

CRUMBLING

What new thing did you learn from this week's reading?

What stood out the most to you from the reading?

Take a moment to read & reflect upon favorite passages from this week's part of the story?

THE STORY CONTINUES

2 Kings 25, Isaiah 1-2, Jeremiah 3-4, Ezekiel 8-10, Isaiah 52.13-53.12, Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 34

Three horizontal rectangular boxes stacked vertically, intended for reflection. The top and bottom boxes are a medium gray color, while the middle box is a lighter gray color.

1 & 2 KINGS

1 and 2 Kings is _____ and _____ commentary upon the history that otherwise can be known.

It is NOT _____

Three Views of 1 and 2 Kings

1

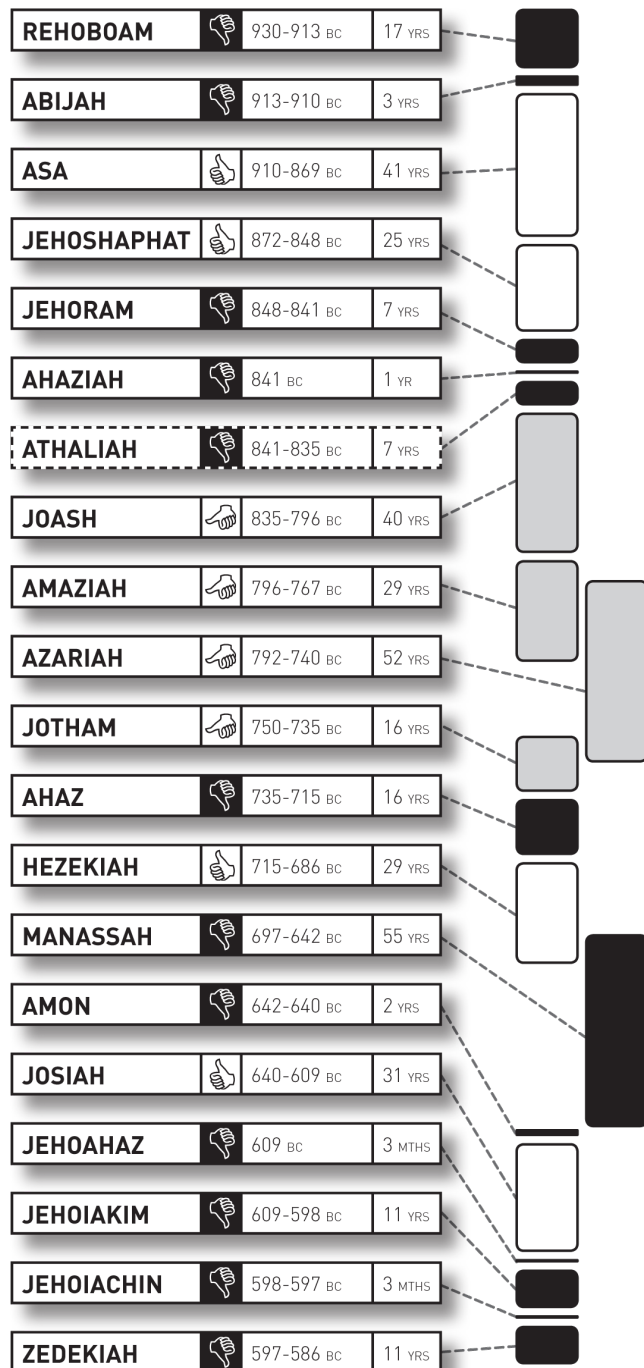
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3

