angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. No one remained except the tribe of Judah alone. 19Even Judah did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God but followed the practices that Israel had introduced. 20The LORD rejected the entire offspring of Israel, afflicted them, and handed them over to plunderers until he had thrown them out from his presence. 21When Israel tore itself away from the house of David and made Jeroboam son of Nebat king, Jeroboam drove Israel away from following the LORD and caused them to commit a great sin. 22The Israelites persisted in all the sins of Jeroboam that he had committed. They did not turn away from them 23until the LORD removed Israel from his presence, just as he had spoken through all his servants the prophets. Israel was deported from their own soil to Assyria, where they remain to this day. 24The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and settled them in the cities of Samaria in place of the Israelites. They took possession of Samaria and lived in its towns. 25When they first settled there, they did not fear the LORD. So the LORD sent lions among them, and the lions were killing some of them. 26They reported to the king of Assyria: "The nations you deported and resettled in the cities of Samaria do not know the requirements of the God of the land. He has sent lions among them, and the lions are killing them because they do not know the requirements of the God of the land." 27The king of Assyria gave an order: "Send back one of the priests you deported from there. Let him go and live there and teach them the requirements of the God of the land." 28So one of the priests who had been deported from Samaria came and settled in Bethel, and began teaching them how to fear the LORD. 29But each nation continued making its own gods, and they placed them in the shrines at the high places that the Samaritans had built — each nation in the towns where they settled. 30The people of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, the people of Cuth made Nergal, and the people of Hamath made Ashima. 31The Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak. The Sepharvites immolated their children to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of

Sepharvaim. ³²They also feared the LORD, and from among their own people they appointed priests for the high places, who officiated for them in the high place shrines. ³³They feared the LORD, but they also served their own gods according to the custom of the nations from which they had been deported. ³⁴To this day they continue their former practices. They do not truly fear the LORD, and they do not follow the statutes, the ordinances, the Law, or the commandment that the LORD commanded the descendants of Jacob, whom he named Israel. ³⁵The LORD had made a covenant with them and commanded them: "You must not fear other gods, or bow down to them, or serve them, or sacrifice to them. ³⁶Rather, the LORD — who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power and an outstretched arm — him you must fear, to him you must bow down, and to him you must sacrifice. ³⁷The statutes, the ordinances, the Law, and the commandment that he wrote for you — you must carefully observe them always. You must not fear other gods. ³⁸The covenant that I made with you — you must not forget it. You must not fear other gods. ³⁹Rather, the LORD your God you must fear, and he will deliver you from the power of all your enemies." ⁴⁰But they did not listen. They continued their former practices. ⁴¹So these nations feared the LORD while also serving their carved images. Their children and their grandchildren continue to do exactly as their ancestors did, to this day.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The accession formula for Israel's last king is stark. Hoshea's nine-year reign will end in catastrophe. His name (Hoshea, 'salvation') is bitterly ironic — the man named 'salvation' will preside over the destruction of the northern kingdom.
2. The qualifier *raq lo kemalkei Yisrael* ('only not like the kings of Israel') is a faint distinction — Hoshea is evil, but comparatively less so. This partial mitigation does not save him or his kingdom. The narrator acknowledges a degree of difference without granting approval. The judgment is still *hara be-einei YHWH* ('evil in the eyes of the LORD').
3. Shalmaneser V (reigned 727-722 BCE) succeeded Tiglath-pileser III. The phrase *vayyehi lo Hoshea eved* ('and Hoshea became his servant') indicates formal vassal status. The word *minchah* ('tribute, gift') in political contexts means regular tribute payments acknowledging overlordship. Israel is now a client state of Assyria.
4. The word *qesher* ('conspiracy, rebellion') is the political term for revolt against an overlord. So (So') king of Egypt is difficult to identify — possibly Osorkon IV of Tanis, or the Egyptian commander Sib'e mentioned in Assyrian records, or a corruption of Sais (the city). Hoshea's fatal miscalculation was seeking Egyptian alliance against Assyria — a strategy Isaiah repeatedly condemns (Isaiah 30:1-5, 31:1-3). The verb *vayyaa'atserahu* ('and he seized/detained him') followed by *vayyaa'asrehu beit kele* ('and he bound him in a prison house') indicates formal arrest and imprisonment.
5. The phrase *bekhol ha-arets* ('throughout the entire land') indicates a comprehensive military campaign, not a targeted strike. The three-year siege of Samaria (approximately 725-722 BCE) was one of the longest in ancient Near Eastern history. The verb *vayyatsar* ('and he besieged') implies complete encirclement — cutting off food, water, and communication.
6. This verse records the end of the northern kingdom of Israel — 722 BCE, approximately two hundred years after the division under Rehoboam. The verb *vayyegel* ('and he exiled') is from *galah*, the root that means both 'to exile' and 'to uncover, lay bare.' The deportation locations are in upper Mesopotamia and western Iran: Chalach (Halah) near Nineveh, Chavor (Habor) on the Gozan River (modern Khabur River in northeastern Syria), and the cities of the Medes in western Iran. The scattered placement was deliberate Assyrian policy — dispersing conquered populations prevented organized resistance.
7. The theological explanation begins with *ki* — 'because.' Everything that follows is the reason for the exile. The narrator anchors the entire argument in the exodus: YHWH is identified as *hamma'aleh otam me-erets Mitsrayim* ('the one who brought them up from the land of Egypt'). The exodus is the foundational act of salvation that creates the obligation of exclusive loyalty. The phrase *vayyir'u elohim acherim* ('and they feared other gods') uses *yare* ('to fear, to revere') — the same verb used for proper worship of God. Fearing other gods is the primal covenant violation.
8. Two sources of corruption are identified: the *chuqqot haggoyim* ('statutes/customs of the nations') that God had driven out, and the practices introduced by *malkei Yisrael* ('the kings of Israel'). The verb *horish* ('to dispossess, to drive out') recalls the conquest — these nations were removed precisely because of their practices, and now Israel has adopted what destroyed others. The phrase *asher asu* ('which they made/did') at the end refers to the royal innovations — the calves, the high places, the Baal worship — that the kings imposed.
9. The verb *vaychapp'u* is extremely rare — a hapax legomenon from the root *chapa*, meaning 'to cover, to conceal, to do secretly.' The Israelites were smuggling pagan meanings into their worship of the LORD, concealing foreign practices under Yahwistic language. The phrase *devarim asher lo khen* ('things that were not so/right') suggests false theological claims — attributing to God what was not from God.
9. The phrase *mimmigdal notserim ad ir mivtsar* ('from a watchtower of watchmen to a fortified city') is a merism — from the smallest inhabited outpost to the largest urban center, meaning everywhere without exception. No settlement was too small to have its own high place.
10. The *matstsevoth* ('standing stones, sacred pillars') were upright stone monuments associated with Canaanite worship. The *asherim* ('Asherah poles' or 'sacred trees') represented the goddess Asherah. The phrase *al kol giv'ah gevohah vetachat kol ets ra'anah* ('on every high hill and under every leafy

tree') is the standard formula for the ubiquity of illicit worship — elevated sites for pillars, shaded groves for Asherah poles.

11. The verb *vayyegatteru* ('and they burned incense') at the *bamot* ('high places') replicates exactly what the dispossessed nations had done. The phrase *lehakh'is et YHWH* ('to provoke the LORD') uses the *hiphil* of *ka'as* ('to anger, to provoke'). The narrator does not say they intended to anger God, but that the objective effect of their actions was provocation. The verb *heglah* ('he exiled') applied to the former nations foreshadows what will happen to Israel — the same verb, the same fate.
12. The word *gillulim* ('idols') is a deliberately contemptuous term — probably derived from *galal* ('to roll') and related to *gelal* ('dung'). It means something like 'dung-pellets' or 'worthless round things.' The term is a favorite of Ezekiel, who uses it nearly forty times. The direct divine prohibition — *lo ta'asu et haddavar hazzeh* ('you shall not do this thing') — makes the violation inexcusable. They knew the command and violated it anyway.
13. The verb *vayyya'ad* ('and he testified, warned, admonished') is a legal term — God formally placed Israel on notice. The warning went through *kol nevi'ei kol chozeh* ('every prophet, every seer') — two terms for prophetic figures, indicating comprehensive prophetic witness. The message is simple: *shuvu middarkeikhem hara'im* ('turn back from your evil ways') — the call to repentance. The standard is *kekhol hattorah* ('according to the entire Torah') — not part of it, not a reduced version, but the whole instruction given to the ancestors.
14. The phrase *vayyaqshu et orfam* ('they stiffened their neck') is the classic image of the stubborn ox that will not respond to the yoke. The comparison *ke-oref avotam* ('like the neck of their ancestors') reaches back to the wilderness generation — the same *qeshei oref* ('stiff-necked') people of Exodus 32:9 and Deuteronomy 9:6. The verb *he'eminu* ('they trusted, believed') from the root *aman* — the refusal to trust God is the fundamental failure beneath all the specific sins.
15. The verb *vayyim'asu* ('they rejected') is a strong term — active, deliberate refusal, not passive drift. Three things are rejected: *chuqqav* ('his statutes'), *berito* ('his covenant'), and *edvotav* ('his testimonies/warnings'). The wordplay *vayyyelkhu acharei hahevel vayyehbalu* ('they pursued emptiness and became empty') is one of the most theologically dense phrases in Kings: *hevel* ('breath, vapor, emptiness') is the word Ecclesiastes uses for futility. They chased vapor and became vapor. You become what you worship.
16. The catalog of sins escalates. The *massekah shenayim agalim* ('molten image — two calves') refers to Jeroboam's golden calves at Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12:28-29), the foundational sin of the northern kingdom. The *asherah* is the cult object representing the goddess. The phrase *kol tseva hashamayim* ('the entire host of heaven') refers to astral worship — sun, moon, stars, and planetary deities. The *Baal* (*haBa'al*, 'the lord/master') is the Canaanite storm deity whose worship Elijah confronted on Mount Carmel. The progression moves from Israelite innovation (calves) to Canaanite nature religion (*Asherah*, *Baal*) to Mesopotamian astral worship (host of heaven) — a comprehensive catalog of available idolatries.
17. The sins reach their apex: child sacrifice (*he'eviru et-beneihem ve-et-benoteihem ba-esh* — both sons and daughters), divination (*qesamim*), and sorcery (*nachash*, 'reading omens from signs'). The phrase *vayyitmakkeru la'asot hara* ('they sold themselves to do evil') uses the reflexive of *makhar* ('to sell') — they became slaves to evil by their own transaction. No one forced them; they sold themselves. The same verb will describe Ahab in 1 Kings 21:25.
18. The verb *vayyit'annaf* ('he became angry') in the *hitpael* indicates intense, sustained anger. The phrase *vayyisrem me-al panav* ('he removed them from before his face/presence') is the sentence: exile is removal from the divine presence. The land was where God's face was turned toward Israel; exile is where his face is turned away. The survival of *shevet Yehudah levaddo* ('the tribe of Judah alone') is both a mercy and a warning — Judah is spared but now utterly alone.
19. The ominous parenthetical: *gam Yehudah* ('even Judah') did not guard God's commandments. The narrator interrupts the indictment of Israel to note that Judah is infected with the same disease. They walked *bechuqqot Yisrael* ('in the customs of Israel') — the northern kingdom's sins had spread south. This verse foreshadows Judah's own eventual exile, which the narrator knows is coming.
20. The verb *vayyim'as* ('he rejected') echoes v. 15 where Israel rejected God's covenant — the verb is turned back on them. What they did to God's covenant, God now does to them. The phrase *ad asher hishlikham mippanav* ('until he threw them from before his face') is more violent than v. 18's 'removed' — *hishliakh* is 'to hurl, to throw away.' The progression from 'removed' to 'hurled away' intensifies the judgment language.
21. The narrator traces the disease to its origin: the division of the kingdom. The verb *qara* ('to tear, to rend') is the same word *Ahijah* used when he tore his garment into twelve pieces (1 Kings 11:30-31). *Jeroboam* is charged with two actions: *vayyaddach* ('he drove away, pushed away') Israel from following YHWH, and *hecheti'am chata'ah gedolah* ('he caused them to sin a great sin'). The 'great sin' is the establishment of the golden calves at Dan and Bethel — the institutional alternative to Jerusalem worship that corrupted every subsequent generation.
22. The phrase *lo saru mimennah* ('they did not turn aside from it') uses the verb *sur* ('to turn aside, to depart') — the same verb used positively when kings 'do not turn aside' from the LORD's commands. Here it is inverted: they would not turn aside from Jeroboam's sin. The persistence is total — *bekhol chattot Yarov'am* ('in all the sins of Jeroboam') — no exception, no reform.
23. The theological summary reaches its conclusion: *ad asher hesir YHWH et Yisrael me-al panav* ('until the LORD removed Israel from before his face'). The exile is presented as both predicted (*ka'asher dibber*, 'just as he spoke') and executed — prophetic word became historical reality. The phrase *vayyigel Yisrael me-al admato* ('Israel was exiled from upon its soil') uses *adamah* ('soil, ground') rather than *erets* ('land'), emphasizing the agricultural, physical rootedness that exile tears up. They are pulled from the ground like uprooted plants.
24. Assyrian population transfer policy: conquered peoples from various regions are relocated to fill the emptied cities of Samaria. *Babylon* (*Bavel*) is in southern Mesopotamia; *Cuthah* (*Kutah*) is near Babylon; *Avva* is uncertain but possibly in Syria; *Hamath* (*Chamat*) is in central Syria; *Sepharvaim*

(Sefarvayim) may be Sippar in Mesopotamia. The phrase tachat benei Yisrael ('in place of the children of Israel') is blunt replacement language. The verb vayyirshu ('they took possession') is the same verb used for Israel's original taking of the land in Joshua — foreign nations now possess what Israel once conquered.

25. The phrase lo yar'u et YHWH ('they did not fear the LORD') identifies the problem: the new inhabitants do not know or reverence the God of the land. The response — vayyeshallah YHWH bahem et ha-arayot ('the LORD sent lions among them') — treats the land as sacred territory that rejects uninstructed inhabitants. Lions were native to the region in antiquity and are associated with divine judgment (1 Kings 13:24, 20:36). The participial form horgim ('killing') indicates ongoing, repeated attacks — not a single incident but a persistent threat.
26. The settlers understand the situation through their own polytheistic framework: every land has its god, and the god of this land is angry because the proper rituals are not being performed. The phrase mishpat elohei ha-arets ('the requirement/custom of the God of the land') uses mishpat in its sense of 'established practice, customary right.' They see YHWH as a territorial deity whose protocols they need to learn — a fundamental misunderstanding that will shape the syncretistic religion described in the chapter's final verses.
27. The Assyrian solution is pragmatic: send back a priest who knows the local deity's requirements. The verb yoreim ('let him teach them') is from yarah, the root of torah — teaching. But the teaching will be conducted within a polytheistic framework where YHWH is treated as one god among many. The singular 'one of the priests' (echad mehakoananim) means a single Israelite priest must instruct multiple foreign populations — an impossible task that guarantees syncretism.
28. The returned priest settles in Beit-El ('House of God') — which is deeply ironic. Bethel was the site of one of Jeroboam's golden calves, the center of the northern kingdom's corrupted worship. A priest trained in Bethel's syncretistic traditions is now teaching foreigners 'how to fear the LORD.' The verb moreh ('teaching') is a participle from yarah — ongoing instruction. But what kind of instruction? The priest himself was trained in a compromised tradition.
29. The phrase goy goy elohav ('nation by nation, its gods') — the repetition of goy emphasizes the multiplicity. Every group maintained its own deities alongside the instruction about YHWH. They installed these gods in beit habamot ('the houses/shrines of the high places') that the Shomronim ('Samaritans' — here the original Israelite inhabitants) had previously built. Israel's high places, originally built for syncretistic Yahwism, now serve as ready-made temples for foreign gods.
30. The catalog of foreign deities begins. Sukkot Benot ('Booths of Daughters') is obscure — possibly a corruption of a Babylonian deity name (perhaps Sarpanitu or Zir-banitu, consort of Marduk). Nergal was the Mesopotamian god of the underworld and plague, well attested in Babylonian texts. Ashima is mentioned in Amos 8:14 and may be related to a Syrian deity. The narrator lists these names without explaining them — the foreignness itself makes the theological point.
31. Nibhaz and Tartak are otherwise unknown deities — later Jewish tradition identified Nibhaz with a dog-shaped idol and Tartak with a donkey, but these identifications are speculative. The Sepharvites practice child sacrifice (sorefim et-beneihem ba-esh, 'burning their children in fire') to Adrammelech and Anammelech — the names contain the element melekh ('king'), common in Semitic divine names. The narrator places child sacrifice by foreign settlers in the same land where Israelite kings had already practiced it (v. 17, and 16:3), creating a grim continuity.
32. The phrase vayyihyu yre'im et YHWH ('they were fearing the LORD') describes an addition, not a conversion. They added YHWH to their existing pantheon. The phrase miqqetsotam ('from their extremities/from among themselves') means they appointed priests from their own non-Levitical ranks — anyone could serve. This reproduces the original sin of Jeroboam, who appointed non-Levitical priests (1 Kings 12:31). The pattern perpetuates itself through different populations.
33. The definitive statement of Samaritan syncretism: et YHWH hayu yre'im ve-et eloheihem hayu ovdim ('the LORD they were fearing, and their own gods they were serving'). The narrator treats these as irreconcilable — fearing the LORD demands exclusive allegiance (Deuteronomy 6:13-14). The dual worship is not a compromise or bridge between religions but a theological impossibility that the narrator records with controlled disapproval.
34. The narrator now contradicts v. 33 — or rather, clarifies it. In v. 33 they 'feared the LORD'; here he says einam yre'im et YHWH ('they do not fear the LORD'). The resolution: what they practice is not genuine fear of the LORD because it violates the exclusive covenant terms. The full covenant vocabulary is deployed: chuqqotam ('their statutes'), mishpetam ('their ordinances'), hattorah ('the Torah'), hammitsvah ('the commandment'). The reference to benei Ya'aqov asher sam shemo Yisrael ('the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel') reaches back to Genesis 32:28 — the name 'Israel' itself carries covenant identity.
35. The narrator now quotes the original covenant terms. The verb karat ('to cut') is the standard idiom for covenant-making — literally 'cutting a covenant,' referring to the ancient practice of cutting sacrificial animals as part of the ratification ceremony (Genesis 15:9-18). Four prohibitions cascade: lo tir'u ('do not fear'), lo tishtachavu ('do not bow down'), lo ta'avdum ('do not serve'), lo tizbchu ('do not sacrifice'). Each represents a deeper level of worship — from internal reverence to physical prostration to ongoing service to the ultimate act of offering sacrifice.
36. The positive command mirrors the negative: the same four verbs (fear, bow down, serve, sacrifice) are redirected exclusively to YHWH. The phrase bekoach gadol uvizro'a netuyah ('with great power and an outstretched arm') is classic Deuteronomic exodus language (Deuteronomy 4:34, 5:15, 26:8). The 'outstretched arm' (zero'a netuyah) is the image of God's power reaching into Egypt to extract Israel — military metaphor applied to divine action.
37. The fourfold legal vocabulary returns: chuqqim ('statutes'), mishpatim ('ordinances'), torah, mitsvah ('commandment'). The phrase asher katav lakhem ('which he wrote for you') specifies written law — a clear reference to the Mosaic Torah as a written document. The phrase kol hayyamim ('all the days') means perpetually, without interruption or exception. The repetition of lo tir'u elohim acherim ('do not fear other gods') frames the

covenant command as both the first and last word.

38. The verb *tishkachu* ('you shall forget') from *shakach* ('to forget') reveals the deepest danger: not active rebellion but passive forgetting. The covenant can be lost not only through defiance but through amnesia. Memory is a covenant obligation. The phrase *habberit asher karati ittekhem* ('the covenant that I cut with you') places God's voice directly into the narrative — the first person *karati* ('I cut') is God speaking through the narrator's recollection of Sinai.
39. The promise attached to exclusive worship: *vehu yatstsil etkhem miyyad kol oyeveikhem* ('and he will rescue you from the hand of all your enemies'). The verb *yatstsil* (from *natsal*, 'to deliver, to snatch away') promises active divine protection. The irony is devastating in context: the nation that feared other gods was not delivered from its enemies but handed over to them. The promise was conditional, and the condition was not met.
40. The phrase *velo shame'u* ('but they did not listen') is the verdict that echoes throughout Kings. The Hebrew root *shama* ('to hear, to listen, to obey') means not merely auditory reception but responsive obedience. They heard the words but did not obey them. The phrase *kemishpatam harishon* ('according to their former custom') indicates no change — the recitation of covenant terms produced no effect.
41. The chapter's final verse is its theological epitaph. The impossible combination persists: *yre'im et YHWH ve-et pesileihem hayu ovdim* ('fearing the LORD and serving their carved images'). The word *pesilim* ('carved images') is the term from the second commandment (Exodus 20:4). The generational language — *beneihem uveneihem* ('their children and their children's children') — indicates the syncretism has become hereditary, passed down as family religion. The phrase *ad hayyom hazzeh* ('to this day') marks this as a permanent condition at the time of the narrator's writing, explaining the religious situation in Samaria that will persist into the Second Temple period and beyond.

