THE BOOK OF 2 KINGS

The King Who Keeps the Lamp Burning

2 Kings, Unfiltered

For teens who think they've heard it all

BILL McLEOD

Papa Bill Books

THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR TEENS

The King Who Keeps the Lamp Burning: The Book of 2 Kings, Unfiltered

Part of The Old Testament for Teens series.

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In the author's own text, pronouns referring to God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are capitalized for reverence. Scripture quotations follow the WEB Protestant Edition exactly, including its capitalization.

AI Disclosure. This book was written by Bill McLeod with the assistance of artificial intelligence tools for drafting, research, and editing. All content was reviewed and approved by the author, who takes full responsibility for it. Readers are encouraged to open the Scriptures and study them for themselves.

A WORD TO THE READER

Before You Start

You know the saying by now: “If you want to get something done, hire a teenager while they still know it all.” You might remember a few wild stories from 2 Kings. A prophet carried into heaven in a chariot of fire. An ax head that floats. A foreign general who dips in a muddy river seven times and comes out with skin like a baby’s. Maybe the one about the bears, which everybody wants to ask about.

2 Kings is the story of how God’s people lost everything. It begins with Elijah leaving and Elisha taking his place, performing more miracles than almost anyone in the Old Testament. But as the book goes on, the kings get worse, the warnings get louder, and the people keep refusing to listen. First the northern kingdom of Israel falls to Assyria. Then, about 135 years later, the southern kingdom of Judah falls to Babylon. The temple is burned. Jerusalem is destroyed. The people are dragged away into exile.

So why read it? Because 2 Kings is honest about what happens when people ignore God for generations. And yet, even in the darkest moments, there are flashes of light: a brave servant girl, a baby king hidden in the temple, an eight-year-old who grows up to change a nation, and a final scene that whispers that God’s promise to David isn’t dead.

Let’s go.

How This Book Works

This book walks through 2 Kings in nine chapters: Elijah's departure and Elisha's double portion (2 Kings 1–3), Elisha's miracles of oil, life, and bread (4), Naaman (5), the floating ax head and the armies of heaven (6–8), Jehu and the hidden king (9–12), the fall of Israel (13–17), Hezekiah and the siege of Jerusalem (18–20), Manasseh and Josiah (21–23), and the fall of Jerusalem (24–25).

Before chapter 1, a section called Setting the Scene explains what kind of book 2 Kings is, where it fits, and the world it came from. Read it first. If you get confused about the two kingdoms, look back at the quick guide in the 1 Kings book, or in the Setting the Scene section here.

Each chapter ends with a Key Verse quoted word for word from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain modern translation used for every Scripture quotation in this book (Scripture is quoted exactly as the WEB prints it; in the rest of the book, pronouns for God are capitalized out of reverence); Real Talk questions to think through alone or argue about with friends; and a Try This challenge.

On questions where sincere Christians disagree, such as how to understand the story of Elisha and the bears, I'll lay out the main views fairly and leave the decision to you, your family, and your church. This book quotes 2 Kings in places and explains it mostly in my own words, so keep a Bible open next to it. Don't take my word for it. Take His.

FOR THE ADULTS

A Note for Parents and Youth Leaders

Thank you for putting this book in a teenager's hands. It's the twelfth book in The Old Testament for Teens, a companion to the New Testament for Teens series, written for readers who can smell a sermon coming a mile away. I've tried to write honestly, directly, with some humor, and with real respect for what these readers can handle.

2 Kings raises real questions. A hard-passage box on Elisha and the bears (2:23–25) explains the Hebrew term ne'arim and presents the main views fairly. Jehu's violent purge and Jezebel's death are summarized without graphic detail, and the book notes that the prophet Hosea later condemned the bloodshed at Jezreel. The fall of Israel and Judah, including Manasseh's child sacrifice and the siege of Jerusalem, are handled honestly but age-appropriately.

Real Talk boxes address greed, courage, peer pressure, fear, mental health, and grief, and the book points readers to trusted adults and the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline where relevant. Background Check boxes explain archaeological finds like Hezekiah's Tunnel, Sennacherib's Prism, and the Babylonian records of Jehoiachin.

The closing section, Where This Points, shows how the New Testament sees Elisha's miracles and the surviving line of David pointing to Jesus, while acknowledging that Jewish readers treasure 2 Kings in their own rich ways. Wherever Scripture is quoted

directly, in the chapters and in the Key Verses, the wording is from the World English Bible (WEB), Protestant Edition, a public-domain translation.

The Real Talk questions are designed for discussion. They work well for a youth group, a small group, a family dinner table, or a car ride. Don't rush to the right answer. Let them wrestle. Faith that has been thought through tends to last.