THE KINGS OF JUDAH & ISRAEL

FROM 1 & 2 KINGS

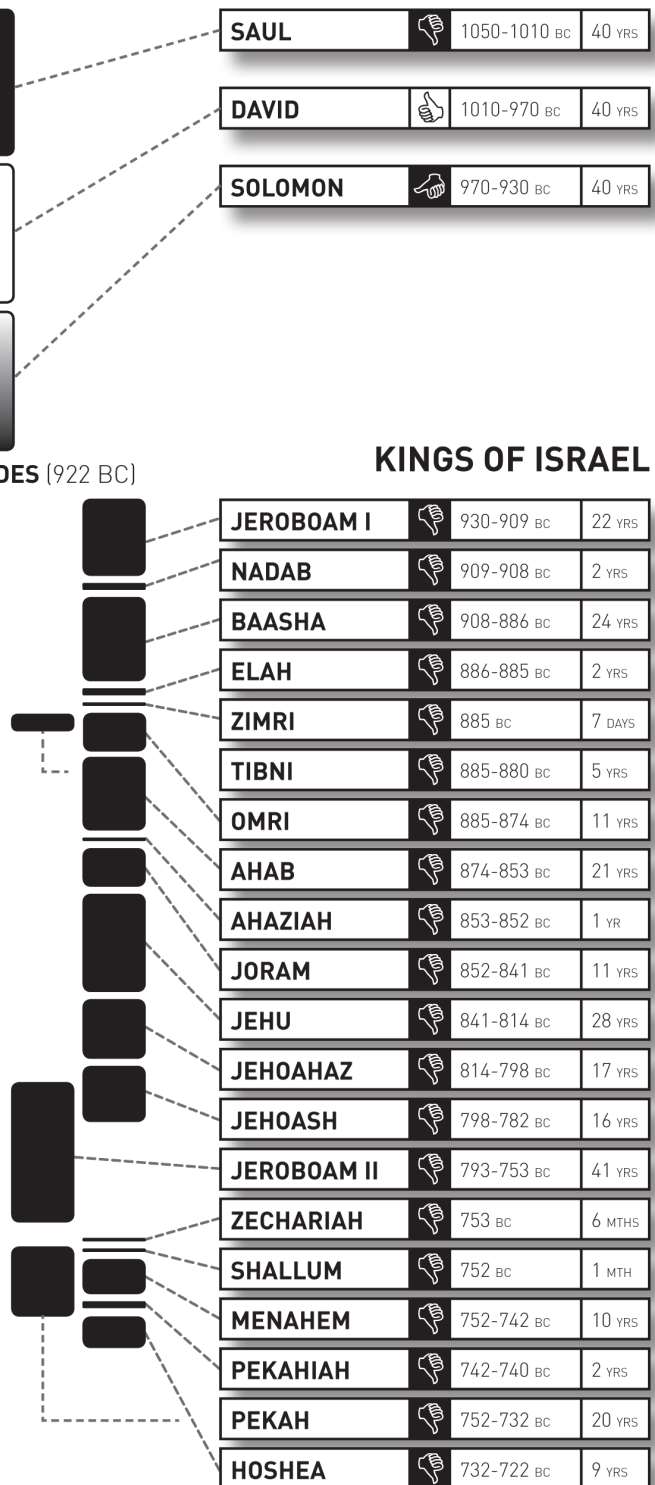
KINGS OF JUDAH



JUDAH EXILED BY BABYLON (586 BC)

KINGDOM DIVIDES (922 BC)

KINGS OF ISRAEL



ISRAEL ASSIMILATED BY ASSYRIA (722 BC)

Read & Discuss Jeremiah 7:1-15, 22-26

Read & Discuss Jeremiah 31:1-4, 31-34

Read & Discuss Isaiah 52:13-53:12

“Don’t for a Minute Believe the Lies” from Peterson, Eugene H. *Run with the Horses: The Quest for Life at Its Best*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022.

The Message from GOD to Jeremiah: “Stand in the gate of GOD’s Temple and preach this Message. “Say, ‘Listen, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship GOD. GOD-of the-Angel-Armies, Israel’s God, has this to say to you: “Clean up your act—the way you live, the things you do—so I can make my home with you in this place. Don’t for a minute believe the lies being spoken here—“This is GOD’s Temple, GOD’s Temple, GOD’s Temple!”””

JEREMIAH 7:1-4

Jesus today has many who love his heavenly kingdom, but few who carry his cross; many who yearn for comfort, few who long for distress. Plenty of people he finds to share his banquet, few to share his fast. Everyone desires to take part in his rejoicing, but few are willing to suffer anything for his sake. There are many that follow Jesus as far as the breaking of bread, few as far as drinking the cup of suffering; many that revere his miracles, few that follow him in the indignity of his cross.

THOMAS À KEMPIS¹

MANASSEH WAS THE WORST KING the Hebrews ever had. He was a thoroughly bad man presiding over a totally corrupt government. He reigned in Jerusalem for fifty-five years, a dark and evil half century.

He encouraged a pagan worship that involved whole communities in sexual orgies. He installed cult prostitutes at shrines throughout the countryside. He imported wizards and sorcerers who enslaved the people in superstitions and manipulated them with their magic. The man could not do enough evil. There seemed to be no end to his barbarous cruelties. His capacity for inventing new forms of evil seemed bottomless. His appetite for the sordid was insatiable. One day he placed his son on the altar in some black and terrible ritual of witchcraft and burned him as an offering (2 Kings 21).