18

Summary: *Hezekiah son of Ahaz becomes king of Judah and receives the highest verdict of any Davidic king: he trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel, and there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, before or after. He removes the high places, smashes the sacred pillars, cuts down the Asherah pole, and destroys the bronze serpent that Moses had made, because the Israelites had been burning incense to it. He rebels against Assyria and defeats the Philistines. But in the fourteenth year of his reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria invades and captures all the fortified cities of Judah. Hezekiah first tries appeasement, stripping the Temple and palace to pay tribute, but Sennacherib sends a massive force to Jerusalem anyway. The Rabshakeh — the chief Assyrian spokesman — delivers a devastating speech in Hebrew to the people on the walls, systematically attacking every basis for Judah's confidence: military strength, Egyptian alliance, and trust in the LORD himself. He claims the LORD sent Assyria to destroy Jerusalem.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The Rabshakeh's speech (vv. 19-35) is one of the most psychologically sophisticated pieces of propaganda in ancient literature. He speaks in Hebrew (Yehudit) deliberately, so the common soldiers on the wall can understand — when Hezekiah's officials beg him to switch to Aramaic, the diplomatic language, he refuses and speaks louder. His argument is methodical: (1) Your military confidence is a broken reed. (2) Egypt will fail you. (3) Your own God is angry because Hezekiah removed his high places and altars. (4) The LORD himself told me to come destroy this place. (5) No god of any nation has ever stopped Assyria. Each point is designed to separate the people from their king and their God. The theological irony is layered: the Rabshakeh is both right and wrong — God did use Assyria as an instrument of judgment (Isaiah 10:5-6), but Assyria does not understand that it is a tool, not an autonomous power. The speech inverts covenant language: where the covenant promises security through trust in God, the Rabshakeh promises security through surrender to Assyria.*

Translation Friction: *The chronological note 'in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah' (v. 13) combined with the synchronism of v. 1 creates a well-known chronological difficulty. If Hezekiah became king in the third year of Hoshea (v. 1) and Samaria fell in Hezekiah's sixth year (v. 10), the fourteenth year would be approximately 714-711 BCE, while Sennacherib's invasion is firmly dated to 701 BCE by Assyrian records. Various solutions have been proposed (co-regency, textual error, multiple campaigns). We render the text as given. The Rabshakeh's claim that 'the LORD said to me, Go up against this land and destroy it' (v. 25) may be a lie, a theological interpretation, or an ironic truth — Isaiah 10:5-6 does call Assyria the rod of God's anger. The narrator lets the claim stand without comment, trusting the reader to evaluate it.*

Connections: Hezekiah's destruction of the bronze serpent (Nechushtan, v. 4) reaches back to Numbers 21:4-9, where Moses made a bronze serpent as a means of healing during the wilderness plague. What God once commanded as salvation had become an object of worship — the trajectory from divine gift to idol. Hezekiah's verdict — 'he trusted in the LORD' (batach ba-YHWH, v. 5) — is the precise opposite of his father Ahaz, who trusted in Assyria (16:7). The Rabshakeh's speech parallels and inverts Deuteronomy's covenant promises: where Deuteronomy says 'trust in the LORD and he will give you the land,' the Rabshakeh says 'trust in me and I will give you a land of grain and wine' (v. 32). The siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib is one of the best-attested events in ancient history, confirmed by Sennacherib's own annals (the Taylor Prism), which boast of shutting Hezekiah up 'like a caged bird' — but notably do not claim to have captured Jerusalem.

¹In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, Hezekiah son of Ahaz became king of Judah. ²He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi daughter of Zechariah. ³He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, exactly as his ancestor David had done. ⁴He removed the high places, smashed the sacred pillars, cut down the Asherah pole, and crushed the bronze serpent that Moses had made — because up to that time the Israelites had been burning incense to it. He called it Nehushtan. ⁵He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah — neither after him nor before him. ⁶He held fast to the LORD, never turning aside from following him, and he kept his commandments — the ones the LORD had commanded Moses. ⁷The LORD was with him, and he succeeded in everything he undertook. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and refused to serve him. ⁸He struck down the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territories, from the smallest watchtower to the largest fortified city. ⁹In the fourth year of King Hezekiah — which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel — Shalmaneser king of Assyria marched against Samaria and laid siege to it. ¹⁰They captured it at the end of three years. In the sixth year of Hezekiah — which was the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel — Samaria was taken. ¹¹The king of Assyria deported Israel to Assyria and settled them in Halah, along the Habor — the river of Gozan — and in the cities of the Medes, ¹²because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God but violated his covenant — everything that Moses, the servant of the LORD, had commanded. They neither listened nor obeyed. ¹³In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria marched against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. ¹⁴Hezekiah king of Judah sent word to the king of Assyria at Lachish: "I have done wrong. Withdraw from me, and whatever you impose on me I will bear." ¹⁵The king of Assyria imposed on Hezekiah king of Judah a payment of three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. ¹⁶Hezekiah handed over all the silver found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace. ¹⁷At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the LORD's temple and from the doorposts that he himself had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria. ¹⁸The king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rab-saris, and the Rabshakeh from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem with a massive force. They marched up and arrived at Jerusalem, and they took their position by the conduit of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field. ¹⁹They called for the king, and out came Eliakim son of Hilkiyah, who was in charge of the palace, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder. ²⁰The Rabshakeh said to them, "Tell Hezekiah: This is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says — What is this confidence of yours that you rely on? ²¹Look — you are relying on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff! If anyone leans on it, it stabs into his hand and pierces it. That is what Pharaoh king of Egypt is to everyone who trusts in him. ²²If you say to me, 'We trust in the LORD our God' — is he not the one whose high places and altars Hezekiah removed, telling Judah and Jerusalem, 'You must worship only before this altar in Jerusalem'? ²³Now then, make a wager with my lord the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses — if you can find enough riders to mount them! ²⁴How could you turn back even one of the least of my lord's governors? Yet you put your trust in Egypt for chariots and cavalry! ²⁵Besides — do you think I marched against this place without the LORD's approval? The LORD himself said to me, 'March against this land and destroy it.'" ²⁶Eliakim son of Hilkiyah, Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic — we understand it. Do not speak to us in Judahite Hebrew within earshot of the people on the wall." ²⁷The Rabshakeh replied, "Did my lord send me only to your master and to you to speak these words? Was it not also to the men sitting on the wall — who will be eating their own excrement and drinking their own urine along with you?" ²⁸Then the Rabshakeh stood and shouted in a loud voice in Judahite Hebrew: "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! ²⁹This is what the king says: Do not let Hezekiah

deceive you, because he cannot rescue you from his power. ³⁰Do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD by saying, 'The LORD will certainly rescue us — this city will not be handed over to the king of Assyria.' ³¹Do not listen to Hezekiah. For this is what the king of Assyria says: Make peace with me and come out to me, and each of you will eat from his own vine and from his own fig tree and drink water from his own cistern — ³²until I come and take you to a land like your own land — a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive oil and honey. Choose life and do not die! Do not listen to Hezekiah, because he is misleading you when he says, 'The LORD will rescue us.' ³³Has any god of the nations ever rescued his land from the power of the king of Assyria? ³⁴Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? Did they rescue Samaria from my power? ³⁵Who among all the gods of these lands has ever rescued his land from my power? Why should the LORD rescue Jerusalem from my power?" ³⁶The people remained silent and did not answer him a word, because the king had commanded them, "Do not answer him." ³⁷Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who was in charge of the palace, Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph the recorder came to Hezekiah with their garments torn and reported the Rabshakeh's words to him.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The accession formula synchronizes Hezekiah with the dying northern kingdom — he becomes king while Samaria still stands, and will witness its fall. The name Chizkiyahu means 'the LORD is my strength' or 'the LORD strengthens,' a programmatic name for a king whose story will center on whether he trusts in divine strength or human alliances.
2. The queen mother's name is given as Avi ('my father'), shortened from Aviyah ('my father is the LORD') in the parallel passage 2 Chronicles 29:1. The identification of the queen mother (gevirah) was standard in Judahite regnal formulas, reflecting her political significance. Twenty-nine years is one of the longest Judahite reigns, indicating stability.
3. The positive verdict *kekhol asher asah David aviv* ('according to all that David his father did') is the highest commendation in Kings. Most good kings receive the qualifier 'but the high places were not removed.' Hezekiah will receive no such asterisk — he is compared to David without qualification.
4. Four acts of reform: removing *bamot* (high places), smashing *matstsebot* (sacred pillars), cutting the Asherah, and destroying *nechash hannechoshet* ('the serpent of bronze') from Numbers 21:8-9. The bronze serpent, originally made at God's command as a means of healing, had become an object of worship — *meqatterim lo* ('burning incense to it'). Hezekiah's name for it, *Nechushtan*, is a wordplay: *nechash* ('serpent') + *nechoshet* ('bronze') = *Nechushtan*, 'just a bronze thing.' The name strips it of sacred power by reducing it to its material. This is one of the most radical acts in Kings — destroying something Moses himself had made, because its function had changed from pointer-to-God to replacement-for-God.
5. The verb *batach* ('to trust, to rely upon, to lean on') is placed emphatically first: *ba-YHWH Elohei Yisrael batach* ('in the LORD God of Israel he trusted'). This is the defining characteristic the narrator selects from Hezekiah's entire reign. The superlative — *lo hayah khamohu* ('there was none like him') — is extraordinary and creates a tension with the similar claim for Josiah in 23:25. The narrator may be distinguishing different categories: Hezekiah was unmatched in trust (*bitachon*), Josiah in Torah-obedience.
6. The verb *davaq* ('to cling, to hold fast, to adhere') is the same word used in Genesis 2:24 for a man clinging to his wife — it implies intimate, unbreakable attachment. The phrase *lo sar me-acharav* ('he did not turn aside from following him') uses the same verb *sur* that the sinful kings 'did not turn aside from' Jeroboam's sins (17:22). Hezekiah's loyalty is described with the Deuteronomic vocabulary of covenant faithfulness: clinging to God and keeping his commands as given through Moses.
7. The phrase *YHWH immo* ('the LORD was with him') is the formula of divine presence that marked Joseph (Genesis 39:2), Joshua (Joshua 6:27), and David (1 Samuel 18:14). The verb *yaskil* ('he acted wisely, he succeeded') implies both prudence and prosperity. His rebellion against *melekh Ashshur* ('the king of Assyria') reverses his father Ahaz's voluntary submission (16:7). Where Ahaz said 'I am your servant,' Hezekiah says 'I will not serve you.'
8. Hezekiah's military success against the Philistines reverses generations of Philistine encroachment. Gaza (*Azzah*) is the southernmost Philistine city, indicating the campaign reached the full extent of Philistine territory. The phrase *mimmigdal notserim ad ir mivtsar* ('from watchtower to fortified city') is the same merism used in 17:9 to describe Israel's high places — here it describes the comprehensive scope of Hezekiah's victory.
9. The narrator provides the Judahite perspective on Samaria's fall — events already narrated in chapter 17 are re-dated according to Hezekiah's regnal years. This double dating links the two kingdoms' fates: Hezekiah witnesses from Jerusalem what happens when a nation abandons the covenant.
10. The fall of Samaria is recorded again, now from Hezekiah's chronological perspective. The phrase *nilkedah Shomeron* ('Samaria was taken') uses the niphil passive — the city is the object, not the subject. It suffered capture rather than choosing defeat. The double-dated chronology embeds the northern catastrophe within the Judahite timeline.
11. The deportation locations repeat 17:6 verbatim. The repetition is deliberate — the narrator wants the reader to hear the exile sentence again, now from Hezekiah's perspective. What happened to Israel will serve as the warning Hezekiah heeds and the lesson the Rabshakeh will soon weaponize.
12. The explanation for exile is compressed into one verse: failure to hear (*lo shame'u beqol YHWH*), violation of covenant (*vayyya'avru et berito*, 'they crossed over/transgressed his covenant'), and failure to act (*lo shame'u velo asu*, 'they did not listen and did not do'). The verb *avar* in the phrase

vayyya'avru et berito means 'to cross over, to transgress' — they crossed the boundary line of the covenant. Moses is identified as eved YHWH ('servant of the LORD'), his highest title.

13. Sennacherib (Sancheriv) succeeded Sargon II in 705 BCE. His campaign against Judah in 701 BCE is one of the most thoroughly documented events in ancient history — Assyrian records, the biblical accounts in Kings, Isaiah, and Chronicles, and archaeological evidence from Lachish all converge. The phrase kol arei Yehudah habetsurot ('all the fortified cities of Judah') indicates comprehensive conquest — Judah's defensive network is systematically dismantled. The siege of Lachish, Judah's second city, is depicted in famous relief panels from Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh.
14. Hezekiah's first response is capitulation: chatati ('I have sinned/done wrong') is a confession of political error — his rebellion was a mistake. The phrase shuv me-alai ('turn back from upon me, withdraw from me') begs for Assyrian withdrawal. The blank-check submission — et asher titten alai essa ('whatever you put on me I will carry') — offers unconditional compliance. Sennacherib is at Lachish (Lakhish), besieging Judah's second-most important city, about 30 miles southwest of Jerusalem.
15. The tribute demand is enormous: three hundred talents of silver (approximately 10 tons) and thirty talents of gold (approximately 1 ton). Sennacherib's own annals claim 30 talents of gold and 800 talents of silver — the gold figure matches; the silver discrepancy may reflect different accounting methods or additional payments. A talent (kikkar) weighed approximately 75 pounds. This sum would deplete the national treasury.
16. Hezekiah empties both the Temple and palace treasuries — the same sources Ahaz raided in 16:8. The cycle of plunder continues: foreign threats drain the Temple of its wealth. The phrase kol hakkesef hannimtsa ('all the silver found') indicates a total depletion — everything available.
17. The bitter irony: Hezekiah, the great reformer, must strip gold from the very Temple he had restored. The phrase asher tsippah Chizkiyyahu ('which Hezekiah had overlaid') specifies that this gold overlay was his own work — he is dismantling his own renovation. The daltot heikhal YHWH ('doors of the temple of the LORD') and the omnot ('doorposts/pillars') are the visible face of the Temple. The reformer's piety funds the imperial tribute.
18. Three Assyrian officials arrive: the Tartan (turtanu, commander-in-chief), the Rab-saris (chief eunuch/official), and the Rabshakeh (rab shaqe, chief cupbearer/chief officer). These are titles, not personal names. They come with cheil kaved ('a heavy/massive force') — military intimidation accompanies diplomatic speech. The location — te'alat haberekhah ha-elyonah ('the conduit of the Upper Pool') on the road to the Washerman's Field — is the same spot where Isaiah had met Ahaz years earlier (Isaiah 7:3). The geography is loaded: where Ahaz refused to trust God, Hezekiah's officials will now face the consequences of that refusal's legacy.
19. Three Judahite officials meet three Assyrian officials — a diplomatic parallel. Eliakim is asher al habbayit ('over the house'), the palace steward and chief administrator. Shebna is hassofer ('the scribe/secretary'), responsible for state documents. Joah is hammazkir ('the recorder/herald'), the official who maintained royal records and communications. These same officials appear in Isaiah 36:3. The king himself does not come out — diplomatic protocol places intermediaries at the wall.
20. The Rabshakeh opens with the Assyrian royal formula: koh amar hammelekh haggadol melekh Ashshur ('thus says the great king, the king of Assyria'). The title 'great king' (melekh gadol) is the standard Assyrian imperial designation, deliberately echoing the prophetic messenger formula koh amar YHWH ('thus says the LORD'). The question mah habbitachon hazzeh asher batachta ('what is this confidence in which you trust?') attacks the core of Hezekiah's identity — the narrator has just told us Hezekiah's defining quality is trust (batach, v. 5). The Rabshakeh targets precisely what makes Hezekiah exceptional.
21. The image of Egypt as mish'enet haqqaneh haratsuts ('the staff of the crushed/splintered reed') is devastating propaganda — and Isaiah would agree (Isaiah 30:1-5, 31:1-3). A reed staff looks like support but collapses under weight and stabs the hand that grips it. The verb yissamekh ('he leans upon') from samakh ('to lean, to support') suggests full body weight. The Rabshakeh's mockery of Egyptian alliance is theologically sound — the prophets said the same thing. This creates the speech's unsettling power: the enemy speaks truth.
22. The Rabshakeh's most theologically sophisticated argument: he claims Hezekiah's reform — removing bamot ('high places') and mizbekhot ('altars') — was an offense against YHWH, not an act of faithfulness. From the Assyrian perspective (and from the perspective of many Judahites who worshipped at these shrines), centralizing worship in Jerusalem looked like reducing the deity's access points. The argument is wrong but plausible to an audience that valued local worship sites. The Rabshakeh understands Judahite religion well enough to exploit internal tensions.
23. The Rabshakeh's mockery turns to military assessment: hit'arev na ('make a bet, enter a wager') is a taunt. He offers two thousand horses because he knows Judah cannot field enough trained cavalry to ride them. The number is deliberately chosen to expose Judah's military weakness. If a nation cannot even staff two thousand horses, how can it resist the Assyrian army? The argument combines insult with accurate intelligence about Judah's depleted military capacity.
24. The logic tightens: if Judah cannot defeat a single pechat ('governor, provincial official') — the lowest rank in Assyrian military hierarchy — how can it withstand the full army? The taunt exposes the absurdity of resisting a superpower. The reference to trusting Egypt lerekev uleparashim ('for chariots and horsemen') identifies Judah's secret diplomatic strategy — seeking Egyptian military support, which both Isaiah and the Rabshakeh condemn.
25. The most audacious claim: YHWH amar elai ('the LORD said to me') — the Rabshakeh claims divine authorization for the Assyrian invasion. This is either a calculated lie, an inference from Assyrian military theology (gods send empires to punish), or an ironic truth — Isaiah 10:5-6 does call Assyria 'the rod of my anger.' The narrator does not confirm or deny the claim. The effect on the audience would be devastating: if their own God has authorized their destruction, resistance is not just futile but impious.

26. The Judahite officials make a desperate diplomatic request: *dabber na Aramit* ('please speak in Aramaic'), the lingua franca of international diplomacy that the common people would not understand. The phrase *ve-al tedabber immanu Yehudit* ('do not speak with us in Judahite') reveals their fear — the Rabshakeh's arguments are reaching the population. *Yehudit* refers to the Judahite dialect of Hebrew. The officials' request inadvertently confirms that the propaganda is effective.
27. The Rabshakeh refuses to switch languages and escalates with crude siege imagery. The words *chareihem* ('their excrement') and *sheineihem* ('their urine') are either euphemisms or deliberately vulgar terms — the Masoretic margin (Qere) substitutes less offensive readings, suggesting the original text was considered too coarse for public reading. The Rabshakeh's point is clear: continued resistance means siege, and siege means starvation so severe that people consume their own waste. He is addressing the soldiers and civilians on the wall over the heads of the diplomats.
28. The Rabshakeh responds to the request for Aramaic by speaking even more loudly in Hebrew. The phrase *beqol gadol Yehudit* ('in a loud voice, in Judahite') is deliberately defiant. The formula *shim'u devar hammelekh haggadol* ('hear the word of the great king') mimics the prophetic call *shim'u devar YHWH* ('hear the word of the LORD'). The Assyrian king's word is being presented as a rival to divine speech.
29. The verb *yashshi* ('let him deceive, let him mislead') from *nasha* ('to deceive, to beguile') directly attacks Hezekiah's credibility. The king's name is used without title — a deliberate demotion. The phrase *lo yukhal lehatstil etkhem miyyado* ('he cannot deliver you from his hand') uses the same rescue language (*natsal*) that the covenant reserves for God's action. The Rabshakeh is telling the people: your king cannot play the role your God is supposed to play.
30. Now the Rabshakeh directly attacks divine trust: *al yavteach etkhem Chizkiyyahu el YHWH* ('do not let Hezekiah cause you to trust in the LORD'). The infinitive absolute construction *hatsel yatssilenu* ('he will certainly rescue us') quotes what Hezekiah presumably says to his people. The Rabshakeh is trying to separate the population from both their king and their God simultaneously — the twin pillars of Judahite identity.
31. The verb *asu itti verakhah* ('make with me a blessing/peace') can mean 'make a peace agreement' or 'submit and receive my favor.' The idyllic promise — *ish gafno ve-ish te'enato* ('each man his vine, each man his fig tree') — deliberately quotes the messianic peace of 1 Kings 4:25 and Micah 4:4. The Rabshakeh is offering Assyrian imperialism dressed in covenant language: surrender and receive the peace that your God promised but has not delivered. The image of drinking from one's own cistern (*mei voro*) evokes settled domestic security.
32. The Rabshakeh now promises deportation as paradise: a land *kedartsekem* ('like your land') described with the vocabulary of covenant blessing — *dagan* ('grain'), *tirosh* ('new wine'), *lechem* ('bread'), *keramim* ('vineyards'), *zeit yitshar* ('olive oil'), *devash* ('honey'). This is a distorted echo of Deuteronomy 8:8's description of the promised land. The phrase *vichiyu velo tamutu* ('and live and do not die') echoes Deuteronomy 30:19: 'choose life.' The Rabshakeh is offering an Assyrian version of the covenant choice — but life through surrender rather than life through obedience.
33. The rhetorical question expects the answer 'no.' The infinitive absolute *hahatsel hitssilu* ('did they actually rescue?') emphasizes the totality of divine failure across every conquered nation. The Rabshakeh's argument presupposes that all gods are territorial and limited — what held for the gods of Hamath and Arpad must hold for the God of Jerusalem. He does not yet understand that he is dealing with a categorically different deity.
34. The Rabshakeh lists conquered cities whose gods failed to protect them: Hamath and Arpad in Syria, Sepharvaim (possibly Sippar in Mesopotamia), Hena and Ivvah (locations uncertain). The climactic question *ki hitssilu et Shomeron miyyadi* ('did they rescue Samaria from my hand?') brings the argument home — Samaria, the northern Israelite capital, whose God is the same God Judah claims. If YHWH could not save Samaria, why would he save Jerusalem? The Rabshakeh's fatal error is treating YHWH as one deity among many — but the fall of Samaria gives his argument empirical force.
35. The speech's climax: *mi bekol elohei ha-aratsot* ('who among all the gods of the lands?') places YHWH in a lineup of defeated deities. The final question — *ki yatstil YHWH et Yerushalayim miyyadi* ('that the LORD should rescue Jerusalem from my hand?') — is the Rabshakeh's fatal theological overreach. He names YHWH directly and challenges him personally. In the narrative logic of Kings, this is no longer propaganda but blasphemy — and blasphemy invites divine response.
36. The silence of the people — *vehechrishu ha'am* ('the people were silent') — is both discipline and dignity. The verb *charesh* ('to be silent, to be deaf') can imply either unable to respond or choosing not to. Hezekiah's command *lo ta'anuhu* ('do not answer him') prevents the Rabshakeh from engaging in dialogue with the population, which is exactly what he wanted. The silence denies him a debating partner and preserves Hezekiah's authority over the response.
37. The three officials return with *qeru'ei vegadim* ('their garments torn') — the physical sign of grief and distress. Tearing garments indicates they understood the speech as a crisis, not merely a negotiation. They relay *divrei Rav Shaqeh* ('the words of the Rabshakeh') to Hezekiah, setting up the king's response in chapter 19. The torn garments prepare the reader for Hezekiah's own grief and his turn to God rather than to diplomacy.