My prayer is that every reader will see in 2 Kings both the seriousness of ignoring God and the faithfulness of a God who keeps His lamp burning even in exile.

Grace and peace,

Bill McLeod

Papa Bill Books

BEFORE YOU OPEN THE BOOK

Setting the Scene

What Kind of Book Is This?

2 Kings is history told as a story, with a clear point of view. It was originally the second half of one book with 1 Kings. The writer judges every king by whether he was faithful to the LORD, and he keeps asking one big question: why did God's people lose their land? The answer runs through the whole book. They were warned again and again by prophets, and they wouldn't listen.

Where It Fits

2 Kings covers about 300 years, from around 850 BC, when Elijah is taken to heaven, to around 560 BC, when the exiled king Jehoiachin is released from prison in Babylon. Many of the prophets whose books appear later in the Bible lived during these years: Amos and Hosea in the north, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, and others in the south. Reading 2 Kings helps their books make sense.

Who Wrote It?

Like 1 Kings, the book doesn't name its author. Jewish tradition says Jeremiah wrote it. Since it ends during the exile in Babylon, most scholars think the final version was completed then, drawing on royal records and stories of the prophets, as part of a larger history running from Deuteronomy through Kings. Christians with different views agree that it is God's Word.

Two Kingdoms, Two Empires

After Solomon, the kingdom split. The northern kingdom, called Israel, had its capital at Samaria and a series of different royal families, none of them faithful to the LORD. The southern kingdom, called Judah, had its capital at Jerusalem, the temple, and kings from David's family, some good and many bad. During 2 Kings, two huge empires rise. Assyria, based in what is now northern Iraq, destroys Israel in 722 BC. Then Babylon, based in what is now southern Iraq, destroys Judah and Jerusalem in 586 BC.

Archaeology and 2 Kings

Many people and events in 2 Kings show up in ancient records outside the Bible. Assyrian inscriptions mention kings like Jehu, Hezekiah, and Manasseh. Sennacherib's own account of his attack on Jerusalem has been found. A tunnel Hezekiah cut through solid rock still carries water under Jerusalem today. And Babylonian tablets list food rations for Jehoiachin, king of Judah, in exile. You'll find boxes on some of these finds along the way.

Hard Stories and Safety Notes

2 Kings includes war, famine, violent revolutions, child sacrifice, and the destruction of a city. Including a story in the Bible doesn't mean God approves of what happens in it. Often the writer is showing us how badly things have gone wrong. When we come to these stories, you'll find a box with a safety note. If you are ever going through something that feels like too much, please talk to a trusted adult. In the United States you can call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, any time, and in an emergency, call 911.

The Map

Chapter 1 (2 Kings 1–3): The chariot of fire.

Chapter 2 (2 Kings 4): Oil, life, and bread.

Chapter 3 (2 Kings 5): Naaman.

Chapter 4 (2 Kings 6–8): More are with us.

Chapter 5 (2 Kings 9–12): Jehu and the hidden king.

Chapter 6 (2 Kings 13–17): The fall of Israel.

Chapter 7 (2 Kings 18–20): Hezekiah and the siege.

Chapter 8 (2 Kings 21–23): The boy king and the lost book.

Chapter 9 (2 Kings 24–25): The fall of Jerusalem.

Contents

Setting the Scene .....

1 The Chariot of Fire *1–3* .....

2 Oil, Life, and Bread *4* .....

3 Naaman *5* .....

4 More Are with Us *6–8* .....

5 Jehu and the Hidden King *9–12* .....

6 The Fall of Israel *13–17* .....

7 Hezekiah and the Siege *18–20* .....

8 The Boy King and the Lost Book *21–23* .....

9 The Fall of Jerusalem *24–25* .....

Where This Points .....

CHAPTER 1

The Chariot of Fire

2 Kings 1–3

2 Kings opens with Ahab dead and his son Ahaziah on the throne of Israel. Ahaziah falls through a lattice window in his upstairs room and is badly hurt. Instead of asking the LORD what will happen, he sends messengers to ask Baal-zebub, the god of the Philistine city of Ekron, whether he'll recover. The name Baal-zebub probably meant something like lord of the flies, a mocking nickname for the god. In the New Testament, a version of the name, Beelzebul, became a name for Satan.

God sends Elijah to intercept the messengers. Is it because there is no God in Israel that you're going to ask the god of Ekron? Tell the king he won't get out of bed. He's going to die. When the messengers report back, the king asks what the man looked like. They say, "He was a hairy man, and wearing a leather belt around his waist." The king knows immediately. "It's Elijah the Tishbite."

The king sends soldiers to arrest Elijah, and fire from heaven falls on two groups of fifty. The third captain falls on his knees and begs for mercy, and the angel of the LORD tells Elijah to go with him. Elijah delivers the message to the king in person, and Ahaziah dies, just as he said. The point of the story is the same one Elijah made on Carmel: the LORD is God, and you can't go around Him to some other power.