The great Solomonic temple in Jerusalem, resplendent in its holy simplicity, empty of any form of god so that the invisible God could be attended to in worship, swarmed with magicians and prostitutes. Idols shaped as beasts and monsters defiled the holy place. Lust and greed were deified. Murders were commonplace. Manasseh dragged the people into a mire far more stinking than anything the world had yet seen. The sacred historian’s judgment was blunt: “Manasseh led them off the beaten path into practices of evil even exceeding the evil of the pagan nations that GOD had earlier destroyed” (2 Kings 21:9).²

Jeremiah was born in the last decade of Manasseh’s rule. This is the world in which Jeremiah learned to walk and talk and play. No worse environment in which to raise a child can be imagined. It was a slum society: “From the wicked who stalk us with lies, from the wicked who collect honors for their wonderful lies” (Ps 12:8).

Fifty-five years of such misrule brought the faith close to oblivion. Some old people remembered prophetic oracles and acts of true worship. Rumors of holiness were no doubt whispered about. Hidden pockets of faithful people maintained a fugitive existence. Then Manasseh died. His son Amon succeeded him. The people watched to see if things would change. They didn’t. The evil continued. But the people had their stomachs full. They had reached the breaking point and could take no more. Amon was murdered. His eight-year-old son, Josiah, was put on the throne.

¹ Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1959), pp. 76-77.

² See also John Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953), p. 100.

JOSIAH'S REFORMS

Now begins one of the most remarkable chapters in the story of these people who are our ancestors. Somehow in this boy king there was an innocence and uncorrupt spirit that God was able to use to bring new life to the land.

We wonder how Josiah got started, for he had no models to work from. Goodness originates at some deep level inaccessible to our investigations. When I see a large expanse of black asphalt parking lot, I sometimes think of Manasseh and Josiah. The asphalt is ugly and forbidding. A fresh green creation has been bulldozed into oblivion to make way for this sterile, monotonous surface. A harsh and brutal technology has obliterated a delicately nuanced life for the convenience of the worshipers of the god Mammon. But before long, cracks appear and grasses, wildflowers, even sprouting trees, push their way through. The underground forces of life break through the surface patina of death. Maintenance engineers patch and fill and seal to keep their surface intact and smooth. If they are inattentive for so much as a season or two, seemingly fragile but in fact formidable life reasserts itself.

I speak of the unremarked
And make the pavement toss—
Forces concealed in quiet
People and plants³

Manasseh had covered the Holy Land with Sodom-and-Gomorra asphalt. But the holy was not gone, only invisible. Josiah was one of the first shoots to break through the black bitumen. Out of some deep, intuitive longing for God that corrupt parents had not been able to quash, that an evil environment had not been able to annihilate, he asked questions: How could a better rule be established? What could he do as king to recover health and goodness in the garbage dump that was Jerusalem? He had to start someplace. He started at the place of worship.

A people's lives are only as good as their worship. The temple in Jerusalem was the architectural evidence of the importance of God in the life of the people. All the lines of life crisscrossed in the temple. Meaning was established there. Values were created there. Worship defines life. If worship is corrupt, life will be corrupt. For fifty-five years lust and violence in the temple had percolated into the streets and homes and villages of the nation. Josiah began by cleaning up the temple.

As the temple was being renovated and repaired, Hilkiah the priest found an old book there. The book was brought to Josiah and read aloud to him. It was the book of Deuteronomy. Imagine the impact of that reading.

Here is Josiah, disgusted with the evil of his father and grandfather and determined to do something about it, but not knowing quite how. He had no blueprint, no direction, no counsel. The only thing he had inherited from his father and grandfather was fifty-five years of evil. Now he had this powerful document about the love of God and worship of him, clear definitions of right and wrong, and explicit directions on how to make moral decisions and conduct intelligent worship. In Josiah's ears the reading was "a thunderclap of conscience."⁴

³ William Meredith, "Chinese Banyan," quoted in Richard Howard, *Alone with America* (New York, NY: Atheneum, 1969), p. 324.

⁴ John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 299.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What are your top three excuses for not obeying God?

What are our idols today? Give several examples.

What is hindering your relationship with God more than anything else? Why?

What are the worse social injustices today? What can we do about them? Be specific.

Pick one of the prophets from this section of reading and write a letter from them to you.

HOMework

Memorize

- ☐ Daniel 12.2

Biblical Text

- ☐ Daniel 1-3
- ☐ Nehemiah 1-6.3
- ☐ Haggai 1-2
- ☐ Malachi 3-4

Read

- ☐ Duvall/ Hays – *Living God's Word*, Chapter 9

Complete

- ☐ Duvall/ Hays – *Living God's Word*, pg XXX
- ☐ Personal Reflection Questions