19

Summary: *Hezekiah tears his garments, puts on sackcloth, and enters the Temple. He sends officials to the prophet Isaiah with an urgent plea. Isaiah responds with a word from the LORD: do not fear the Rabshakeh's words; the Assyrian king will hear a rumor and return to his own land, where he will fall by the sword. Meanwhile, Sennacherib sends a letter to Hezekiah repeating his threats — no god has saved any nation from Assyria, and the God of Jerusalem will be no different. Hezekiah spreads the letter before the LORD in the Temple and prays one of the great prayers of the Hebrew Bible: he affirms that the LORD alone is God of all kingdoms, acknowledges that Assyria has indeed destroyed nations and their gods, and asks God to save Jerusalem so that all kingdoms will know that the LORD alone is God. Isaiah sends a second oracle — a poetic masterpiece — declaring that Assyria has raged against the Holy One of Israel, but God controls the rise and fall of empires. A sign is given: for two years Judah will eat what grows on its own, and in the third year they will plant and harvest normally. That night, the angel of the LORD strikes down 185,000 in the Assyrian camp. Sennacherib withdraws to Nineveh and is eventually assassinated by his own sons.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains two of the most important theological speeches in Kings: Hezekiah's prayer and the LORD's response through Isaiah. Hezekiah's prayer (vv. 15-19) is a model of covenant theology under pressure — he does not deny the Rabshakeh's facts (Assyria has destroyed nations), but he reframes the theological category (those were not gods; the LORD is). The Isaiah oracle (vv. 21-34) is one of the most sophisticated pieces of Hebrew poetry in the prophetic corpus, shifting between mockery of Assyrian arrogance, affirmation of divine sovereignty over history, and specific promise of Jerusalem's preservation. The destruction of the Assyrian army (v. 35) is narrated in a single verse — the narrator gives more space to the theological argument than to the military miracle, because the argument is the point. God does not save Jerusalem because of its walls or Hezekiah's diplomacy but because of his own name and his covenant with David.*

Translation Friction: *The number 185,000 killed (v. 35) has generated extensive discussion. Some read it literally as divine intervention; others propose a plague (Herodotus records a story of mice destroying Sennacherib's army's bowstrings, possibly reflecting a plague narrative); still others suggest it is a stylized number. The Hebrew text simply states vayyakkeh bemachaneh Ashshur ('he struck in the camp of Assyria') — the mechanism is not specified, only the agent (mal'akh YHWH, 'the angel/messenger of the LORD'). We render the text as given. The relationship between Sennacherib's assassination (v. 37) and historical records is confirmed: Esarhaddon did succeed him after a dynastic crisis, though Assyrian records name only one assassin. The Isaiah oracle's poetry (vv. 21-28) presents translation challenges with its dense metaphorical language and shifts between addressees.*

Connections: *Hezekiah's response to crisis — entering the Temple, sending to a prophet — is the inverse of Ahaz's response (seeking Assyria rather than God). The phrase qedosh Yisrael ('the Holy One of Israel,' v. 22) is Isaiah's distinctive title for God, appearing over 25 times in his prophecy and rarely elsewhere — its use here marks the oracle as authentically Isaianic. The angel of the LORD striking the camp (v. 35) echoes the Passover narrative: the same destroying agent who struck Egypt now strikes Assyria. The sign of two years of wild growth followed by normal agriculture (vv. 29-31) recalls the Sabbath and Jubilee agricultural cycles of Leviticus 25 — the land itself will testify to divine control of time. Sennacherib's assassination before his god Nisroch (v. 37) creates a final irony: the king who mocked other gods as unable to save is killed in the temple of his own god, who also cannot save him.*

¹When King Hezekiah heard this, he tore his garments, wrapped himself in sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD. ²He sent Eliakim, who was in charge of the palace, Shebna the secretary, and the senior priests — all wearing sackcloth — to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. ³They told him, "This is what Hezekiah says: This is a day of distress, rebuke, and disgrace. Children have reached the point of birth, but there is no strength to deliver them. ⁴Perhaps the LORD your God will hear all the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words the LORD your God has heard. Lift up a prayer for the remnant that survives." ⁵When King Hezekiah's servants came to Isaiah, ⁶Isaiah said to them, "Tell your master: This is what the LORD says — Do not be afraid of the words you have heard, with

which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. ⁷I am about to put a spirit in him so that when he hears a report, he will return to his own land. And I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land." ⁸The Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, because he had heard that Sennacherib had moved on from Lachish. ⁹ Then Sennacherib heard a report about Tirhakah king of Cush: "He has set out to fight against you." So he sent messengers again to Hezekiah, saying, ¹⁰"Say this to Hezekiah king of Judah: Do not let your God, in whom you trust, deceive you by saying, 'Jerusalem will not be handed over to the king of Assyria.' ¹¹You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to every land, utterly destroying them. Will you alone be rescued? ¹²Did the gods of the nations rescue them — the ones my predecessors destroyed: Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar? ¹³Where is the king of Hamath? The king of Arpad? The king of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah?" ¹⁴Hezekiah took the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the house of the LORD and spread it open before the LORD. ¹⁵Hezekiah prayed before the LORD: "O LORD, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim — you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heavens and the earth. ¹⁶Incline your ear, O LORD, and hear. Open your eyes, O LORD, and see. Hear the words of Sennacherib, which he sent to mock the living God. ¹⁷It is true, O LORD — the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands. ¹⁸They have thrown their gods into the fire — because they were not gods at all, but only the work of human hands, wood and stone. So of course they destroyed them. ¹⁹Now, O LORD our God, save us from his power, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone." ²⁰Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: What you prayed to me about Sennacherib king of Assyria — I have heard. ²¹This is the word the LORD has spoken against him: She despises you, she mocks you — Virgin Daughter Zion! She shakes her head behind your back — Daughter Jerusalem! ²²Whom have you mocked and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes in arrogance? Against the Holy One of Israel! ²³Through your messengers you have mocked the Lord and said, 'With my many chariots I have scaled the mountain heights, the remotest peaks of Lebanon. I cut down its tallest cedars, its choicest cypresses. I penetrated its farthest lodge, its densest forest. ²⁴I dug wells and drank foreign waters. With the soles of my feet I dried up all the rivers of Egypt.' ²⁵Have you not heard? Long ago I planned it. In ancient times I shaped it. Now I have brought it about — that you should crush fortified cities into heaps of rubble. ²⁶Their inhabitants, shorn of strength, were shattered and shamed. They became like plants of the field, like tender green shoots, like grass on rooftops scorched before it can grow. ²⁷I know your sitting down, your going out, and your coming in — and your raging against me. ²⁸Because your raging against me and your arrogance have reached my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way you came." ²⁹And this will be your sign: This year you will eat what grows on its own. In the second year you will eat what springs from that. But in the third year, sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ³⁰The surviving remnant of the house of Judah will take root downward and bear fruit upward. ³¹For out of Jerusalem a remnant will go forth, and survivors from Mount Zion. The zeal of the LORD of Hosts will accomplish this. ³²Therefore this is what the LORD says about the king of Assyria: He will not enter this city. He will not shoot an arrow here. He will not advance against it with a shield. He will not build a siege ramp against it. ³³By the way he came, he will return. He will not enter this city — declares the LORD. ³⁴I will shield this city and save it — for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David. ³⁵That night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the survivors rose at dawn, there were dead bodies everywhere. ³⁶Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp, departed, and returned to Nineveh, where he remained. ³⁷While he was worshipping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him down with the sword. They escaped to the land of Ararat, and his son Esarhaddon reigned in his place.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Hezekiah's three actions form a sequence: tearing garments (grief and distress), donning sackcloth (mourning and penitence), and entering the Temple (turning to God). The verb *vayyavo beit YHWH* ('he went into the house of the LORD') is the decisive choice — where Ahaz turned to Assyria, Hezekiah turns to God's house. This is the physical expression of the trust (*batach*) that defines his reign.

2. Hezekiah's delegation now includes ziqnei hakkohanim ('the elders of the priests') — not just civil officials but religious leaders. All are mitkassim basaqim ('covered in sackcloth'), indicating national mourning. Isaiah ben Amots ('Isaiah son of Amoz') appears by name for the first time in Kings. He is called hannavi ('the prophet'), his formal title, identifying him as the authoritative voice of God for this crisis.
3. Hezekiah's message uses three words for the crisis: tsarah ('distress, anguish'), tokhechah ('rebuke, correction, punishment'), and ne'atsah ('contempt, disgrace, blasphemy'). The birth metaphor — ba'u vanim ad mashber vekoach ayin leledah ('children have come to the breaking point of birth and there is no strength to deliver') — is devastating. The mashber is the birth stool or the cervical opening; the image is of a woman in the final stage of labor who has no strength to push. The nation is at the crisis point but cannot save itself.
4. The word ulai ('perhaps') reveals genuine uncertainty — Hezekiah does not presume on divine action but hopes for it. The phrase lecharef Elohim chai ('to mock the living God') reframes the Rabshakeh's speech as blasphemy against Elohim chai ('the living God') — a title that distinguishes YHWH from the dead idols of the nations. The request venasata tefillah be'ad hashe'erit hannimtsa'ah ('lift up prayer for the remnant that is found') uses she'erit ('remnant'), the prophetic term for the surviving portion of the people. Jerusalem is the remnant — all else has fallen.
5. A brief transitional verse linking the royal delegation's departure to their arrival at Isaiah's location. The officials are called avdei hammelekh ('servants of the king'), emphasizing they act under royal authority.
6. Isaiah's response opens with koh amar YHWH ('thus says the LORD'), the prophetic messenger formula — the same formula the Rabshakeh used for the Assyrian king. The divine message begins with al tira ('do not fear'), the standard oracle of reassurance in the Hebrew Bible. God identifies the Rabshakeh's words as giddefu oti ('they have blasphemed me') — the Rabshakeh attacked God, not merely Hezekiah, and God takes personal offense. The Assyrian officials are dismissively called na'arei melekh Ashshur ('servants/boys of the king of Assyria') — a deliberate demotion.
7. The prophecy is precise and will be fulfilled: hineni noten bo ruach ('I am putting a spirit in him') — God will manipulate Sennacherib's inner disposition. The word ruach ('spirit, wind, disposition') here means an impulse or inclination that God plants. The shemu'ah ('report, rumor') he will hear is likely news of the Ethiopian/Egyptian advance (v. 9) or internal Assyrian threats. The phrase veshav le-artso ('he will return to his land') predicts withdrawal, and vehippaltiv bacherev be-artso ('I will fell him by the sword in his land') predicts his assassination — fulfilled in v. 37.
8. Libnah (Livnah) was a fortified city in the Judahite lowlands, near Lachish. Sennacherib has moved to a new siege target while the Rabshakeh was at Jerusalem. The campaign continues — the Assyrian war machine does not stop for negotiations.
9. Tirhakah (Tirhaqah) was a Nubian/Cushite pharaoh of Egypt's 25th Dynasty. His advance from the south threatened Sennacherib's flank. Some scholars note that Tirhakah may not yet have been pharaoh in 701 BCE, suggesting either an anachronistic title or a second campaign. The approach of an Egyptian force makes Sennacherib intensify his pressure on Jerusalem — he wants the city before he must turn south.
10. Sennacherib's letter repeats the Rabshakeh's argument but now in writing. The phrase al yashshi'akha Elohekha asher attah boteach bo ('do not let your God in whom you are trusting deceive you') directly targets the trust relationship between Hezekiah and God. The participle boteach ('trusting') is continuous — Sennacherib knows Hezekiah is still trusting, and tries to break that trust.
11. The verb lechacharimam ('to devote them to destruction') uses the root charam — the same word used for Israel's total warfare in Joshua. Sennacherib claims Assyria has applied cherem ('total destruction') to every nation. The rhetorical question ve-attah tinnatsel ('and will you be saved?') implies the obvious answer: no.
12. The list of conquered territories is meant to overwhelm: Gozan in upper Mesopotamia, Haran (Abraham's ancestral city) in northern Syria, Rezech in the Syrian Desert, and benei Eden ('children of Eden,' not the garden but the Aramean state of Bit-Adini) near Telassar. The word avotai ('my fathers/predecessors') refers to previous Assyrian kings, claiming a dynasty of destroyers.
13. The taunting question ayyeh ('where?') repeats the Rabshakeh's earlier challenge (18:34). The kings are gone — erased. The question is rhetorical: they are nowhere, because Assyria destroyed them. The repetition of this list from chapter 18 shows Sennacherib's propaganda is standardized — the same arguments, the same city names, the same challenge to any god who would resist.
14. The verb vayyifrehehu ('he spread it out') is a vivid physical action: Hezekiah unrolls or unfolds the letter and lays it open lifnei YHWH ('before the LORD's face'). He is showing God the letter — not because God needs to read it, but as an act of bringing the crisis directly into God's presence. The gesture is both prayer and protest: 'See what they have written. See what they say about you.' This is prayer as presentation of evidence.
15. The prayer opens with a theological declaration that answers the Rabshakeh's fundamental error. YHWH is yoshev hakeruvim ('enthroned above the cherubim'), a reference to the Ark of the Covenant where God's presence dwelt between the cherubim in the Holy of Holies. The critical claim: attah hu ha-Elohim levaddekha lekhol mamlekhot ha-arets ('you alone are the God of all the kingdoms of the earth'). This is not a territorial deity but the universal sovereign. The phrase attah asita et hashamayim ve-et ha-arets ('you made the heavens and the earth') grounds the claim in creation — a God who made everything cannot be defeated by anything.
16. The prayer uses body-part language for God — hatteh oznekha ('incline your ear'), peqach einekha ('open your eyes') — not as literal anthropomorphism but as the language of intimate plea. The verbs are imperatives: hear, see, hear. Hezekiah wants God to attend to the specific words of Sennacherib's letter. The title Elohim chai ('living God') is repeated from v. 4 — it distinguishes YHWH from the dead gods of the nations and implicitly challenges Sennacherib's comparison.
17. Hezekiah concedes the Rabshakeh's facts: omnam ('truly, indeed') — the Assyrians have destroyed nations. The verb hecherivu ('they devastated, laid waste') does not sugarcoat the military reality. Honest prayer does not require denying reality; it requires reframing it theologically.

18. The theological reframe: *ki lo elohim hemmah* ('because they are not gods'). This is the pivot of the prayer. The Rabshakeh argued: no god has saved anyone, so your God cannot save you either. Hezekiah argues: they were not gods — they were *ma'aseh yedei adam ets va-even* ('the work of human hands, wood and stone'). The argument is not that those gods failed but that they never existed as gods in the first place. Assyria destroyed idols, not deities. The category error is the Rabshakeh's, not Hezekiah's.
19. The prayer reaches its climax with two petitions: *hoshi'enu na miyyado* ('save us now from his hand') and the purpose clause — *veyyed'u kol mamlekhot ha-arets ki attah YHWH Elohim levaddekha* ('so that all kingdoms of the earth will know that you, LORD, are God alone'). Hezekiah's prayer is not merely for survival but for divine self-revelation. Salvation is not an end in itself but a means by which all nations will recognize YHWH's sole divinity. The universalism is striking: the goal is not Judah's vindication but the world's knowledge of God.
20. The divine response begins with *shama'ti* ('I have heard') — answering Hezekiah's plea 'hear' (v. 16). God heard because Hezekiah asked him to hear. The prayer-response pattern confirms the covenant relationship: the God who seemed silent during the Rabshakeh's speech now speaks through his prophet.
21. The Isaiah oracle begins with taunting poetry. The personification of Jerusalem as *betulat bat Tsiyyon* ('Virgin Daughter Zion') turns the tables completely: the mighty Assyrian king is mocked by a young woman. The word *bazah* ('she despises, she scorns') is the verb of contempt. The gesture *rosh heni'ah* ('she shakes her head') is dismissive ridicule. The unraveling of Assyrian power begins with God laughing at the pretension.
22. Three rhetorical questions with one devastating answer: *et mi cherafta veggiddafta* ('whom did you mock and blaspheme?'), *al mi harimota qol* ('against whom did you raise your voice?'), and *vattissa marom einekha* ('you lifted your eyes on high'). The answer: *al qedosh Yisrael* ('against the Holy One of Israel'). The title *qedosh Yisrael* appears over twenty-five times in Isaiah and is his most distinctive name for God. *Qadosh* means 'separate, set apart, wholly other' — the Assyrians have challenged the one being in the cosmos they cannot dominate.
23. God quotes Sennacherib's own boasts back to him. The language of conquest is expressed through nature imagery: climbing mountains, cutting cedars, penetrating forests. Lebanon's cedars (*arazav*) were the ancient world's most prized timber — claiming to cut them down is claiming dominion over nature's finest. The phrase *melon qitso* ('the lodge of its limit/end') and *ya'ar karmillo* ('its garden-forest') represent the uttermost reaches of territory. Sennacherib claims there is nowhere he cannot go.
24. Sennacherib's boast continues: he dug wells in foreign lands (*qarti veshatiti mayim zarim*, 'I dug and drank foreign waters') and his marching armies dried up rivers (*achrib bekhaf pe'amai kol ye'orei matsor*, 'I dried up with the sole of my feet all the canals of Egypt'). The word *ye'orei* is the plural of *ye'or*, the Nile — the rivers of *matsor* ('Egypt' or 'siege'). The boast claims mastery over water itself, the fundamental resource of life. In a region where water means survival, claiming to control it claims to control everything.
25. God's response to Sennacherib's boasting: *halo shamata* ('have you not heard?') — a devastating question. Everything Assyria has accomplished was planned by God *lemerachok* ('from afar, long ago') and formed *liyemei qedem* ('from days of old'). Sennacherib is not a conqueror but an instrument. The verb *yetsartihah* ('I formed it, I shaped it') uses the potter's verb (*yatsar*) — God molded this history like clay. Assyria's victories are not achievements but assignments.
26. The conquered peoples are described with images of fragility: *esev sadeh* ('plants of the field'), *yereq deshe* ('tender green herb'), *chatsir gaggot* ('roof grass'). Grass growing on flat rooftops in the ancient Near East had no deep soil and withered quickly in the sun. The phrase *ushedemah lifnei qamah* ('scorched/blasted before standing') describes grain destroyed before it reaches maturity. The nations were weak not because Assyria was strong but because God made them weak for his purposes.
27. God claims total surveillance of Sennacherib: *shivtekh* ('your sitting/dwelling'), *tse'tekha* ('your going out'), *uvo'akha* ('your coming in') — every movement is known. The final phrase *ve-et hitragezekha elai* ('and your raging against me') identifies Sennacherib's real offense: not political ambition but personal rage against God. The verse echoes Psalm 139:2 ('you know my sitting down and my rising up') — the same all-knowing attention, now turned from comfort to judgment.
28. The punishment matches Assyrian practice — Assyrian reliefs show conquered kings led by hooks through their noses or lips. God will do to Sennacherib what Sennacherib does to others: *vesamti chachi be-appekha umitiggiy bisfatekha* ('I will set my hook in your nose and my bridle in your lips'). The image is of an animal led by a ring. The once-mighty conqueror becomes a led beast. The phrase *vahashivotikha baderekh asher bata bah* ('I will return you by the way you came') promises forced withdrawal — the same road in, the same road back.
29. The sign (*ot*) is agricultural: for two years the land will produce only *saphiach* ('aftergrowth, volunteer grain') and *sachish* ('what springs up by itself') — crops from ungathered seed of the previous harvest. The disruption of normal agriculture reflects the Assyrian invasion's damage. But in the third year — *zir'u veqitsru* ('sow and reap') — normal life resumes. The sign confirms divine control over the agricultural calendar, the most basic human concern. Vineyards take years to mature, so 'plant vineyards and eat their fruit' promises long-term stability.
30. The agricultural metaphor extends to the people: *peleitath beit Yehudah hannish'arah* ('the escaped remnant of the house of Judah that remains') will function like a replanted tree — *shoresh lemattah* ('root downward') and *asah peri lema'lah* ('bear fruit upward'). The image reverses exile: instead of being uprooted and deported (as happened to Israel), Judah will be rooted deeper. The word *peleitath* ('escaped remnant, survivors') and *nish'arah* ('remaining') acknowledge the devastating losses while promising recovery.
31. The promise is sourced: *qin'at YHWH tseva'ot ta'aseh zot* ('the zeal of the LORD of Hosts will accomplish this'). The word *qin'ah* ('zeal, jealousy, passionate commitment') is the divine attribute that refuses to share Israel with other gods and refuses to abandon Israel to other powers. *YHWH Tseva'ot* ('the LORD of Hosts/Armies') is the divine warrior title — the God who commands heavenly armies acts out of covenant jealousy.

32. Four negations describe what Sennacherib will not do to Jerusalem: lo yavo ('he will not enter'), lo yoreh sham chets ('he will not shoot an arrow there'), lo yeqaddemenah magen ('he will not confront it with a shield'), lo yishpokh aleha solelah ('he will not pour out against it a ramp'). Each item represents a stage of ancient siege warfare: entry, missile fire, close combat, and ramp-building. God forbids the entire sequence. The city will be untouched — not because its walls are strong but because God's word forbids the assault.
33. The oracle concludes with ne'um YHWH ('oracle of the LORD'), the prophetic seal of authority. The promise badderekh asher ba bah yashuv ('by the road he came he will return') is a forced retreat — the same road, reversed. The repetition of lo yavo ('he will not enter') is emphatic. The city's safety is guaranteed by divine speech, not military calculation.
34. Two motivations for Jerusalem's deliverance: lema'ani ('for my own sake') and ulma'an David avdi ('for the sake of David my servant'). God acts for his own reputation — the name that Sennacherib blasphemed must be vindicated — and for the Davidic covenant. The phrase David avdi ('David my servant') invokes 2 Samuel 7 and the unconditional promise to David's house. Jerusalem is saved not because of Hezekiah's merit or Judah's righteousness but because of God's name and God's promise to David.
35. The destruction occurs ballailah hahu ('that very night') — the theological argument has been made; now the action follows immediately. The mal'akh YHWH ('angel/messenger of the LORD') is the agent of divine warfare — the same figure who passed through Egypt on Passover night (Exodus 12:23). The number 185,000 (me'ah shemonim vachamishah elef) is staggering. The narrative moves from the theological speeches to a single devastating verse. The phrase vayyashkimu vaboqer ('they rose early in the morning') presumably refers to the survivors, who find vehinne khullam pegarim metim ('behold, all of them — dead corpses'). The word pegarim ('corpses') is a clinical term for dead bodies.
36. Three verbs of retreat: vayyissa ('he pulled up stakes, broke camp'), vayyelekh ('he went'), vayyashav ('he returned'). The mighty Assyrian emperor who sent three officials and a massive army to Jerusalem simply leaves. The phrase vayyeshv beNineveh ('he settled in Nineveh') indicates he did not attempt another campaign against Jerusalem. The prophecy of v. 7 ('he will return to his own land') is fulfilled.
37. The final irony: Sennacherib, who mocked the gods of every nation as powerless, is assassinated beit Nisrokh elohav ('in the house of Nisroch his god'). His own god's temple cannot protect him. The assassination by his own sons — Adrammelech and Sharezer (Assyrian records confirm the coup) — fulfills Isaiah's prophecy of v. 7: 'I will fell him by the sword in his own land.' They flee to erets Ararat ('the land of Ararat,' modern Armenia/eastern Turkey). Esarhaddon (Esar-Chaddon) succeeded in 681 BCE, confirmed by Assyrian records. The man who challenged the living God dies in the house of a dead one.

20

Summary: *Hezekiah falls ill and is told by Isaiah that he will die. The king turns his face to the wall and prays, weeping bitterly. Before Isaiah has left the middle courtyard, God sends him back with a new word: Hezekiah will be healed, will go up to the Temple in three days, and will receive fifteen additional years of life. God will also defend Jerusalem for his own sake and for David's sake. Isaiah prescribes a fig poultice for the boil, and Hezekiah is healed. As confirmation, God causes the shadow on Ahaz's stairway to retreat ten steps. Later, Merodach-baladan king of Babylon sends envoys with letters and a gift to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery. Hezekiah shows them everything in his treasury — silver, gold, spices, fine oil, his armory, and all his storehouses. Isaiah asks what they saw, and Hezekiah admits: everything. Isaiah delivers a devastating prophecy: the day will come when everything in the palace will be carried to Babylon, and some of Hezekiah's own descendants will serve as eunuchs in the Babylonian palace. Hezekiah's response is ambiguous: he accepts the word as good because there will be peace in his lifetime.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains Hezekiah's greatest moment of faith (the prayer for healing) and his most troubling moment of failure (the Babylonian audience). The two episodes are linked by the theme of what you do when death — personal or national — stands at the door. Facing his own death, Hezekiah prays with passionate intimacy and God responds with extraordinary mercy: not just healing but a specific number of added years. Facing the Babylonian envoys, Hezekiah shows them everything — a display of wealth that functions as either pride, political alliance-building, or both. The narrator does not explain Hezekiah's motive; he lets the reader see the action and hear Isaiah's response. Hezekiah's final words — 'Is it not good, if there will be peace and stability in my days?' — have been read as either humble acceptance of God's word or selfish relief that the catastrophe will fall on future generations. The Hebrew supports both readings, and the narrator's silence is the judgment.*

Translation Friction: The sign of the shadow retreating ten steps on the ma'alot Achaz ('the steps/degrees of Ahaz,' v. 11) is one of the most debated passages in Kings. The word ma'alot can mean 'steps' (a physical staircase), 'degrees' (marks on a sundial), or 'ascents.' If it is a staircase, the shadow moving backward would be a visible astronomical miracle. If it is some kind of time-marking device, the phenomenon is equally extraordinary. We render ma'alot as 'steps' and note the ambiguity. The timing of the Babylonian embassy is disputed — Merodach-baladan (Marduk-apla-iddina II) was active in 721-710 and briefly in 703 BCE, which may place this episode before the Sennacherib invasion rather than after it. The chronological arrangement in Kings may be thematic rather than strictly sequential. Hezekiah's final response (v. 19) is rendered to preserve the ambiguity of the Hebrew rather than resolving it in either a positive or negative direction.

Connections: Hezekiah's prayer echoes Hannah's prayer (1 Samuel 2) and David's prayers in the Psalms — the pattern of turning to God in extremity and being heard. The fig poultice (develat te'anim, v. 7) is a known ancient medical treatment but here is prescribed by the prophet, making it both medicine and sign. The shadow retreating on Ahaz's steps creates an ironic link to Hezekiah's father: the stairway Ahaz built now serves as the instrument of a divine sign for the son who reversed his father's policies. The Babylonian embassy introduces the power that will eventually destroy Jerusalem — Babylon's interest in Judah begins with Hezekiah's illness and ends with Nebuchadnezzar's siege. Isaiah's prophecy of Babylonian exile (vv. 17-18) is the first explicit mention in Kings of Babylon as Judah's future conqueror, pivoting the book's attention from the Assyrian crisis to the Babylonian threat that will dominate the remaining chapters.

¹In those days Hezekiah became deathly ill. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz came to him and said, "This is what the LORD says: Set your house in order, because you are going to die — you will not recover." ²He turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD: ³"Please, O LORD, remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your eyes." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. ⁴Before Isaiah had left the middle courtyard, the word of the LORD came to him: ⁵"Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people: This is what the LORD, the God of your ancestor David, says — I have heard your prayer. I have seen your tears. I am going to heal you. On the third day you will go up to the house of the LORD. ⁶I will add fifteen years to your life. I will rescue you and this city from the power of the king of Assyria. I will shield this city for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David." ⁷Isaiah said, "Get a cake of pressed figs." They brought one and applied it to the boil, and he recovered. ⁸Hezekiah asked Isaiah, "What is the sign that the LORD will heal me and that I will go up to the house of the LORD on the third day?" ⁹Isaiah said, "This is the sign from the LORD that the LORD will do what he has promised: Shall the shadow advance ten steps, or shall it go back ten steps?" ¹⁰Hezekiah answered, "It would be easy for the shadow to advance ten steps. No — let the shadow go back ten steps." ¹¹Isaiah the prophet called out to the LORD, and he brought the shadow back the ten steps it had descended on the stairway of Ahaz. ¹²At that time Merodach-baladan son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah, because he had heard that Hezekiah had been ill. ¹³Hezekiah welcomed them and showed them his entire treasure house — the silver, the gold, the spices, the fine oil, his armory, and everything found in his storehouses. There was nothing in his palace or in his entire realm that Hezekiah did not show them. ¹⁴Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah and asked him, "What did these men say? Where did they come from?" Hezekiah answered, "They came from a distant land — from Babylon." ¹⁵Isaiah asked, "What did they see in your palace?" Hezekiah answered, "They saw everything in my palace. There is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them." ¹⁶Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD: ¹⁷The days are coming when everything in your palace — everything your ancestors stored up until this day — will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the LORD. ¹⁸Some of your own descendants — your own offspring — will be taken away and will serve as officials in the palace of the king of Babylon." ¹⁹Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good." Then he added, "At least there will be peace and stability in my lifetime." ²⁰The rest of the acts of Hezekiah, all his accomplishments, and how he constructed the pool and the tunnel and brought water into the city — are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ²¹Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and his son Manasseh reigned in his place.

1. The phrase *chalah Chizkiyahu lamut* ('Hezekiah was sick to death') indicates a terminal illness. Isaiah's prophetic message is blunt: *tsav leveitikha* ('command/set in order your house') — settle your affairs, arrange succession. The declaration *met attah velo tichyeh* ('dying are you and you will not live') is an emphatic double statement: you are dying, and you will not recover. This is presented as divine decree, not medical opinion — *koh amar YHWH* ('thus says the LORD').
2. The gesture *vayyashev et panav el haqqir* ('he turned his face to the wall') is physically intimate — Hezekiah faces the wall to create privacy, to block out the room, to be alone with God. The verb *hishev* ('to turn') implies deliberate redirection. In his most vulnerable moment, the king who trusted in God turns not to advisors, physicians, or foreign allies but to the wall — and through the wall, to God.
3. The prayer's address — *annah YHWH* ('please, O LORD') — is desperate and tender. The appeal is to covenant faithfulness: *hithalakhti lefanekha be-emet* ('I walked before you in truth/faithfulness') and *uleveav shalem* ('with a whole/complete heart'). The word *emet* ('truth, faithfulness, reliability') and the phrase *levav shalem* ('whole heart') are the standard of covenant loyalty. Hezekiah is not boasting but presenting evidence — the narrator already confirmed these qualities in 18:3-6. The phrase *vayyevk Chizkiyahu bekhi gadol* ('Hezekiah wept with great weeping') reveals raw emotion — the exemplary king faces death and weeps.
4. The speed of God's response is emphasized: *lo yatsa ha-ir hattikhonah* ('he had not yet gone out of the middle court') — Isaiah is still within the palace compound when God reverses the decree. The phrase *udevar YHWH hayah elav* ('the word of the LORD came to him') marks a new prophetic revelation that overturns the previous one. God changes his declared intention in response to prayer — a profound theological statement about the nature of prophecy and divine responsiveness.
5. God addresses Hezekiah as *negid ammi* ('the leader/prince of my people') — a title of intimacy that acknowledges Hezekiah's role. The divine self-identification as *Elohei David avikha* ('the God of David your ancestor') links the healing to the Davidic covenant. Two things God reports perceiving: *shamati et tefillatekha* ('I heard your prayer') and *ra'iti et dim'atekha* ('I saw your tears'). The prayer and the tears both reached God. The healing promise is specific: *bayyom hashelishi ta'aleh beit YHWH* ('on the third day you will go up to the house of the LORD') — three days from deathbed to Temple.
6. The promise has three components: *vehosafti al yamekha chamesh esreh shanah* ('I will add fifteen years to your days') — a precise, generous extension; *umikkaf melekh Ashshur atsilekha* ('from the hand of the king of Assyria I will rescue you') — personal deliverance; and *veganoti al ha-ir hazzot* ('I will shield this city') — corporate protection. The motivation repeats 19:34: *lema'ani ulma'an David avdi* ('for my sake and for the sake of David my servant'). The coupling of personal healing with national deliverance connects Hezekiah's body to Jerusalem's fate.
7. The remedy is medical and prophetic simultaneously: *develat te'enim* ('a cake/lump of pressed figs') was a known ancient treatment for skin infections and abscesses. The *shachin* ('boil, ulcer, skin inflammation') is the same word used for the sixth plague in Egypt (Exodus 9:9-11). The cure is ordinary — figs applied to a boil — but the healing is extraordinary, coming with a divine promise of fifteen years. The verb *vayyechi* ('and he lived/recovered') is terse and total.
8. Hezekiah's request for a sign (*ot*) is not faithlessness but standard prophetic protocol — signs confirm the word. His father Ahaz refused a sign (Isaiah 7:12); Hezekiah requests one. The question *mah ot* ('what sign?') assumes a sign will be given and asks what form it will take. The phrase *ve-aliti bayyom hashelishi beit YHWH* ('and I will go up on the third day to the house of the LORD') repeats God's promise, making the sign a confirmation of that specific timeline.
9. Isaiah offers Hezekiah a choice between two miraculous signs involving the *tselem* ('shadow') and *eser ma'alot* ('ten steps/degrees'). The *ma'alot* may be a staircase where the shadow's position serves as a time indicator, or it may refer to marks on a sundial-like device. Either way, the choice is between acceleration (the shadow moving forward) and reversal (the shadow moving backward). The word *ma'alot* connects verbally to the *ma'alot Achaz* ('steps of Ahaz') in v. 11.
10. Hezekiah chooses the harder miracle: *naqel latstsel lintot eser ma'alot* ('it is easy for the shadow to decline ten steps') — the shadow naturally moves forward as the day progresses. The reversal — *yashuv hatsel achorannit* ('let the shadow return backward') — is against nature. Hezekiah wants the sign that is unmistakably supernatural, that could not be explained away as coincidence. This is the choice of a man who has just faced death and wants absolute confirmation.
11. Isaiah mediates: *vayyiqra el YHWH* ('he called out to the LORD') — the prophet prays and God acts. The shadow retreats *bema'alot Achaz* ('on the steps/stairway of Ahaz') — the very structure associated with Hezekiah's faithless father now serves as the instrument of a faith-confirming miracle. The verb *vayyashev* ('he brought back, he returned') uses the same root (*shuv*) as repentance — God 'turned back' the shadow as a sign for a king who 'turned' to him in prayer.
12. The name appears here as *Bero'dakh Bal'adan*, a variant of *Marduk-apla-iddina* (Merodach-baladan in the parallel Isaiah 39:1). He was a Chaldean ruler who seized the Babylonian throne and maintained independence from Assyria in 721-710 and briefly in 703 BCE. His embassy to Hezekiah was almost certainly political rather than humanitarian — he was seeking allies against Assyria. The ostensible reason *ki shama ki chalah Chizkiyahu* ('because he heard that Hezekiah had been sick') is diplomatic cover for anti-Assyrian coalition-building.
13. The verb *vayyishma* ('he listened to/welcome') indicates receptive hospitality. The phrase *vayyar'em et kol beit nekhoto* ('he showed them his entire treasure house') initiates a catalog of displayed wealth: *kesev* ('silver'), *zahav* ('gold'), *besamim* ('spices'), *shemen hattov* ('fine oil'), *beit kelav* ('his armory/weapon house'). The narrator emphasizes totality twice: *kol asher nimtsa be-otsrotav* ('everything found in his storehouses') and *lo hayah davar asher lo her'am* ('there was nothing he did not show them'). The double negative is emphatic — the display was without reservation. Whether this was foolish pride, diplomatic necessity, or careless enthusiasm, the narrator lets the reader judge.

14. Isaiah's questions are pointed: mah ameru ('what did they say?') and me-ayin yavo'u ('where did they come from?'). The prophet is probing, not asking for information he lacks. Hezekiah's answer — me-erets rechoqah ba'u miBavel ('from a distant land they came, from Babylon') — seems to emphasize the distance with a note of pride: Babylon, far away, sought him out. The word rechoqah ('distant, far away') will gain ominous weight when Isaiah reveals what Babylon will eventually do to everything Hezekiah showed them.
15. Isaiah's question mah ra'u beveitkha ('what did they see in your house?') forces Hezekiah to articulate what he did. The king's answer repeats the totality language: et kol asher beveiti ra'u ('everything in my house they saw'). The repetition from v. 13 in Hezekiah's own words makes him the witness against himself. He is not yet aware that this display has prophetic consequences.
16. The formula shema devar YHWH ('hear the word of the LORD') signals a formal prophetic oracle. This is no longer conversation between prophet and king but a transmission of divine speech. The shift in register prepares for judgment.
17. The prophecy reverses the display: kol asher beveitkha ('everything in your house') — the same 'everything' Hezekiah showed will be taken. The phrase venissa Bavelah ('it will be carried to Babylon') names the destination explicitly. What the Babylonian envoys saw, Babylon will take. The phrase lo yivvater davar ('nothing will remain') is comprehensive — the totality of the display predicts the totality of the loss. The time frame is indefinite — yamim ba'im ('days are coming') — but certain.
18. The prophecy reaches beyond treasure to people: umibanekha asher yets'u mimmekha ('from your sons who will come from you'). The word sarisim can mean 'eunuchs' (castrated court officials) or 'court officials' more broadly. In either reading, Hezekiah's descendants will serve the Babylonian king — the ultimate inversion of royal dignity. The phrase beheikhil melek Bavel ('in the palace of the king of Babylon') specifies servitude in the very court that sent envoys to Hezekiah. This prophecy will be fulfilled in the persons of Daniel and his companions (Daniel 1:1-7), among others.
19. Hezekiah's response is the chapter's most debated utterance. The phrase tov devar YHWH asher dibbarta ('good is the word of the LORD that you spoke') can be read as genuine submission ('the LORD's word is always good') or as self-interested relief. The follow-up — halo im shalom ve-emet yihyeh veyamai ('is it not so that peace and truth/stability will be in my days?') — has been read as humble acceptance (he will not question God's timing), grateful relief (at least the exile will not happen now), or selfish indifference to future generations. The Hebrew preserves all three possibilities. The word emet here means 'stability, permanence, security' rather than 'truth.' The narrator does not comment, which is itself a comment.
20. The standard closing formula includes a specific achievement: et haberekhah ve-et hatte'alah vayyave et hammayim ha-irah ('the pool and the tunnel and he brought the water into the city'). This refers to the Siloam Tunnel (also called Hezekiah's Tunnel), one of the most remarkable engineering projects of the ancient world — a 533-meter underground channel carved through solid rock to bring water from the Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam inside the city walls. The tunnel was rediscovered in 1838 and an inscription found inside it (the Siloam Inscription) describes the dramatic moment when the two teams of diggers, working from opposite ends, met in the middle. The project was likely undertaken to secure Jerusalem's water supply against the anticipated Assyrian siege.
21. The death formula vayyishkav Chizkiyyahu im avotav ('Hezekiah lay down with his ancestors') closes the reign of Judah's most trusted king. The transition to Menasheh beno ('Manasseh his son') is ominous for the reader who knows what comes next — Manasseh will be the worst king in Judah's history (ch. 21), undoing everything his father built and committing the sins that will seal Judah's fate for exile. The name Menasheh ('Manasseh,' from nashah, 'to forget') is bitterly appropriate: he will forget everything his father remembered.

21

Summary: *Manasseh son of Hezekiah becomes king of Judah at age twelve and reigns fifty-five years in Jerusalem. He reverses every reform his father made: he rebuilds the high places Hezekiah tore down, erects altars to Baal, makes an Asherah pole as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worships the entire host of heaven. He builds pagan altars inside the Temple of the LORD — the very place where God said he would establish his name forever. He passes his son through fire, practices divination and sorcery, and consults mediums and spiritists. He sets up a carved image of Asherah in the Temple itself. The narrator's verdict is devastating: Manasseh did more evil than the nations the LORD had driven out before Israel. God sends prophets who declare that because of Manasseh's abominations, Jerusalem will suffer the same fate as Samaria — God will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria and the plumb line of the house of Ahab, wiping Jerusalem as one wipes a dish. Manasseh also sheds so much innocent blood that he fills Jerusalem from end to end. The chapter closes with his death and burial, followed by the brief two-year reign of his son Amon, who continues his father's evil ways. Amon's own servants assassinate him, but the people of the land execute the conspirators and place Amon's son Josiah on the throne.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Manasseh's reign presents one of the sharpest theological reversals in the entire Deuteronomistic History. His father Hezekiah received the highest evaluation of any Judean king (18:5), yet Manasseh receives the lowest. The text goes out of its way to compare Manasseh not to previous Judean kings but to Ahab — the worst king of Israel — making the comparison explicit by noting*

that Manasseh 'made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done' (verse 3). The theological weight of this chapter is enormous: it provides the reason for Jerusalem's eventual destruction. Even Josiah's later reforms cannot undo the sentence pronounced here. The phrase 'I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down' (verse 13) is one of the most vivid images of divine judgment in the Hebrew Bible — domestic, almost casual, yet total. The fifty-five-year reign is the longest of any king in Judah or Israel, meaning the worst king reigned the longest — a fact the narrator presents without commentary but that sits uncomfortably with any simple doctrine of divine reward and punishment.

Translation Friction: The primary historical difficulty is the relationship between this account and 2 Chronicles 33:10-17, which reports that Manasseh was taken captive to Babylon, repented, prayed, was restored to his throne, and reformed his worship. Kings contains no repentance narrative — the portrait is unrelieved darkness. Scholars debate whether Chronicles preserves an independent tradition or whether the repentance account was developed to explain how a wicked king could reign fifty-five years. The phrase 'he passed his son through fire' (verse 6) is debated: does it mean literal child sacrifice (as in Moabite practice) or a dedicatory ritual? The parallel with 2 Kings 16:3 and the Tophet references in Jeremiah 7:31 suggest actual sacrifice. The shedding of 'very much innocent blood' (verse 16) has generated later traditions identifying Manasseh as the killer of the prophet Isaiah (the Martyrdom of Isaiah), though this is not stated in the biblical text.

Connections: Manasseh's reign directly fulfills the covenant warnings of Deuteronomy 28-29 and Leviticus 26 — the consequences of comprehensive idolatry. The measuring line and plumb line imagery (verse 13) echoes Amos 7:7-8 and Isaiah 34:11, instruments of construction now repurposed for destruction. The comparison with the 'nations the LORD drove out' (verse 2) invokes the entire conquest tradition of Joshua, suggesting that Judah has become indistinguishable from the Canaanites. The phrase 'I will not cause the feet of Israel to wander anymore from the land' (verse 8) echoes 2 Samuel 7:10 (the Davidic covenant), recasting God's promise as conditional. Manasseh's placing an Asherah in the Temple reverses Solomon's dedication (1 Kings 8) and Hezekiah's cleansing (2 Kings 18:4). The 'people of the land' who execute Amon's assassins and install Josiah (verses 23-24) represent the rural Judean landholders who consistently support the Davidic line — they appear also in 11:14-20 (Joash's enthronement) and 23:30 (Jehoahaz's installation).

¹Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah. ²He did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations that the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. ³He rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had destroyed, erected altars for Baal, made an Asherah pole just as Ahab king of Israel had done, and bowed down to the entire host of heaven and served them. ⁴He built altars in the house of the LORD — the place where the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem I will establish my name." ⁵He built altars for the entire host of heaven in both courtyards of the house of the LORD. ⁶He passed his son through fire, practiced cloud-reading and divination, and established mediums and spiritists. He did much that was evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger. ⁷He placed the carved image of Asherah that he had made in the house — the house about which the LORD had said to David and to his son Solomon, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will establish my name forever." ⁸"I will never again cause Israel's feet to wander from the land I gave their ancestors — if only they are careful to do everything I commanded them, the entire instruction that my servant Moses gave them." ⁹But they did not listen. Manasseh led them astray to do more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites. ¹⁰The LORD spoke through his servants the prophets, saying: ¹¹"Because Manasseh king of Judah has committed these detestable acts — acting more wickedly than everything the Amorites who came before him ever did — and has caused Judah also to sin with his worthless idols, ¹²therefore this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I am about to bring such disaster on Jerusalem and Judah that the ears of everyone who hears of it will ring. ¹³I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line used on Samaria and the plumb line used on the house of Ahab. I will wipe Jerusalem clean the way a person wipes a dish — wiping it and turning it upside down." ¹⁴I will abandon the remnant of my inheritance and hand them over to their enemies. They will become plunder and loot for all their enemies, ¹⁵because they have done what is evil in my eyes and have been provoking me from the day their ancestors came out of Egypt until this very day. ¹⁶Manasseh also shed so much innocent blood that he filled Jerusalem from one end to the other — in addition to the

sin by which he caused Judah to sin, doing what was evil in the eyes of the LORD. ¹⁷The rest of the acts of Manasseh — everything he did and the sin he committed — are they not recorded in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ¹⁸Manasseh slept with his fathers and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the Garden of Uzza. His son Amon reigned in his place. ¹⁹Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Meshullemeth daughter of Haruz, from Jotbah. ²⁰He did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father Manasseh had done. ²¹He walked in every way his father had walked, serving the worthless idols his father had served, and bowing down to them. ²²He abandoned the LORD, the God of his ancestors, and did not walk in the way of the LORD. ²³Amon's own officials formed a conspiracy and assassinated the king inside his palace. ²⁴But the people of the land struck down all who had conspired against King Amon, and the people of the land made his son Josiah king in his place. ²⁵The rest of the acts of Amon — what he did — are they not recorded in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ²⁶He was buried in his tomb in the Garden of Uzza. His son Josiah reigned in his place.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The standard regnal formula introduces Manasseh with the longest reign in Judean history — fifty-five years (roughly 697-642 BCE, including a co-regency with Hezekiah). His mother's name Cheftsi-vah means 'my delight is in her,' a name Isaiah uses as a prophetic title for restored Jerusalem (Isaiah 62:4). The irony is piercing: the king who will cause Jerusalem's destruction was born to a woman whose name means 'God delights in her.'
2. The standard evaluation formula — *va-ya'as ha-ra be-einei YHWH* ('he did the evil in the eyes of the LORD') — is intensified by the comparison: *ke-to'avot ha-goyim* ('according to the detestable things of the nations'). The term *to'evah* ('abomination, detestable thing') is the strongest term of ritual revulsion in Hebrew. The nations in question are the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan, making the charge that Manasseh has returned Judah to the very conditions that justified the conquest.
3. The verse catalogs a comprehensive reversal of Hezekiah's reforms (18:4). The verb *va-yashav* ('he returned, he turned back') emphasizes deliberate undoing. The comparison *ka-asher asah Ach'av melekh Yisra'el* ('just as Ahab king of Israel had done') is devastating — Manasseh is not merely a bad Judean king but a replica of the worst Israelite king. The 'host of heaven' (*tseva ha-shamayim*) refers to astral deities — sun, moon, stars, and planets worshiped as gods — an Assyrian religious influence during Manasseh's era of vassal status.
4. The contrast is devastating: God chose this precise location to place his name (*asim et shemi*), and Manasseh installs pagan altars there. The 'name theology' — God's name dwelling in the Temple rather than God himself — is central to Deuteronomic thought (Deuteronomy 12:5, 1 Kings 8:29). To place foreign altars where God's name dwells is to defile the point of intersection between heaven and earth.
5. The two courtyards — the inner court (the priestly area) and the outer court (the general assembly area) — are both contaminated. The phrase *bi-shtei chatsrot beit YHWH* ('in the two courtyards of the house of the LORD') means every accessible area of the Temple complex now contains pagan altars. The sacred space has been comprehensively violated.
6. The catalog of forbidden practices covers the full range prohibited in Deuteronomy 18:10-12: *he'evir et beno ba-esh* ('he made his son pass through the fire') refers to child sacrifice or a dedicatory fire ritual associated with Molech; *onen* ('cloud-reader, soothsayer') and *nichesh* ('diviner, one who reads omens') are forms of mantic prophecy; *ov* ('medium, one who consults the dead') and *yid'onim* ('spiritists, knowing ones') are necromancers. The final phrase *le-hakh'is* ('to provoke') attributes intentionality — Manasseh's acts are not merely careless but deliberately provocative.
7. The narrator quotes the divine promise at length to maximize the contrast. The *pesel ha-Asherah* ('carved image of Asherah') — a cultic representation of the Canaanite mother goddess — is placed inside the very building about which God made his promise to David and Solomon. The word *le-olam* ('forever') at the end of God's promise echoes painfully: 'forever' is now confronted with Manasseh's idol. The passage compresses 2 Samuel 7:13 and 1 Kings 8:29 into a single citation.
8. The divine promise continues with its devastating conditional: *raq im* ('only if'). The promise of permanence in the land was never unconditional. The word *torah* here — *ve-le-khol ha-torah asher tsivvah otam avdi Mosheh* ('the entire instruction that my servant Moses commanded them') — is the comprehensive body of Mosaic law. Manasseh has violated not one or two commands but the entire covenantal framework.
9. The verb *va-yat'em* ('he led them astray, he caused them to wander') casts Manasseh as a seducer of the entire nation. The comparative *min ha-goyim* ('more than the nations') is the most extreme condemnation possible: Judah under Manasseh has surpassed the wickedness of the Canaanites whose abominations forfeited them the land. If the Canaanites lost the land for their sins, and Judah has exceeded those sins, the conclusion is inescapable.
10. The phrase *be-yad avadav ha-nevi'im* ('by the hand of his servants the prophets') is the standard formula for prophetic mediation. The specific prophets are unnamed — this is a collective prophetic witness. The divine speech that follows (verses 11-15) is one of the most consequential oracle-of-doom passages in the Deuteronomic History.
11. The oracle begins with *ya'an asher* ('because') — a formal juridical charge. The Amorites (*ha-Emori*) represent the pre-Israelite population generically. The term *gillulim* ('idols') is deliberately derogatory, probably derived from a root meaning 'dung pellets' — a contemptuous label for cult objects. The verb *va-yachati* ('he caused to sin') makes Manasseh responsible not only for his own sin but for the corruption of the entire people.

12. The phrase *tittsalnah shtei oznav* ('both his ears will ring/tingle') describes the physical shock of hearing devastating news — a buzzing or ringing in the ears from the sheer force of the report. The same expression appears in 1 Samuel 3:11 (the oracle against Eli's house) and Jeremiah 19:3 (Jerusalem's doom). It marks the most extreme category of divine judgment.
13. The *qav Shomron* ('line of Samaria') and *mishqolet beit Ach'av* ('plumb line of the house of Ahab') establish exact parallels between the fate of the northern kingdom and the coming fate of Judah. The *dish-wiping* image — *machah ve-hafakh al paneha* ('wipe and turn over on its face') — is unique to this passage and is one of the most memorable metaphors in the prophetic literature. The verb *machah* also means 'to blot out' (as in Genesis 6:7, the flood narrative), adding a further layer of total erasure.
14. The word *she'erit* ('remnant') is loaded: after the northern kingdom's fall, Judah is the remnant of God's *nachalah* ('inheritance, portion'). Now even this remnant will be abandoned (*natash*). The terms *baz* ('plunder') and *meshissah* ('spoil, loot') reduce God's chosen people to war booty. The theological weight is immense: God himself will hand over his own inheritance to hostile powers.
15. The divine accusation reaches back to the exodus itself: *min ha-yom asher yats'u avotam mi-Mitsrayim* ('from the day their ancestors left Egypt'). The entire history from exodus to Manasseh is framed as continuous provocation. The verb *makh'isim* ('provoking, angering') is a participle, indicating ongoing, habitual action — not a single act of rebellion but a sustained pattern stretching across centuries.
16. The phrase *dam naqi* ('innocent blood') — blood shed without just cause — is one of the gravest charges in biblical law (Deuteronomy 19:10, 13). The spatial image *peh la-peh* ('mouth to mouth,' meaning 'from one end to the other') portrays Jerusalem overflowing with unjustly shed blood. Later tradition (reflected in the Talmud and the Ascension of Isaiah) identified the prophet Isaiah as one of Manasseh's victims, though the biblical text does not name specific victims.
17. The standard source citation for Judean kings: *Sefer Divrei ha-Yamim le-Malkhei Yehudah* ('the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah'). The phrase *ve-chattato asher chata* ('and his sin that he sinned') is a sharp addition to the usual formula, ensuring the reader understands this reign's legacy is defined by transgression.
18. Manasseh is not buried in the royal tombs (the 'City of David' burial site used by most Judean kings) but in *gan beito be-gan Uzza* ('the garden of his house, in the Garden of Uzza') — a private garden burial. Whether this reflects disgrace or personal preference is debated. The Garden of Uzza may have been a family estate near the palace. The peaceful death of such a wicked king — he is not assassinated or punished during his lifetime — is a theological puzzle the narrator does not address.
19. The regnal formula for Amon is notably brief, befitting his short reign. His mother *Meshullemeth* ('the rewarded one' or 'the completed one') was from Jotbah, a town whose location is uncertain — possibly in Galilee or in Judah. The two-year reign (roughly 642-640 BCE) ended in assassination.
20. The evaluation formula is identical to the standard negative verdict, with the addition *ka-asher asah Menasheh aviv* ('just as his father Manasseh had done'). Amon is defined entirely by his father's pattern — he has no independent theological identity in this narrative.
21. The threefold repetition of 'his father' (*aviv*) in a single verse hammers the point: Amon is nothing more than a continuation of Manasseh. The *gillulim* ('worthless idols, dung-pellets') are the same objects Manasseh installed. The *'way'* (*derekh*) metaphor — walking in the father's path — is central to Deuteronomistic theology, where life is a road and the king chooses which direction to travel.
22. The verb *va-ya'azov* ('he abandoned') is the covenant-breach term — the opposite of the Deuteronomistic command to 'hold fast' (*davaq*) to the LORD. The phrase *Elohei avotav* ('the God of his ancestors') reminds the reader that Amon has a heritage of faithfulness (through David, Hezekiah) that he has rejected. The irony of *derekh YHWH* ('the way of the LORD') alongside the 'way of his father' in verse 21 sets the two paths in stark opposition.
23. The verb *va-yiqsheru* ('they conspired') is the standard term for palace coups (used of Zimri in 1 Kings 16:9, Jehu in 2 Kings 9:14, and others). The murder *be-veito* ('in his house') — in the royal residence — indicates an inside job by palace officials. The conspirators' motives are not stated: political, personal, or religious motivations are all possible.
24. The *am ha-arets* ('people of the land') — the rural Judean landholding class — intervene to execute the conspirators and ensure Davidic succession. This group consistently supports the legitimate dynasty (see 11:14-20 for the Joash precedent). Their action simultaneously punishes regicide and installs the boy who will become Judah's greatest reformer. The name *Yoshiyahu* ('Josiah,' meaning 'the LORD supports' or 'the LORD heals') will prove prophetically fitting.
25. The standard source citation. For a king who reigned only two years, the formula feels almost generous — there were hardly enough 'acts' to fill a chronicle. The brevity of his record contrasts with his father's fifty-five-year catalog of evil.
26. Amon is buried in the same Garden of Uzza as his father Manasseh — the private garden burial rather than the royal tombs in the City of David. The final phrase *va-yimlokh Yoshiyahu veno tachtav* ('and Josiah his son reigned in his place') closes one of the darkest chapters in Judean history and opens the door to the greatest reform. The narrative hinge from Manasseh/Amon to Josiah is one of the most dramatic reversals in the Deuteronomistic History.

22

Summary: *Josiah becomes king of Judah at eight years old and reigns thirty-one years in Jerusalem. He receives the highest evaluation alongside Hezekiah: he did right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in the way of David, turning neither to the right nor to the left. In his eighteenth year, Josiah sends his secretary Shaphan to the Temple to oversee the distribution of silver collected for repairs. Hilkiah the high priest tells Shaphan he has found 'the Book of the Law' in the house of the LORD. Shaphan reads it aloud to the king. When Josiah hears the words, he tears his robes in anguish, recognizing that the nation's ancestors have not obeyed what is written in this scroll and that divine wrath must be great. He sends a delegation — Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah — to inquire of the LORD on behalf of the nation. They go to Huldah the prophetess, wife of Shallum the keeper of the wardrobe, who lives in the Second Quarter of Jerusalem. Huldah delivers a devastating two-part oracle: first, the LORD will indeed bring disaster on Jerusalem and its inhabitants, fulfilling every curse written in the scroll, because they have abandoned the LORD and burned incense to other gods; second, because Josiah's heart was tender and he humbled himself before the LORD when he heard the words against this place, and because he tore his robes and wept, he will be gathered to his grave in peace and will not see the coming disaster.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The discovery of sefer ha-torah ('the Book of the Law') in the Temple is one of the most consequential moments in biblical history. The text implies that the scroll had been lost — not hidden, not stored, but genuinely lost in the Temple during the decades of Manasseh's and Amon's neglect. The sacred text of the covenant had literally disappeared inside the very building dedicated to the God who gave it. Josiah's visceral response — tearing his robes — shows a king encountering divine demands for the first time and recognizing instantly the catastrophic gap between what God requires and what the nation has been doing. The choice of Huldah as the prophetic authority is remarkable: Jeremiah and Zephaniah were both active during Josiah's reign, yet the delegation consults a woman. The text presents this without apology or explanation — Huldah is simply the prophet the LORD has authorized for this moment. Her oracle is unflinching: the disaster is certain and cannot be averted. Josiah's personal reprieve — he will die before the catastrophe — is simultaneously a mercy and a confirmation that Jerusalem's doom is sealed.*

Translation Friction: *The identification of the discovered scroll is one of the most debated questions in biblical scholarship. Since W.M.L. de Wette (1805), most scholars have identified it with some form of Deuteronomy (or at least its core), based on the correspondence between Josiah's subsequent reforms (chapter 23) and Deuteronomistic law — centralization of worship, destruction of high places, celebration of Passover. Others argue it was the entire Pentateuch or a different legal collection. The circumstances of the 'discovery' have raised suspicions: was the scroll planted by the priestly party to motivate reform? The text gives no hint of this — it presents the discovery as genuine. Huldah's promise that Josiah will be 'gathered to your grave in peace' (verse 20) creates a difficulty, since Josiah dies in battle at Megiddo (23:29). Various solutions have been proposed: 'in peace' refers to the absence of the Babylonian catastrophe during his lifetime; or the oracle is an authentic prophecy that was not fulfilled in every detail; or the battle of Megiddo was understood as a peaceful death compared to the horrors that followed.*

Connections: *The discovery of the scroll connects to the entire Deuteronomistic tradition — the book found is the book that frames the Deuteronomistic History. The scene of a king hearing the law read aloud and responding with repentance echoes the covenant renewal at Sinai (Exodus 24) and anticipates Ezra's public reading of the Torah (Nehemiah 8). Josiah's tearing of robes recalls David's responses to covenant violation (2 Samuel 1:11, 3:31). Huldah's oracle that the curses 'written in this scroll' will be fulfilled connects directly to Deuteronomy 28-29, the covenant curses that describe exile, destruction, and scattering. The 'tender heart' (rakh levav) of Josiah contrasts with the 'hardened heart' of Pharaoh (Exodus 7-14) — the one who softens before God's word receives mercy. The phrase 'you will be gathered to your grave' echoes the patriarchal death formula and the promise that the righteous will not see the coming judgment (Isaiah 57:1).*

¹Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah daughter of Adaiah, from Bozkath. ²He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in the entire way of

his ancestor David, turning neither to the right nor to the left. ³In the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan son of Azaliah son of Meshullam, the royal secretary, to the house of the LORD with these instructions: ⁴"Go up to Hilkiah the high priest and have him total the silver that has been brought into the house of the LORD — the silver the doorkeepers have collected from the people. ⁵Let them hand it over to the work supervisors appointed over the house of the LORD, and let those supervisors pay the workers repairing the house of the LORD — the damage to the building: ⁶to the carpenters, builders, and masons, and to purchase timber and cut stone for repairing the building." ⁷No accounting was required of them for the silver entrusted to them, because they worked with complete integrity. ⁸Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD." Hilkiah gave the scroll to Shaphan, and he read it. ⁹Shaphan the secretary came to the king and reported: "Your servants have melted down the silver found in the Temple and handed it over to the work supervisors appointed at the house of the LORD." ¹⁰Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a scroll." And Shaphan read it aloud before the king. ¹¹When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. ¹²The king gave orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king's attendant: ¹³"Go, inquire of the LORD for me, for the people, and for all Judah concerning the words of this scroll that has been found. The wrath of the LORD that burns against us must be great, because our ancestors did not listen to the words of this scroll or do everything written in it concerning us." ¹⁴Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter. They spoke with her. ¹⁵She said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, ¹⁶This is what the LORD says: I am about to bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants — every word of the scroll that the king of Judah has read. ¹⁷Because they have abandoned me and burned incense to other gods, provoking me with everything their hands have made, my wrath has been kindled against this place and will not be quenched." ¹⁸But to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the LORD, say this to him: This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you have heard: ¹⁹Because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I declared against this place and its inhabitants — that they would become a desolation and a curse — and because you tore your robes and wept before me, I too have heard you, declares the LORD. ²⁰Therefore I will gather you to your ancestors, and you will be laid in your grave in peace. Your eyes will not see any of the disaster I am about to bring on this place." They brought the king this answer.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The regnal formula introduces Josiah at age eight — a child king, the youngest since Joash (12:1). His mother's name Yedidah ('beloved') echoes the name Yediyah ('beloved of the LORD'), the name the prophet Nathan gave to Solomon (2 Samuel 12:25). Bozkath was a town in the lowland region of Judah (Joshua 15:39). The thirty-one-year reign (roughly 640-609 BCE) spans the decline of Assyrian power and the rise of Babylon.
2. The evaluation formula is maximally positive. The phrase *be-khol derekh David aviv* ('in all the way of David his father') makes David the standard — not Solomon, not Hezekiah, but the dynastic founder. The phrase *lo sar yamin u-semol* ('he did not turn right or left') echoes Deuteronomy 5:32 and 17:20, the instruction for the ideal king. After the darkness of Manasseh and Amon, the narrator's verdict on Josiah is a shaft of light.
3. The eighteenth year of Josiah's reign (roughly 622 BCE) is the pivotal date in the Deuteronomistic History. Shaphan the *sofer* ('scribe, secretary') belongs to a distinguished family: his descendants Ahikam, Gedaliah, and Gemariah appear prominently in Jeremiah's narrative as supporters of the prophet. The three-generation genealogy (Shaphan ben Atsalyahu ben Meshullam) signals aristocratic standing.
4. *Chilqiyahu ha-kohen ha-gadol* ('Hilkiah the high priest') is the senior religious official. The silver collection system — with *shomrei ha-saf* ('keepers of the threshold, doorkeepers') collecting from worshipers — mirrors the arrangement established under Joash (12:10-16). The verb *yattem* ('let him complete the reckoning, let him total') indicates financial accounting.
5. The administrative chain is clear: silver flows from people to doorkeepers to high priest to supervisors (*ha-mufqadim*, 'the appointed ones') to the actual workers (*osei ha-melakhah*). The phrase *le-chazeq bedeq ha-bayit* ('to strengthen the breach of the house') is the same technical term for Temple repair used in the Joash narrative (12:6-13). The Temple apparently needed significant structural work after decades of neglect under Manasseh and Amon.
6. Three categories of craftsmen: *charashim* ('carpenters, woodworkers'), *bonim* ('builders, construction workers'), and *godrim* ('masons, wall builders'). The materials — *etsim* ('timber') and *avnei machtsev* ('quarried stones, hewn stones') — indicate major structural repair, not cosmetic maintenance.

7. The phrase *ki ve-emunah hem osim* ('because they are acting in faithfulness/integrity') is a remarkable trust statement. The word *emunah* ('faithfulness, reliability, trustworthiness') is from the root *aman*, the same root as 'amen.' The supervisors are so trustworthy that auditing is unnecessary — a detail that echoes the identical statement about Joash's Temple repair workers (12:16) and establishes a pattern of honesty in Temple administration.
8. The *sefer ha-torah* ('Book of the Law/Instruction') is widely identified with some form of Deuteronomy, based on the reforms that follow in chapter 23. The verb *matsa* ('to find') is used in its straightforward sense of discovery. Hilkiah's matter-of-fact announcement — embedded in a financial report — gives the discovery an almost casual quality that heightens its drama. The greatest theological event of the seventh century BCE is reported as an incidental finding during a building renovation.
9. Shaphan delivers the financial report first — *hittikhu avadekha et ha-kesef* ('your servants have poured out/melted down the silver'). The verb *hittikhu* (from *natakh*, 'to pour, melt') suggests the silver was melted into usable form for payments. The routine administrative report creates a narrative delay before the explosive announcement of the scroll.
10. Shaphan's understated announcement — *sefer natan li Chilqiyah ha-kohen* ('a scroll Hilkiah the priest gave me') — uses the indefinite 'a scroll' rather than 'the Book of the Law.' He may not yet understand its significance. The reading aloud (*va-yiqra'ehu Shaphan lifnei ha-melekh*) is a formal public reading, transforming the forgotten text into a living prophetic word. The king hears what the nation has not heard for generations.
11. The narrator now uses the full title *sefer ha-torah* ('the Book of the Law') — the text has been identified. Josiah's response — *va-yiqra et begadav* ('he tore his garments') — is the standard act of mourning and anguish, but here it signifies something more: the king recognizes in the scroll's words a description of what the nation has been doing wrong and the consequences that must follow. The tearing is not grief for the dead but terror before the living word of God.
12. The five-member delegation represents both religious and civil authority: Hilkiah is the high priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan is a court official (who later protects Jeremiah from execution, Jeremiah 26:24), Achbor son of Micaiah is another senior official, Shaphan is the royal secretary, and Asaiah is the king's personal attendant (*eved ha-melekh*). The delegation's composition signals the gravity of the inquiry.
13. Josiah's command is remarkable for its first-person plural language: *ba'adi u-ve'ad ha-am u-ve'ad kol Yehudah* ('for me, for the people, and for all Judah') and *avoteinu* ('our ancestors'). The king includes himself in the guilt — he does not exempt the throne from responsibility. The phrase *gedolah chatat YHWH* ('great is the wrath of the LORD') reflects his reading of the covenant curses. He recognizes that generational disobedience has accumulated an enormous debt of divine anger.
14. Chuldah *ha-nevi'ah* ('Huldah the prophetess') is one of only a handful of women given the title *nevi'ah* in the Hebrew Bible (along with Miriam, Deborah, and Isaiah's wife). Her husband Shallum is identified as *shomer ha-begadim* ('keeper of the wardrobe') — a palace official responsible for royal or priestly garments. She lives in the *Mishneh* ('Second Quarter'), a newer section of Jerusalem on the western hill. The delegation of the most powerful men in Judah comes to consult a woman — the text presents this as entirely natural.
15. Huldah's oracle begins with the standard prophetic messenger formula: *koh amar YHWH Elohei Yisra'el* ('thus says the LORD, the God of Israel'). Her reference to Josiah as *ha-ish asher shalach etkhem elai* ('the man who sent you to me') rather than 'the king' is striking — before God's word, the king is simply a man. This is not disrespect but prophetic perspective: in the presence of divine speech, all human titles diminish.
16. The first part of the oracle confirms Josiah's worst fear: disaster is coming. The phrase *et kol divrei ha-sefer* ('all the words of the scroll') means every curse written in the document will be fulfilled. The scroll is not merely an ancient text but a living sentence. The word *ra'ah* ('disaster, evil, calamity') is the comprehensive term for divine judgment.
17. The reason clause — *tachat asher azavuni* ('because they have abandoned me') — uses the covenant-breach verb *azav* ('to abandon, to forsake'). The phrase *ve-lo tikhbeh* ('and it will not be quenched') is final: the fire of divine anger, once lit by generational apostasy, cannot be extinguished. Even Josiah's repentance cannot reverse the sentence on the nation. This is one of the most theologically uncompromising statements in the prophetic literature — no amount of late reform can undo what Manasseh initiated.
18. The oracle's second part shifts from the nation's fate to the king's personal fate. Huldah now addresses Josiah directly (through the delegation) with a separate divine word. The transition — *ve-el melekh Yehudah* ('but to the king of Judah') — marks a clear division: the nation's sentence stands, but the king's case is heard separately.
19. The key phrase is *rakh levavkha* ('your heart was tender/soft'). The adjective *rakh* ('soft, tender, gentle') describes a heart responsive to God's word — the opposite of the 'hard heart' or 'stiff neck' that characterizes the disobedient. Josiah's response — humbling himself (*va-tikkana*), tearing his robes (*va-tiqra et begadekha*), weeping (*va-tivkeh*) — is a complete catalog of repentance gestures. God's response — *ve-gam anokhi shamati* ('I too have heard') — mirrors the king's hearing: Josiah heard the scroll and responded; God heard Josiah's response and answers.
20. The promise *ve-ne'esafat el qivrotekha be-shalom* ('you will be gathered to your graves in peace') uses the gentle verb *asaf* ('to gather, to collect') — the same word used for gathering the harvest. Josiah's death will be a gathering-in, not a violent tearing-away. The word *be-shalom* ('in peace') has generated debate since Josiah dies in battle at Megiddo (23:29). The most likely meaning is that he will die before the Babylonian catastrophe — his 'peace' is defined by what he will not see: the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, the exile. The final clause — *va-yashivu et ha-melekh davar* ('they returned word to the king') — closes the prophetic consultation with bureaucratic efficiency.

23

Summary: *Josiah assembles all the people of Judah at the Temple and reads aloud every word of the Book of the Covenant found in the house of the LORD. He stands by the pillar and makes a covenant before the LORD to follow him, to keep his commands, decrees, and statutes with all his heart and soul, and to carry out the words written in the scroll. All the people pledge themselves to the covenant. Josiah then launches the most sweeping religious reform in Judean history: he removes from the Temple all vessels made for Baal, Asherah, and the host of heaven and burns them in the Kidron Valley; he deposes the idolatrous priests appointed by previous kings; he brings out the Asherah from the Temple, burns it at the Kidron, and grinds it to dust; he tears down the quarters of the cult prostitutes in the Temple complex; he defiles Topheth in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom so no one can sacrifice children to Molech; he removes the horses dedicated to the sun at the Temple entrance and burns the sun-chariots; he demolishes the altars Manasseh built in the Temple courts and the altars on the roof; he destroys the high places Solomon built for Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Milcom; he smashes the sacred pillars and cuts down the Asherah poles. He extends his reforms north into the former territory of Israel, destroying the altar at Bethel that Jeroboam son of Nebat had built — fulfilling the prophecy of the man of God from Judah (1 Kings 13). He celebrates a Passover in Jerusalem of unprecedented scale — nothing like it since the days of the judges. Despite all this, the narrator delivers a crushing verdict: the LORD did not turn from the fierce burning of his great wrath against Judah because of everything Manasseh had done to provoke him. Josiah's reforms cannot reverse the sentence. The chapter ends with Josiah's death: Pharaoh Neco of Egypt marches to the Euphrates to aid Assyria against Babylon, and Josiah goes to confront him at Megiddo. Neco kills him. His servants carry his body back to Jerusalem in a chariot. The people of the land anoint his son Jehoahaz, who reigns three months before Neco deposes him, installs Jehoiakim, and imposes tribute on Judah. Jehoiakim does evil in the eyes of the LORD.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is the climactic reform narrative of the entire Deuteronomistic History — the moment when a king finally does everything Deuteronomy demands. Josiah's purge is comprehensive beyond anything attempted before: he addresses every form of syncretism accumulated across four centuries, from Solomon's high places to Manasseh's abominations. The destruction of the Bethel altar fulfills a prophecy spoken nearly three hundred years earlier (1 Kings 13:2), and the narrator takes care to note the fulfillment. The Passover celebration (verses 21-23) is described as the greatest since the judges — surpassing even those under Moses and Joshua in the narrator's estimation. Yet the theological punch of the chapter lies in verses 26-27: despite the most perfect reform by the most righteous king, the sentence stands. Manasseh's sins have created an irreversible momentum toward destruction. The Deuteronomistic historian has set up a devastating theological paradox: obedience matters absolutely, yet the accumulated weight of disobedience can reach a point of no return. Josiah's death at Megiddo — sudden, unexplained, seemingly unjust — is the narrative confirmation that the age of grace for Judah has ended.*

Translation Friction: *The relationship between Josiah's righteousness and his violent death at Megiddo is the chapter's central difficulty. Huldah promised he would die 'in peace' (22:20), yet he dies in battle. Various explanations exist: Josiah was not killed by the Babylonian catastrophe (the disaster Huldah specified); or 'peace' refers to his era generally; or Josiah exceeded his mandate by confronting Neco (2 Chronicles 35:21-22 suggests Neco warned him). The scope of Josiah's northern reforms (verses 15-20) raises historical questions: could a Judean king exercise authority in the former northern kingdom? The decline of Assyrian power by the 620s BCE may have created a power vacuum that Josiah exploited. The narrator's assertion that no Passover like this had been celebrated since the judges (verse 22) seems to contradict Hezekiah's Passover (2 Chronicles 30), though Kings does not mention Hezekiah's Passover. The theological problem of verses 26-27 — why reform if the outcome is fixed — is the deepest tension in Deuteronomistic theology.*

Connections: *The covenant renewal ceremony (verses 1-3) echoes Joshua 24 (the Shechem covenant), Exodus 24 (the Sinai covenant), and anticipates Nehemiah 8-10 (Ezra's covenant renewal). The destruction of the Bethel altar (verses 15-16) fulfills 1 Kings 13:2 with remarkable specificity — the man of God named Josiah by name three centuries before his birth. The Passover (verses 21-23) connects to Exodus 12 (the original Passover) and Deuteronomy 16:1-8 (centralized Passover legislation). The removal of the Asherah from the Temple reverses Manasseh's act*

in 21:7. The destruction of Topheth connects to Jeremiah 7:30-34 and 19:1-15. Josiah's death at Megiddo becomes a defining moment for later tradition — Zechariah 12:11 references 'the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddo,' and the very name Megiddo (Armageddon in Greek) becomes the symbol of final battle in Revelation 16:16.

¹The king sent word, and all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem were assembled before him. ²The king went up to the house of the LORD with every man of Judah, all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests, the prophets, and the entire population from the least to the greatest. He read aloud to them every word of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD. ³The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD: to follow the LORD, to keep his commands, his decrees, and his statutes with all his heart and all his soul, and to carry out the words of this covenant as written in this scroll. And all the people pledged themselves to the covenant. ⁴The king ordered Hilkiah the high priest, the priests of the second rank, and the doorkeepers to remove from the Temple of the LORD all the vessels made for Baal, for Asherah, and for the entire host of heaven. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the terraces of the Kidron Valley and carried their ashes to Bethel. ⁵He deposed the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had appointed to burn incense at the high places in the towns of Judah and in the areas around Jerusalem — those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to the entire host of heaven. ⁶He brought the Asherah pole out of the house of the LORD to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem, burned it there, ground it to dust, and scattered the dust over the common burial ground. ⁷He tore down the quarters of the cult prostitutes that were in the house of the LORD, where women wove coverings for the Asherah. ⁸He brought all the priests from the towns of Judah and defiled the high places where those priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beer-sheba. He also demolished the high places at the gates — the one at the entrance of the gate of Joshua the city governor, on the left as one enters the city gate. ⁹However, the priests of the high places did not go up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they did eat unleavened bread among their fellow priests. ¹⁰He defiled Topheth in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom so that no one could pass a son or daughter through the fire to Molech. ¹¹He removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun at the entrance of the house of the LORD, near the chamber of Nathan-melech the court official in the colonnade, and he burned the sun-chariots with fire. ¹²The altars on the roof of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars Manasseh had built in the two courtyards of the house of the LORD — the king demolished them, smashed them, and threw their rubble into the Kidron Valley. ¹³The king defiled the high places east of Jerusalem, south of the Mount of Corruption, which Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the detestable god of the Ammonites. ¹⁴He smashed the sacred pillars, cut down the Asherah poles, and filled the sites with human bones. ¹⁵He also demolished the altar at Bethel — the high place that Jeroboam son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin, had built. He demolished that altar and the high place, burned the high place, ground it to dust, and burned the Asherah pole. ¹⁶When Josiah turned and saw the tombs on the hillside, he sent men to take the bones from the tombs and burned them on the altar, defiling it — in fulfillment of the word of the LORD that the man of God had proclaimed when he proclaimed these things. ¹⁷He asked, "What is that marker I see?" The men of the city told him, "It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed the very things you have done against the altar of Bethel." ¹⁸He said, "Leave him alone. No one is to disturb his bones." So they left his bones undisturbed, along with the bones of the prophet who had come from Samaria. ¹⁹Josiah also removed all the shrine buildings at the high places in the towns of Samaria that the kings of Israel had built, provoking the LORD. He did to them everything he had done at Bethel. ²⁰He slaughtered all the priests of the high places on their own altars and burned human bones on them. Then he returned to Jerusalem. ²¹The king commanded all the people, "Celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God as it is written in this Book of the Covenant." ²²No Passover like this had been celebrated since the days of the judges who governed Israel — not in all the days of the kings of Israel or the kings of Judah. ²³It was in the eighteenth year of King Josiah that this Passover was celebrated to the LORD in Jerusalem. ²⁴Josiah also swept away the mediums, spiritists, household gods, worthless idols, and every abomination found in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, in order to carry out the words of the instruction written in the scroll that Hilkiah the priest had found in the house of the LORD. ²⁵Before him there had been no king like him who turned to the LORD with all his heart, all his soul, and

all his strength, in full accordance with the instruction of Moses. And after him no one like him arose. ²⁶Yet the LORD did not turn from the fierce burning of his great wrath that blazed against Judah because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him. ²⁷The LORD declared, "I will remove Judah also from my presence, just as I removed Israel. I will reject this city that I chose — Jerusalem — and the house of which I said, 'My name will be there.'" ²⁸The rest of the acts of Josiah — everything he did — are they not recorded in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ²⁹In his days, Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt marched toward the king of Assyria at the Euphrates River. King Josiah went to confront him, and Neco killed him at Megiddo when they met. ³⁰His servants carried his body by chariot from Megiddo, brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own tomb. The people of the land took Jehoahaz son of Josiah, anointed him, and made him king in his father's place. ³¹Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah, from Libnah. ³²He did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as his ancestors had done. ³³Pharaoh Neco imprisoned him at Riblah in the land of Hamath to prevent him from reigning in Jerusalem, and imposed on the land a levy of one hundred talents of silver and one talent of gold. ³⁴Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim son of Josiah king in place of his father Josiah and changed his name to Jehoiakim. He took Jehoahaz away to Egypt, where he died. ³⁵Jehoiakim paid the silver and gold to Pharaoh. But to meet Pharaoh's demand, he imposed a tax on the land; each person was assessed according to his means. He extracted the silver and gold from the people of the land to pay Pharaoh Neco. ³⁶Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zebidah daughter of Pedaiah, from Rumah. ³⁷He did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as his ancestors had done.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The assembly of kol ziqnei Yehudah vi-Yerushalayim ('all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem') creates a national gathering — the elders are the representative leaders of the people. The verb va-ya'asfu ('they gathered') indicates formal convocation. This is a covenant-renewal assembly, paralleling Moses at Sinai and Joshua at Shechem.
2. The scroll is now called sefer ha-berit ('the Book of the Covenant') rather than sefer ha-torah — emphasizing its covenantal character. The gathering is comprehensive: le-miqaton ve-ad gadol ('from the small to the great') means every social class is present. The king himself reads — va-yiqra be-ozneihem ('he read in their ears') — assuming the role of covenant mediator that belongs to Moses (Deuteronomy 31:11). The public reading transforms a private discovery into a national event.
3. The threefold division — mitsvot ('commands'), edot ('decrees, testimonies'), and chuqqot ('statutes') — is the standard Deuteronomic way of referring to the comprehensive body of divine law. The phrase le-haqim ('to establish, to carry out, to fulfill') indicates not just intellectual assent but active implementation. The people's response — va-ya'amod kol ha-am ba-berit ('all the people stood in the covenant') — uses the verb amad ('to stand') in its sense of 'taking a stand, committing oneself.'
4. The reform begins inside the Temple itself — the defilement must be removed from the innermost sacred space outward. The kohanei ha-mishneh ('priests of the second rank') are the deputy priests. The burning takes place in shadmot Qidron ('the terraces/fields of the Kidron'), the valley east of Jerusalem that serves as a disposal site for ritual impurity. The transportation of ashes to Bethel is significant: the contamination is returned to the site of Jeroboam's great sin (1 Kings 12:28-33).
5. The kemarim ('idoltrous priests') is a term distinct from kohanim ('legitimate priests') — it designates priests of non-Yahwistic cults, possibly derived from an Aramaic root meaning 'to be dark' or a Syriac word for priest. The verb hishbit ('he caused to cease, he deposed') means official removal from office. The astral deities listed — shemesh ('sun'), yareach ('moon'), mazzalot ('constellations, zodiacal signs') — reflect Assyrian-influenced astral worship that flourished under Manasseh.
6. The treatment of the Asherah follows a pattern of total destruction: removal (va-yotse), burning (va-yisrof), grinding to powder (va-yadeq le-afar), and scattering the powder on graves (al qever benei ha-am, 'over the grave of the sons of the people' — the common cemetery). Scattering the dust on graves adds ritual defilement to physical destruction, ensuring the object can never be reconstituted or venerated. This reverses Manasseh's installation of the Asherah in the Temple (21:7).
7. The battei ha-qedeshim ('houses/quarters of the cult prostitutes') were built within the Temple complex itself — a measure of how deeply pagan practice had infiltrated the sacred precinct. The women weaving battim la-Asherah ('coverings/houses for the Asherah') were likely producing ritual garments or tent-coverings for the Asherah image. The entire scene — cult prostitution and pagan textile work inside the LORD's Temple — illustrates the comprehensive desecration Josiah faced.
8. The scope is comprehensive: mi-Geva ad Be'er Shava ('from Geba to Beer-sheba') describes the full extent of Judah from north to south. The priests from the high places are brought to Jerusalem — centralization of worship is the Deuteronomic ideal (Deuteronomy 12:5-14). The bamot ha-she'arim ('high places of the gates') were small shrines at city gate entrances, where worship and commerce intersected.

9. The displaced priests receive a compromise: they cannot serve at the Jerusalem altar (maintaining the exclusive sanctity of centralized worship) but they eat matzot ('unleavened bread') — their priestly food allotment — be-tokh acheihem ('among their brothers'). This arrangement parallels Deuteronomy 18:6-8, which allows Levites from the provinces to serve in Jerusalem, though in practice the Jerusalem priesthood restricted access.
10. The Tofet was the site in the Gei Ven-Hinnom ('Valley of the Son of Hinnom,' later 'Gehenna') where children were sacrificed by fire to Molech (or Molek). The verb timme ('he defiled, rendered ritually impure') means Josiah deliberately contaminated the site to make it unusable for worship — likely by spreading human bones or refuse on it. The phrase le-ha'avir et beno ve-et bitto ba-esh ('to pass his son and his daughter through the fire') uses the same language as 21:6 describing Manasseh's practice.
11. Horses and chariots dedicated to the sun (la-shemesh) reflect Assyrian or broader Near Eastern solar worship. The horses were stationed at the Temple entrance — a powerful visual statement of syncretism. Nathan-melech ha-saris ('Nathan-melech the official/eunuch') had a chamber in the parvarim ('colonnade, precincts, suburbs') of the Temple. The burning of the markevat ha-shemesh ('chariots of the sun') — ceremonial vehicles associated with the sun-god's journey across the sky — eliminates the entire apparatus of solar cult.
12. Two sets of altars are destroyed: rooftop altars (al ha-gag aliyat Achaz, 'on the roof of the upper room of Ahaz') used for astral worship, and Manasseh's courtyard altars (21:5). The verb natats ('he demolished, tore down') followed by va-yarats ('he smashed, he ran/crushed') indicates violent destruction. The rubble is disposed of in the Kidron, which serves as Jerusalem's sacred waste site throughout the reform.
13. The reform reaches back to Solomon himself — these high places had stood for over three centuries since 1 Kings 11:7. The Har ha-Mashchit ('Mount of Corruption/Destruction') is a wordplay on Har ha-Mishchah ('Mount of Anointing,' the Mount of Olives) — the narrator renames the hill to reflect its desecrated status. Solomon is identified as melekh Yisra'el ('king of Israel') rather than 'king of Judah,' a subtle rebuke linking him to the northern kingdom's sin. The three deities — Ashtoreth, Chemosh, Milcom — represent Sidonian, Moabite, and Ammonite religion respectively.
14. The matssebot ('sacred pillars, standing stones') were upright stones used in Canaanite worship. The Asherim ('Asherah poles') were wooden cult objects. Filling the sites with atsmot adam ('human bones') ensured permanent ritual defilement — contact with the dead renders a site impure beyond reclamation. The method is systematic: destroy, then contaminate so thoroughly that the sites cannot be reused.
15. The reform now crosses the old border into the former northern kingdom. The altar at Bethel — ha-mizbeach asher be-Veit El — was the foundational sin of the divided monarchy (1 Kings 12:28-33). The phrase Yarov'am ben Nevat asher hecheti et Yisra'el ('Jeroboam son of Nebat who caused Israel to sin') is the standard epithet that has accompanied every mention of Jeroboam's influence throughout Kings. The destruction follows the same pattern: demolition, burning, grinding to dust.
16. The narrator explicitly marks this as prophetic fulfillment: ki-dvar YHWH asher qara ish ha-Elohim ('according to the word of the LORD that the man of God proclaimed'). The unnamed 'man of God' is the prophet from 1 Kings 13:1-2 who prophesied that a king named Josiah would burn human bones on the Bethel altar — a prophecy spoken roughly three hundred years earlier. The fulfillment is precise: the named king, the specific altar, the burning of bones.
17. The tsiyyun ('marker, monument, gravestone') catches Josiah's eye. The townspeople identify it as the burial site of the Judean prophet from 1 Kings 13. Their description — va-yiqra et ha-devarim ha-elleh asher asita ('he proclaimed the very things you have done') — makes the prophetic fulfillment explicit within the narrative. The people of Bethel themselves testify that Josiah's actions were predicted centuries ago.
18. Josiah honors the man of God by leaving his grave intact — the one tomb spared from desecration. The 'prophet who came from Samaria' is the old prophet from 1 Kings 13:11-32 who had asked to be buried alongside the man of God. Both sets of bones are preserved, fulfilling the old prophet's request (1 Kings 13:31). The detail connects the two narratives across the centuries.
19. The reform extends throughout the former northern kingdom: be-arei Shomron ('in the towns of Samaria'). The phrase ke-khol ha-ma'asim asher asah be-Veit El ('according to all the acts he had done at Bethel') means the same pattern — demolition, burning, bone defilement — was applied to every northern high place. The scope implies Josiah exercised effective control over former Israelite territory during the Assyrian power vacuum of the late seventh century.
20. The northern reform is violent: va-yizbach et kol kohanei ha-bamot ('he slaughtered all the priests of the high places'). The verb zavach normally means 'to sacrifice' — the priests are sacrificed on their own altars, a grim irony. This fulfilled the specific words of the man of God in 1 Kings 13:2: 'He will sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who burn incense on you.' The burning of human bones on the altars permanently defiles them. The return to Jerusalem (va-yashav Yerushalayim) transitions from destruction to restoration.
21. The shift from destruction to celebration: asu Pesach la-YHWH Eloheikhem ('make/celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God'). The phrase ka-katuv al sefer ha-berit ha-zeh ('as it is written in this Book of the Covenant') anchors the celebration in the discovered scroll — specifically the Passover legislation of Deuteronomy 16:1-8, which requires centralized celebration in Jerusalem.
22. The narrator's assessment is sweeping: mi-yemei ha-shoftim ('since the days of the judges'). This Passover surpasses not only the monarchic period but reaches back to the pre-monarchic era — roughly four hundred years. The statement implicitly surpasses Solomon's Temple dedication (1 Kings 8), Hezekiah's Passover (2 Chronicles 30), and every other national celebration. It is the apex of Israelite worship in the monarchic period.
23. The date — the eighteenth year, the same year as the scroll's discovery — means all of Josiah's reforms and this unprecedented Passover belong to a single year of spiritual revolution. The phrase la-YHWH bi-Yerushalayim ('to the LORD in Jerusalem') emphasizes both the object of worship and the centralized location — exactly as Deuteronomy 16 requires.

24. A comprehensive catalog of what was purged: ovot ('mediums'), yid'onim ('spiritists'), terafim ('household gods, figurines'), gillulim ('worthless idols'), and kol ha-shiqqustsim ('all the abominations'). The purpose clause — le-ma'an haqim et divrei ha-torah ('in order to carry out the words of the instruction') — explicitly ties every reform action to the discovered scroll. Josiah's program is not arbitrary iconoclasm but systematic obedience to a text.
25. The superlative evaluation — lo hayah lefanav ('there was none before him') and lo qam acharav ('none arose after him') — brackets Josiah as the ultimate Deuteronomic king. The phrase ke-khol torat Mosheh ('according to all the instruction of Moses') makes the standard explicit: complete Mosaic obedience. This verse and 18:5 (Hezekiah's evaluation) create a theological pair — the two best kings, each praised in different terms, neither able to save the nation from the consequences of its collective history.
26. The devastating akh ('yet, however, notwithstanding') overturns everything that preceded it. After the most comprehensive reform, the most perfect obedience, the greatest Passover — lo shav YHWH me-charon appo ha-gadol ('the LORD did not turn from the burning of his great anger'). The cause is named: Manasseh. The accumulated sin of Manasseh's fifty-five-year reign has created an irreversible trajectory. This is the theological crisis at the heart of the Deuteronomistic History: obedience matters, but late obedience cannot undo the consequences of sustained rebellion.
27. The divine verdict is final: gam et Yehudah asir me'al panai ('even Judah I will remove from my presence'). The word gam ('also, even') links Judah's fate to Israel's — the northern kingdom's destruction in 722 BCE is now the template for the south. The rejection of Jerusalem (u-ma'asti et ha-ir ha-zot) and the Temple (ve-et ha-bayit asher amarti yihyeh shemi sham) revokes both the election of Zion and the name theology of Deuteronomy. Everything promised is now being un-promised.
28. The standard source citation. For a king of Josiah's stature, the formula feels almost inadequate — 'everything he did' encompasses the most comprehensive reform in Judean history. But the Deuteronomistic historian is moving the narrative forward; the annals contain the details, while this text delivers the theological verdict.
29. The death of Josiah is reported with shocking brevity. Pharaoh Neco II (610-595 BCE) was marching to aid the remnant of Assyria against Babylon at Carchemish on the Euphrates. The phrase al melekh Ashur ('against/toward the king of Assyria') likely means 'to assist,' not 'against.' Josiah intercepted Neco at Megiddo — probably as a Babylonian ally or to prevent Egyptian resurgence — and va-yemitehu ('he killed him'). The greatest king dies in a single sentence. The narrative refuses to explain why God allowed this or how it relates to Huldah's promise of death 'in peace.'
30. The transport of Josiah's body — va-yarkivuhu avadav met mi-Megiddo ('his servants carried him dead from Megiddo') — is a somber reversal of the royal progress. He is buried bi-qvurato ('in his tomb'), receiving proper royal burial unlike Manasseh and Amon in the Garden of Uzza. The am ha-arets ('people of the land') again exercise their role as kingmakers, anointing Jehoahaz (also called Shallum in Jeremiah 22:11). They bypass the eldest son, possibly choosing someone they believed would continue Josiah's policies.
31. The regnal formula for Jehoahaz signals a tragically brief reign — three months. His mother Chamutal ('my father-in-law is the dew') was from Libnah, a Judean town. The Jeremiah mentioned is not the prophet but a Libnite. The three-month reign (609 BCE) was cut short by Egyptian intervention.
32. The negative evaluation — ke-khol asher asu avotav ('according to everything his ancestors had done') — is jarring after Josiah's superlative righteousness. The son of the best king immediately reverts to the pattern of the worst. The 'ancestors' in question are not Josiah but the broader royal line including Manasseh and Amon.
33. Riblah in the land of Hamath (modern Lebanon) was a strategic military headquarters on the Orontes River — the same location Nebuchadnezzar would later use (25:6, 21). Neco's action demonstrates Egypt's control over Judah: he removes a king and imposes tribute. The levy — me'ah kikkar kesef ve-kikkar zahav ('one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold') — is substantial, approximately 3,400 kg of silver and 34 kg of gold.
34. Neco installs a puppet king: Eliakim (Elyaqim, 'God raises up') is renamed Jehoiakim (Yehoyaqim, 'the LORD raises up'). The name change — va-yassev et shemo ('he turned around his name') — is an act of sovereignty: the one who names rules. Paradoxically, the Egyptian pharaoh gives a Yahwistic name to his vassal. Jehoahaz is exiled to Egypt, where va-yamot sham ('he died there') — a terse end for Josiah's chosen successor. Jeremiah 22:10-12 mourns Jehoahaz (Shallum) and declares he will never return.
35. The verb he'erikh ('he assessed, he valued') means Jehoiakim conducted a formal property assessment to determine each person's tax obligation — ish ke-eriko ('each man according to his valuation'). The phrase nagash et ha-kesef ve-et ha-zahav ('he exacted/extracted the silver and the gold') uses the verb nagash ('to drive, to press, to exact'), suggesting aggressive tax collection. The cost of Egyptian vassalage falls on the common people.
36. The regnal formula for Jehoiakim: eleven years (roughly 609-598 BCE), the period during which Judah shifts from Egyptian to Babylonian vassalage. His mother Zevidah ('gift, endowment') was from Rumah, a town in Galilee or Judah. Jehoiakim is the older brother of Jehoahaz — Neco chose him over the people's choice, perhaps because he was more compliant.
37. The chapter closes with the same negative verdict that opened the post-Josiah era (verse 32). The phrase ke-khol asher asu avotav ('according to everything his ancestors had done') is now a refrain of decline. After Josiah, every king does evil. The Deuteronomistic History has entered its final descent — from here to the fall of Jerusalem, the narrative moves with the inevitability of the divine sentence pronounced in verses 26-27.

24

Summary: *In Jehoiakim's days, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invades, and Jehoiakim becomes his vassal for three years before rebelling. The LORD sends raiding bands of Chaldeans, Arameans, Moabites, and Ammonites against Judah to destroy it, in accordance with the word spoken through the prophets — specifically because of the sins of Manasseh, including the innocent blood he shed, which the LORD was unwilling to forgive. Jehoiakim dies and his son Jehoiachin succeeds him. The narrator notes that the king of Egypt no longer marches out of his own territory because the king of Babylon has taken everything from the Wadi of Egypt to the Euphrates. Jehoiachin reigns only three months in Jerusalem before Nebuchadnezzar besieges the city. Jehoiachin surrenders — going out to the king of Babylon with his mother, his servants, his commanders, and his officials. Nebuchadnezzar takes him captive in his eighth year. He carries off all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the royal palace, cuts up all the gold vessels Solomon had made for the Temple, and departs all Jerusalem: the commanders, the warriors, the craftsmen, and the metalworkers — ten thousand exiles. Only the poorest people of the land remain. He exiles Jehoiachin to Babylon along with the queen mother, the king's wives, his officials, and the leading men of the land. Nebuchadnezzar installs Jehoiachin's uncle Mattaniah as king, changing his name to Zedekiah. Zedekiah is twenty-one years old, reigns eleven years, and does evil in the eyes of the LORD. The chapter closes with the note that Zedekiah rebels against Babylon.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The chapter narrates the first of two Babylonian deportations (597 BCE), and the narrator's theological interpretation is unambiguous: this is God's doing. The raids against Judah are sent by the LORD (verse 2), and the deportation fulfills the prophetic word. The most theologically significant statement is verse 4: God was unwilling to forgive (lo avah YHWH lisloach) because of Manasseh's bloodshed. This is one of the rare passages in the Hebrew Bible where divine forgiveness is explicitly refused. The surrender of Jehoiachin — going out (va-yetse) to the king of Babylon — echoes the vocabulary of military capitulation throughout the ancient Near East but also carries overtones of exile from sacred space, a going-out that mirrors Israel's departure from the garden, from Egypt, from any place of divine presence. The stripping of the Temple — Solomon's gold vessels cut up and carried away — is described with the same care that 1 Kings 6-7 used for their creation, creating a narrative of uncreation. What Solomon built in glory, Nebuchadnezzar dismantles in judgment.*

Translation Friction: *The death of Jehoiakim is handled with unusual ambiguity. The phrase va-yishkav Yehoyaqim im avotav ('Jehoiakim slept with his fathers') is the standard death formula, but Jeremiah 22:18-19 prophesies that Jehoiakim would receive the 'burial of a donkey' — dragged and cast outside the gates of Jerusalem. Whether the standard formula conceals a dishonorable death or Jeremiah's prophecy was not literally fulfilled is debated. The number of deportees — 'ten thousand' (verse 14) — does not perfectly align with Jeremiah 52:28, which gives '3,023 Judeans.' The difference may reflect different counting methods (combatants vs. total population, or round numbers vs. precise counts). Zedekiah's relationship to Jehoiachin is described as 'uncle' (his father's brother), meaning Nebuchadnezzar chose not to continue the direct line but placed a different son of Josiah on the throne — a deliberate weakening of royal legitimacy.*

Connections: *The fulfillment of prophetic word connects to the entire prophetic tradition: the raiders come ki-dvar YHWH ('according to the word of the LORD,' verse 2) spoken be-yad avadav ha-nevi'im ('through his servants the prophets'). The stripping of the Temple treasures begins a process completed in chapter 25 and reverses 1 Kings 7:48-51 (Solomon's golden furnishings). Jehoiachin's exile becomes a reference point for dating throughout Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:2, 'the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile'). The refusal to forgive because of innocent blood connects to Deuteronomy 19:10-13 and the principle that unpurged blood pollutes the land. The name change from Mattaniah to Zedekiah ('righteousness of the LORD') parallels Neco's renaming of Eliakim to Jehoiakim (23:34) — both puppet kings receive Yahwistic names from foreign overlords who do not serve YHWH.*

¹In his days, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded, and Jehoiakim became his vassal for three years. Then he rebelled against him. ²The LORD sent against him raiding bands of Chaldeans, raiding bands of Arameans, raiding bands of Moabites, and raiding bands of Ammonites. He sent them against Judah to destroy it, in accordance with the word of the

LORD that he had spoken through his servants the prophets. ³This came upon Judah solely at the LORD's command, to remove them from his presence because of the sins of Manasseh — everything he had done, ⁴and also because of the innocent blood he shed — he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood — and the LORD was unwilling to forgive. ⁵The rest of the acts of Jehoiakim — everything he did — are they not recorded in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ⁶Jehoiakim slept with his fathers, and his son Jehoiachin reigned in his place. ⁷The king of Egypt did not march out of his own land again, because the king of Babylon had seized everything that belonged to the king of Egypt, from the Wadi of Egypt to the Euphrates River. ⁸Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Nehushta daughter of Elnathan, from Jerusalem. ⁹He did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father had done. ¹⁰At that time, the officers of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon advanced on Jerusalem, and the city came under siege. ¹¹Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon himself came to the city while his officers were besieging it. ¹²Jehoiachin king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon — he, his mother, his servants, his commanders, and his officials. The king of Babylon took him prisoner in the eighth year of his own reign. ¹³He carried off from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the royal palace, and he cut up all the gold vessels that Solomon king of Israel had made for the Temple of the LORD — just as the LORD had declared. ¹⁴He deported all Jerusalem — all the commanders, all the elite warriors, ten thousand exiles in all — along with every craftsman and metalworker. No one remained except the poorest people of the land. ¹⁵He exiled Jehoiachin to Babylon, along with the king's mother, the king's wives, his officials, and the leading men of the land — he took them as captives from Jerusalem to Babylon. ¹⁶All the fighting men — seven thousand — and the craftsmen and metalworkers — one thousand — all of them battle-ready warriors, the king of Babylon brought them as captives to Babylon. ¹⁷The king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah. ¹⁸Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah, from Libnah. ¹⁹He did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as Jehoiakim had done. ²⁰It was because of the LORD's anger that all this happened in Jerusalem and Judah, until he finally cast them out of his presence. And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. Nebuchadnezzar (Nevukhadnetsar in Hebrew, from Akkadian Nabu-kudurri-usur, 'Nabu, protect the boundary stone') became king of Babylon in 605 BCE and quickly established dominance over the Levant. Jehoiakim's vassalage (eved, 'servant/vassal') lasted three years before va-yashav va-yimrad bo ('he turned back and rebelled against him'). The rebellion was likely encouraged by the Egyptian defeat of Babylon in 601 BCE, which suggested Babylonian power might be declining — a catastrophic miscalculation.
2. The subject of the verb is decisive: va-yeshallah YHWH ('the LORD sent'). The raiders — Chaldeans (Babylonians), Arameans, Moabites, and Ammonites — are instruments of divine judgment. The fourfold repetition of gedudei ('raiding bands of') creates a sense of assault from every direction. The purpose clause le-ha'avido ('to destroy it/him') uses the causative form of the verb avad ('to perish'). The phrase ki-dvar YHWH ('according to the word of the LORD') attributes the destruction to prophetic announcement now being fulfilled.
3. The phrase akh al pi YHWH ('surely by the mouth/command of the LORD') eliminates any possibility of attributing Judah's suffering to chance or geopolitics. The purpose — le-hasir me'al panav ('to remove from before his face/presence') — echoes the exact language of 23:27. The cause is named again: be-chattot Menasheh ('because of the sins of Manasseh'). The narrative insists that events happening decades after Manasseh's death are still caused by his sins.
4. The final clause is among the most theologically stark in the Hebrew Bible: ve-lo avah YHWH lisloach ('and the LORD was not willing to forgive'). The verb avah ('to be willing, to consent') paired with the negative lo indicates a deliberate divine refusal — not inability but unwillingness. The reason is dam naqi ('innocent blood'), the same charge from 21:16. Unpurged innocent blood creates a pollution that the covenant demands must be addressed (Deuteronomy 19:13, Numbers 35:33). Manasseh's bloodshed has crossed a threshold beyond which even divine patience does not extend.
5. The standard source citation. Jeremiah's account of Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 22:13-19, 26:20-24, 36:1-32) provides a much fuller and more damning portrait: a king who cut up and burned a prophetic scroll, built his palace with forced labor, and persecuted prophets.
6. The death formula va-yishkav im avotav ('he slept with his fathers') is used without mention of burial — an unusual omission that may hint at the dishonorable burial prophesied in Jeremiah 22:18-19. Jehoiachin (Yehoyakhin, 'the LORD establishes') succeeds him at the worst possible moment: with Babylon mobilizing for a punitive campaign.
7. This parenthetical note explains the geopolitical situation: after the Battle of Carchemish (605 BCE) and subsequent campaigns, Babylon controlled the entire territory mi-nachal Mitsrayim ad nehar Perat ('from the Wadi of Egypt to the Euphrates River') — the traditional boundaries of the promised land (Genesis 15:18, 1 Kings 8:65). The irony is crushing: the land promised to Abraham is now the territory of the king of Babylon. Egypt,

which had been Judah's hoped-for ally, is confined within its own borders.

8. Another tragically brief reign: three months (December 598 to March 597 BCE). His mother Nechushta ('bronze, copper') was from Jerusalem itself — one of the few queen mothers from the capital rather than a provincial town. Elnathan her father may be the Elnathan who participated in extraditing the prophet Uriah from Egypt for Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 26:22). Jehoiachin inherits a kingdom already under siege.
9. The evaluation formula becomes a drumbeat of decline: ke-khol asher asah aviv ('according to everything his father had done'). In three months there is little time for policy, but the narrator renders the verdict based on the trajectory established by Jehoiakim. Every post-Josiah king receives the same negative evaluation.
10. The avdei Nevukhadnettsar ('servants/officers of Nebuchadnezzar') are his military commanders. The phrase va-tavo ha-ir ba-matsor ('the city came into the siege') marks the first of two Babylonian sieges of Jerusalem — this one in 597 BCE. The word matsor ('siege, siege-works') from the root tsur ('to press, to besiege') will define Jerusalem's final years.
11. Nebuchadnezzar arrives personally — va-yavo Nevukhadnettsar melek Bavel al ha-ir ('Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city'). His presence elevates the siege from a military operation to a royal confrontation. The Babylonian Chronicle confirms that Nebuchadnezzar personally campaigned against 'the city of Judah' (al-Yahudu) in his seventh year and captured it on 2 Adar (March 16, 597 BCE).
12. The verb va-yetse ('he went out') describes formal surrender — Jehoiachin exits the city to submit himself. The entourage — immo ('his mother'), avadav ('his servants'), sarav ('his commanders'), sarisav ('his officials/eunuchs') — represents the entire royal household. The eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign is 597 BCE. The Babylonian Chronicle independently confirms this event, making it one of the best-attested dates in biblical history.
13. The verb va-yeqattses ('he cut up, he hacked apart') describes the destruction of Solomon's gold vessels — not careful removal but violent dismemberment for ease of transport and melting. The phrase ka-asher dibber YHWH ('just as the LORD had spoken') reminds the reader that this plundering fulfills prophetic announcement (Isaiah 39:6, where Isaiah told Hezekiah that everything in his palace would be carried to Babylon). The stripping of the Temple reverses 1 Kings 7:48-51.
14. The deportation targets specific social classes: sarim ('commanders, officials'), gibborei ha-chayil ('warriors of the army, mighty men of valor'), charash ('craftsmen, skilled artisans'), and masger ('metalworkers, smiths'). The removal of artisans and smiths is strategic: without metalworkers, the remnant population cannot forge weapons. The phrase lo nish'ar zulat dallat am ha-arets ('none remained except the poorest of the people of the land') creates a deliberately destitute remnant.
15. The deportation list is personal: Jehoiachin himself, em ha-melek ('the queen mother,' Nehushta), neshei ha-melek ('the king's wives'), sarisav ('his officials'), and eilei ha-arets ('the mighty ones/rams of the land' — the leading aristocracy). The metaphor eilei ('rams') suggests the strongest and most prominent members of society. The repeated phrase Bavelah ('to Babylon') hammers the destination. Ezekiel was among these deportees (Ezekiel 1:1-3).
16. The numbers break down the ten thousand total: shiv'at alafim ('seven thousand') soldiers and elef ('one thousand') skilled artisans, plus the royal household and officials. The phrase gibborim osei milchamah ('mighty men, makers of war') emphasizes that Babylon removed all military capacity. The land of Judah is now defenseless — by design.
17. Nebuchadnezzar installs dodo ('his uncle,' literally 'his father's brother') — another son of Josiah — as a puppet ruler. The name change from Mattaniah (Mattanyah, 'gift of the LORD') to Zedekiah (Tsidqiyahu, 'righteousness of the LORD') is the third time a foreign power has renamed a Judean king (after Neco's renaming in 23:34). The Babylonian king gives his vassal a Yahwistic name, asserting ownership over both king and deity. The irony of 'righteousness of the LORD' for the last king of Judah becomes apparent as the narrative unfolds.
18. The regnal formula reveals that Zedekiah has the same mother as Jehoahaz (23:31) — both are sons of Josiah by Hamutal of Libnah. This makes Zedekiah Jehoahaz's full brother and Jehoiakim's half-brother. The eleven-year reign (597-586 BCE) spans the final decade of the kingdom of Judah. Zedekiah is the last king to sit on David's throne.
19. The comparison to Jehoiakim rather than to 'his ancestors' (the usual formula) is specific: Zedekiah follows the pattern of Jehoiakim's rebellion against Babylon and disregard for prophetic warning. Jeremiah's extensive interactions with Zedekiah (Jeremiah 21, 34, 37-38) reveal a weak king who sometimes seeks prophetic counsel but never acts on it.
20. The verse serves as a theological bridge between chapters 24 and 25: ki al af YHWH haytah ('because of the anger of the LORD it happened'). The phrase ad hishlikho otam me'al panav ('until he threw them from before his face') echoes the same language from 23:27 and 24:3 — the removal from God's presence is now approaching completion. Zedekiah's rebellion (va-yimrod be-melek Bavel) — probably encouraged by promises of Egyptian support (Ezekiel 17:15-17) — triggers the final siege that will destroy Jerusalem.

25

Summary: *Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon besieges Jerusalem in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month. The siege lasts until the eleventh year, when famine becomes so severe that there is no food for the people. The city wall is breached. Zedekiah and all his soldiers flee by night through a gap between the double walls near the king's garden, though the Chaldeans surround the city. They flee toward the Arabah, but the Chaldean army pursues and overtakes Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. His army scatters. He is captured and brought to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, where they slaughter his sons before his eyes, put out his eyes, bind him in bronze chains, and take him to Babylon. In the fifth month, on the seventh day, Nebuzaradan captain of the guard arrives in Jerusalem. He burns the house of the LORD, the royal palace, and every great house in Jerusalem. The Chaldean army demolishes the walls. Nebuzaradan deports the remaining population, leaving only the poorest as vinedressers and farmers. The Chaldeans break up the bronze pillars, the stands, and the bronze sea in the house of the LORD and carry the bronze to Babylon. They take the pots, shovels, snuffers, ladles, and all the bronze vessels used in Temple service — along with the gold and silver firepans and basins. The narrator pauses to describe the pillars and the sea in detail, recording what is being lost. Nebuzaradan takes the chief priest Seraiah, the second priest Zephaniah, three doorkeepers, and other officials, brings them to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, and the king of Babylon strikes them down. Judah goes into exile from its land. Nebuchadnezzar appoints Gedaliah son of Ahikam as governor over the remnant. The scattered military commanders come to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and he urges them to serve the king of Babylon and live. But Ishmael son of Nethaniah, of royal blood, comes with ten men and assassinates Gedaliah along with the Judeans and Chaldeans at Mizpah. The entire remaining population flees to Egypt in fear of Babylonian reprisal. The book ends with a coda: in the thirty-seventh year of Jehoiachin's exile, Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in his accession year, releases Jehoiachin from prison, speaks kindly to him, sets his throne above the thrones of the other captive kings, changes his prison garments, and gives him a regular food allowance for the rest of his life.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This is the final chapter of the Deuteronomistic History — the literary work that spans from Deuteronomy through 2 Kings. Everything in this massive narrative has been building toward this moment: the destruction of the Temple, the end of the Davidic monarchy, and the exile of God's people from the promised land. The narrator describes the burning of the Temple with devastating restraint — va-yisrof et beit YHWH ('he burned the house of the LORD') in a single clause. What Solomon built across four chapters of description (1 Kings 6-7) is destroyed in half a verse. The detailed inventory of Temple furnishings being carried to Babylon (verses 13-17) serves as a liturgical lament — the narrator is counting what has been lost, item by item, as one counts the possessions of the dead. The blinding of Zedekiah after forcing him to watch his sons' execution is calculated cruelty: the last thing his eyes see is the end of his dynasty. Yet the book does not end in total darkness. The release of Jehoiachin (verses 27-30) — from prison to the king's table, from captive garments to honored robes — is a slender thread of hope. The Davidic line survives, even in exile. The historian closes not with a theological pronouncement but with an image: a king eating bread at a foreign table, alive, for all the days of his life.*

Translation Friction: *The date of the Temple's destruction varies slightly between sources: verse 8 gives the seventh of the fifth month, while Jeremiah 52:12 gives the tenth. The discrepancy may reflect the arrival of Nebuzaradan versus the actual burning, or a textual variant. The appointment of Gedaliah and the subsequent events (verses 22-26) are told with extreme compression — Jeremiah 40-43 provides a much fuller account of the Gedaliah administration, Ishmael's conspiracy, and the flight to Egypt. The flight to Egypt is deeply ironic: the people who were brought out of Egypt by God now return there by their own choice, fleeing the consequences of the very covenant they broke. The Jehoiachin epilogue (verses 27-30) is debated: is it a note of genuine hope for the Davidic line, or merely a record of marginal survival? The answer shapes one's reading of the entire Deuteronomistic History. If hope, then the historian believes restoration is possible. If merely survival, then the story ends in exile without promise.*

Connections: *The destruction of the Temple reverses Solomon's dedication in 1 Kings 8, where the glory of the LORD filled the house. The exile fulfills the curses of Deuteronomy 28:36, 49-57, 63-68 with devastating specificity — foreign siege, famine, deportation, return to slavery. Zedekiah's blinding fulfills Ezekiel 12:13 ('I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, yet he will not see it'). The flight to Egypt inverts the exodus — the founding*

event of Israel is undone. The detailed Temple inventory connects to 1 Kings 7:15-50, creating a literary frame: what was built in chapters of glory is dismantled in paragraphs of loss. Gedaliah's assassination connects to Jeremiah 40-41 and is commemorated in the Fast of Gedaliah (Zechariah 7:5, 8:19). Jehoiachin's release connects to the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7 — God promised David's line would endure, and even in exile, a descendant of David sits at a king's table. The genealogy in Matthew 1:11-12 traces Jesus' lineage through Jehoiachin, making this exiled king an ancestor of the Messiah.

¹In the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon advanced against Jerusalem with his entire army. They encamped against it and built siege works all around it. ²The city remained under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. ³By the ninth day of the fourth month, the famine in the city was so severe that there was no food for the people of the land. ⁴The city wall was breached. All the soldiers fled by night through the gate between the double walls near the king's garden, even though the Chaldeans surrounded the city. They headed toward the Arabah. ⁵The Chaldean army pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho. His entire army scattered, abandoning him. ⁶They captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, where they pronounced judgment on him. ⁷They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. Then they put out Zedekiah's eyes, bound him in bronze chains, and took him to Babylon. ⁸In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month — the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon — Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, an officer of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. ⁹He burned the house of the LORD, the royal palace, and every house in Jerusalem — every great house he burned down. ¹⁰The entire Chaldean army under the captain of the guard demolished the walls of Jerusalem on every side. ¹¹Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard deported the rest of the people remaining in the city, the deserters who had gone over to the king of Babylon, and the rest of the population. ¹²But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land as vinedressers and farmworkers. ¹³The Chaldeans broke apart the bronze pillars in the house of the LORD, the stands, and the bronze sea in the house of the LORD, and carried the bronze to Babylon. ¹⁴They also took the pots, the shovels, the wick trimmers, the ladles, and all the bronze vessels used in the Temple service. ¹⁵The captain of the guard took the firepans and the sprinkling bowls — those of gold as gold, those of silver as silver. ¹⁶The two pillars, the one sea, and the stands that Solomon had made for the house of the LORD — the bronze of all these vessels was beyond weighing. ¹⁷Each pillar was eighteen cubits tall, with a bronze capital on top. The capital was three cubits high, with a lattice network and pomegranates all around it — entirely bronze. The second pillar was identical, with its own lattice network. ¹⁸The captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, Zephaniah the second priest, and the three doorkeepers. ¹⁹From the city he took one official who had been in charge of the soldiers, five men from the king's personal advisors who were found in the city, the army secretary who conscripted the people of the land, and sixty men of the people of the land found in the city. ²⁰Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. ²¹The king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah went into exile from its land. ²²Over the people remaining in the land of Judah — those Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left behind — he appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan as governor. ²³When all the military commanders and their men heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah, they came to him at Mizpah — Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan son of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah the son of the Maacathite, along with their men. ²⁴Gedaliah swore an oath to them and their men, saying, "Do not be afraid to serve the Chaldeans. Settle in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go well for you." ²⁵But in the seventh month, Ishmael son of Nethaniah son of Elishama, of royal descent, came with ten men and struck down Gedaliah. He died — along with the Judeans and the Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah. ²⁶Then the entire remaining population — from the least to the greatest — along with the military commanders, set out and went to Egypt, because they were afraid of the Chaldeans. ²⁷In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the year he became king, released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison. ²⁸He spoke kindly to him and set his seat above the seats of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. ²⁹He changed out of his prison garments and ate regularly at the king's table for the rest of his life. ³⁰His food allowance, a regular daily provision, was given to him by the king — each day's

portion for that day — for the rest of his life.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The date — the tenth of Tevet, roughly January 588 BCE — is recorded with the precision of a catastrophe that must never be forgotten. This date became a permanent fast day in Jewish tradition (the Tenth of Tevet). The phrase *hu ve-khol cheilo* ('he and all his army') indicates the full military force of Babylon. The *dayeq* ('siege wall, siege ramp') built *saviv* ('all around') means complete encirclement — no food enters, no one escapes.
2. The siege lasted approximately eighteen months — from January 588 to July 586 BCE (with a brief interruption when an Egyptian army approached, Jeremiah 37:5-11). The compressed timeframe of this verse — from the ninth year to the eleventh — passes over months of starvation, suffering, and desperation in a single sentence. The word *matsor* ('siege') carries the full weight of that hidden suffering.
3. The fourth month is Tammuz (approximately July 586 BCE). The phrase *va-yechezaq ha-ra'av ba-ir* ('the famine grew strong/prevailed in the city') uses the verb *chazaq* ('to be strong, to overpower') — the famine has become the dominant force in the city, stronger than any defense. The final phrase *ve-lo hayah lechem le-am ha-arets* ('there was no bread for the people of the land') is absolute: not scarce bread, not rationed bread, but no bread. Lamentations 4:4-10 describes the horrors of this famine in graphic detail.
4. The verb *va-tibbqa* ('it was breached, split open') is the decisive moment — the walls that had held for eighteen months are broken. The escape route — *derekh sha'ar bein ha-chomotayim* ('through the gate between the two walls') — was a passage between the inner and outer walls near the king's garden in the southeastern part of the city, leading toward the Kidron Valley. The Arabah is the Jordan Rift Valley — they are fleeing east toward the desert. The parenthetical note — *ve-Kasdim al ha-ir saviv* ('the Chaldeans all around the city') — makes the escape seem impossible.
5. The *arvot Yericho* ('plains/steppes of Jericho') is where Israel first entered the promised land under Joshua (Joshua 4:13). The last king of Judah is captured at the very place where the conquest began — the entry point becomes the exit point. The phrase *ve-khol cheilo nafotsu me'alav* ('all his army scattered from upon him') describes total military collapse: the soldiers abandon their king and flee in all directions.
6. Riblah — the same place where Neco imprisoned Jehoahaz (23:33) — is Nebuchadnezzar's military headquarters in Syria. The phrase *va-yedabberu itto mishpat* ('they spoke judgment with him') is a formal legal proceeding: Zedekiah is tried as a treaty-breaker. In the ancient Near East, rebellion against a suzerain was the most serious political crime, punishable by the most severe penalties.
7. The sequence is calculated: first, the execution of his sons (*shachatu*, 'they slaughtered' — a verb also used for animal sacrifice) *le-einav* ('before his eyes'), ensuring the last thing those eyes see is the end of the Davidic line through him. Then *et einei Tsidqiyahu ivver* ('they blinded Zedekiah's eyes'). The bronze chains (*nechushtayim*) are a final humiliation — the king enters Babylon not in royal procession but in fetters. Ezekiel 12:13 had prophesied: 'I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, yet he will not see it' — fulfilled with terrible literalness.
8. The fifth month is Av (approximately August 586 BCE). *Nebuzaradan* (*Nevuzar'adan*, from Akkadian *Nabu-zera-iddina*, 'Nabu has given offspring') holds the title *rav tabbachim* ('chief of the executioners/slaughterers' or 'captain of the guard'). He is the instrument of destruction — the man who will carry out the burning. The nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar dates to 586 BCE. The ninth of Av (*Tisha B'Av*) became the most solemn fast day in Judaism, commemorating this destruction.
9. The verb *saraf* ('to burn') is used four times in connection with the Temple throughout Kings — for the incense burned in worship and now for the burning of the building itself. The house where God placed his name (1 Kings 8:29) is now ash. The simplicity of the sentence is its power: no theological commentary, no prophetic lament, just the statement of fact. The narrator trusts the reader to understand the magnitude.
10. The demolition of the walls — *ve-et chomot Yerushalayim saviv natsu* ('they tore down the walls of Jerusalem all around') — removes Jerusalem's identity as a fortified city. Walls defined a city in the ancient world; without them, Jerusalem is merely an open settlement. The verb *natats* ('to tear down, to demolish') is the same verb used for Josiah's destruction of pagan altars — now applied to the city's own defenses.
11. Three groups are deported: *yeter ha-am ha-nish'arim ba-ir* ('the rest of the people remaining in the city'), *ha-noflim asher naflu al melek Bavel* ('the deserters who had fallen/defected to the king of Babylon' — even surrender provided no exemption), and *yeter he-hamon* ('the rest of the multitude'). The comprehensive nature of the deportation means essentially everyone goes.
12. The remnant — *mi-dallot ha-arets* ('from the poorest of the land') — are left not out of mercy but for economic utility: *le-khormim u-le-yogvim* ('as vinedressers and as farmers/field workers'). The land must continue producing agricultural revenue for Babylon. The people deemed too insignificant to deport now become the caretakers of the promised land — the weakest, most marginal members of society.
13. The dismantling of the Temple furnishings begins with the largest bronze items: *ammudei ha-nechoshet* ('the bronze pillars' — Jachin and Boaz, 1 Kings 7:15-22), *ha-mekhonot* ('the stands/movable bases,' 1 Kings 7:27-37), and *yam ha-nechoshet* ('the bronze sea,' 1 Kings 7:23-26). The verb *shibberu* ('they broke apart') indicates the pieces were too large to transport whole. What Hiram of Tyre crafted with exquisite skill (1 Kings 7:13-47) is now raw material for Babylonian furnaces.
14. The inventory descends from monumental pieces to everyday cultic utensils: *sirot* ('pots, cooking vessels'), *ya'im* ('shovels, ash-scoops'), *mezammerot* ('snuffers, wick trimmers'), *kappot* ('ladles, bowls'). The phrase *asher yeshartu vam* ('with which they served/ministered') is poignant — these are not merely objects but instruments of worship, each one used in the daily service of God. The thoroughness of the plundering — even small utensils are taken — indicates nothing of value is left.

15. The *machtot* ('firepans, censers') and *mizraqot* ('sprinkling bowls') are specifically inventoried by material: *asher zahav zahav va-asher kesef kasef* ('what was gold, gold; what was silver, silver'). The repetition emphasizes that the Babylonians sorted the plunder by precious metal — the sacred objects are valued only for their material worth. What was consecrated for worship becomes bullion.
16. The narrator pauses the destruction narrative to catalog what is being lost: *ha-ammudim shenayim, ha-yam ha-echad, ve-ha-mekhonot* ('the two pillars, the one sea, and the stands'). Each item is linked to Solomon — *asher asah Shelomoh le-veit YHWH* ('which Solomon made for the house of the LORD'). The phrase *lo hayah mishqal* ('there was no weight,' meaning the bronze was too vast to measure) echoes 1 Kings 7:47, where Solomon's bronze vessels were so numerous that 'the weight of the bronze was not determined.' The same phrase that described abundance at creation now describes loss at destruction.
17. The dimensions — *shemoneh esreh ammah* ('eighteen cubits,' approximately 27 feet or 8 meters) — match the original description in 1 Kings 7:15. The *koteret* ('capital, crown') with its *sevakhah* ('lattice, network') and *rimmonim* ('pomegranates') are described exactly as they were in 1 Kings 7:17-20. The narrator is writing an obituary for the Temple's most visible features: the twin pillars *Jachin* and *Boaz* that stood at the entrance as symbols of divine establishment and strength. Their destruction marks the end of what they symbolized.
18. *Seraiah* (*Serayah*, 'the LORD contends') the *kohen ha-rosh* ('chief priest, head priest') was the grandson of *Hilkiah* who found the Book of the Law (1 Chronicles 5:39-40). *Zephaniah* (*Tsefanyahu*) is the *kohen mishneh* ('second priest, deputy priest'). The three *shomrei ha-saf* ('keepers of the threshold') are the senior Temple gatekeepers. The religious leadership is systematically removed — the Temple's destruction is not just architectural but institutional.
19. The arrested officials represent every sector of governance: a military commander (*saris echad asher hu paqid al anshei ha-milchamah*), five royal advisors (*chamishshah anashim me-ro'ei fenei ha-melek*, literally 'from those who see the king's face' — the inner council), the military secretary (*ha-sofer sar ha-tsava*, responsible for conscription), and sixty prominent citizens (*me-am ha-arets*). The systematic arrest ensures no leadership structure survives to organize resistance.
20. The prisoners are transported to *Riblah* for judgment — the same military tribunal that sentenced *Zedekiah*. The repetition of the route (from Jerusalem to *Riblah*) creates a pattern: one by one, the leadership of Judah is extracted and brought before *Nebuchadnezzar*.
21. The verb *va-yakh* ('he struck') followed by *va-yemidem* ('he put them to death') describes formal execution. The geographical note — *be-Rivlah be-erets Chamat* ('at *Riblah* in the land of *Hamath*') — places the execution far from Jerusalem, in Syrian territory. The concluding statement *va-yigel Yehudah me'al admato* is the most devastating sentence in Kings.
22. *Gedaliah* (*Gedalyahu*, 'the LORD has made great') belongs to the *Shaphan* family that had been instrumental in *Josiah's* reform: his grandfather *Shaphan* was the secretary who read the scroll to *Josiah* (22:8-10), and his father *Ahikam* protected *Jeremiah* from execution (*Jeremiah* 26:24). The appointment of a Judean governor rather than a Babylonian official suggests Babylon intended to administer Judah through a cooperative local elite. The remnant community is now a province, not a kingdom.
23. The scattered military remnants gather at *Mizpah* (*ha-Mitspah*, a town north of Jerusalem, possibly *Tell en-Nasbeh*), which becomes the administrative center of the remnant community. Four commanders are named: *Ishmael* son of *Nethaniah* (of royal blood, verse 25), *Johanan* son of *Kareah* (who later warned *Gedaliah* about *Ishmael's* plot, *Jeremiah* 40:13-16), *Seraiah* from *Netophah* (near *Bethlehem*), and *Jaazaniah* the *Maacathite*. The gathering suggests initial acceptance of Babylonian-appointed governance.
24. *Gedaliah's* counsel — *shevu va-arets ve-ivdu et melek Bavel ve-yitav lakhem* ('settle in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will be good for you') — echoes *Jeremiah's* controversial advice to submit to Babylon (*Jeremiah* 27:11, 29:5-7). The phrase *ve-yitav lakhem* ('it will be good/well for you') is a conditional promise: survival depends on cooperation. This mirrors the prophet *Jeremiah's* letter to the exiles urging them to seek the welfare of the city where they are sent.
25. The assassination in the seventh month (*Tishrei*, roughly October 586 BCE) destroys the remnant community's fragile stability. *Ishmael* is *mi-zera ha-melukhah* ('of the seed of the kingdom, of royal descent') — his motive is at least partly dynastic: a member of the royal house assassinates the non-royal governor. The murder of both Judeans and Chaldeans (Babylonian officials stationed with *Gedaliah*) ensures Babylonian reprisal. *Jeremiah* 41 provides the full account, including *Ishmael's* massacre of seventy pilgrims and his flight to *Ammon*.
26. The flight to Egypt — *va-yavo'u Mitsrayim* ('they came to Egypt') — is the final irony of the Deuteronomistic History. The people whom God brought out of Egypt now return there voluntarily, fleeing the consequences of covenant violation. *Deuteronomy* 28:68 warned: 'The LORD will bring you back to Egypt in ships' — the return to Egypt represents the complete reversal of the exodus. The phrase *ki yar'u mippenei Kasdim* ('because they feared the Chaldeans') explains the motive: fear of Babylonian reprisal for *Gedaliah's* assassination. *Jeremiah* 42-43 records the prophet's desperate plea not to go to Egypt, which the people ignore.
27. The coda begins with precise dating: the thirty-seventh year of *Jehoiachin's* exile (approximately 561 BCE), the twelfth month (*Adar*), the twenty-seventh day. *Evil-merodach* (*Evil Merodakh*, from Akkadian *Amel-Marduk*, 'man of *Marduk*') succeeded *Nebuchadnezzar* in 562 BCE. The phrase *nasa et rosh* ('he lifted the head of') means to restore honor or grant favor — the opposite of execution (where the head is also 'lifted,' but removed from the body). *Jehoiachin* has been in prison for thirty-seven years.
28. The phrase *va-yedabber itto tovot* ('he spoke good things with him, he spoke kindly to him') is the language of grace after judgment. The elevation of *Jehoiachin's* throne — *me'al kisse ha-melakhim asher itto be-Vavel* ('above the throne/seat of the kings who were with him in Babylon') — means *Jehoiachin* receives precedence among the captive kings held at the Babylonian court. Babylonian administrative tablets discovered at the *Ishtar Gate* list rations for 'Yaukin king of the land of *Yahud*' (*Jehoiachin*), confirming his presence in Babylon as a royal prisoner.

- 29.** The changing of garments — *ve-shinnah et bigdei khil'o* ('he changed his prison clothes') — is a symbolic restoration: the clothes of captivity are replaced. The phrase *akhal lechem tamid lefanav* ('he ate bread continually before him') means a permanent place at the royal table — provision, honor, presence. The phrase *kol yemei chayyav* ('all the days of his life') extends this grace to the end. A descendant of David eats bread at a foreign king's table — diminished, dependent, but alive.
- 30.** The word *aruchah* ('allowance, portion, meal') appears in its doubled form — *aruchato aruchat tamid* — for emphasis. The phrase *dvar yom be-yomo* ('the matter of a day on its day') echoes the manna provision in Exodus 16:4, where God provided bread *dvar yom be-yomo* ('day by day'). The parallel may be intentional: as God sustained Israel in the wilderness between Egypt and the promised land, so now a descendant of David is sustained in exile between the land and whatever comes next. The Deuteronomistic History ends with bread, survival, and an open future.