Then comes one of the most famous scenes in the Bible. “When the LORD was about to take Elijah up by a whirlwind into heaven, Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.”

Everyone seems to know what’s about to happen. Elijah, Elisha, and groups of prophets in Bethel and Jericho all know that God is going to take Elijah away that day. Three times, Elijah tells Elisha to stay behind. Three times, Elisha refuses. “As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you.” It’s the same kind of loyalty Ruth showed Naomi. Elisha won’t let his teacher go alone.

At each town, groups of young prophets come out and ask Elisha, do you know the LORD is going to take your master from you today? Elisha’s answer is short. Yes, I know. Be quiet. He doesn’t want to talk about it. He just wants to stay close.

> **REAL TALK** **When Someone You Love Is Leaving**
>
> Elisha knew his mentor was leaving, and he didn’t want to waste a single moment. Maybe you’ve been through something like that: a grandparent who was sick, a friend moving away, a coach or youth leader leaving, or parents separating. Those seasons are hard. Elisha’s example is to stay close while you can, to say what needs to be said, and to receive whatever they have to give you. Afterward, it’s okay to grieve hard. Elisha did. And if a loss feels too heavy to carry, please talk to a trusted adult or a counselor. You don’t have to carry it alone.

At the Jordan River, Elijah rolls up his cloak and strikes the water, and it divides, like the Red Sea for Moses and the Jordan for Joshua. The two of them cross on dry ground. On the other side, Elijah turns to Elisha and asks, “Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you.”

Elisha says, “Please let a double portion of your spirit be on me.”

That sounds greedy, like he wants twice as much power as Elijah. But in Israel, the oldest son inherited a double portion of his father's property, which made him the main heir. Elisha is asking to be Elijah's true successor, his spiritual firstborn, carrying on his work.

Elijah says, "You have asked a hard thing." It's not his to give. But if you see me when I'm taken from you, it will happen.

They keep walking and talking. And suddenly, "behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." Elijah doesn't die. He's taken. Only one other person in the Old Testament, Enoch, leaves the world without dying.

Elisha sees it. He cries out, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" Elijah was worth more to Israel than an entire army. Then Elisha tears his clothes in grief.

Elijah's cloak has fallen to the ground. Elisha picks it up, walks back to the Jordan, and strikes the water. And he asks a question that every person who has lost a spiritual mentor eventually asks: "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" Is God still here, now that Elijah is gone?

The water divides. Elisha crosses over. God is still here. The prophets watching from Jericho say, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha," and they bow down to him.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Elijah Will Return**

Because Elijah never died, many Jewish people came to believe he would come back. The prophet Malachi, at the very end of the Old Testament, promised: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes." To this day, many Jewish families set a cup of wine for Elijah at the Passover meal and open the door for him. In the New Testament, an angel says John the Baptist would come "in the spirit and

power of Elijah," and Jesus says of John, "this is Elijah, who is to come." And on the mountain where Jesus was transfigured, Elijah appeared with Moses, talking with Jesus about His coming death in Jerusalem.

Now comes the story everyone asks about. Elisha leaves Jericho and heads up to Bethel. On the way, a group of youths comes out of the city and mocks him. "Go up, you baldy! Go up, you baldy!" Elisha turns around, looks at them, and curses them in the LORD's name. Then two female bears come out of the woods and maul forty-two of them.

REAL TALK **The Bears and the Youths**

This is one of the most uncomfortable stories in the Bible, and it's worth looking at carefully. First, the people involved. Some older translations call them little children, which makes the story sound like God punished kids for teasing a bald man. But the Hebrew words are ne'arim qetannim. Na'ar, the singular of ne'arim, is used for a wide age range, from a baby to a young man of fighting age; Joseph is called a na'ar at seventeen, and so are soldiers and servants. Most scholars think these were teenagers or young men, not small children. And there were at least forty-two of them, which sounds more like a mob than a playground. Second, the place. Bethel was the center of Jeroboam's golden calf worship, and its people were hostile to the LORD's prophets. Third, the insult. Go up may be a mocking reference to Elijah's being taken up, as if to say, why don't you disappear too? And mocking God's prophet was a way of mocking God. Christians read the story in a few ways. Many see it as a serious warning, at the very start of Elisha's ministry, that rejecting and mocking God's messenger was rejecting God, much as Leviticus warned that curses would come on a rebellious nation. Some note that the text says the youths were mauled, not necessarily killed. Others honestly admit that the story is still hard and that they can't fully explain it. All agree that the story is not about God being touchy about baldness, and that it doesn't give anyone permission to curse people who mock them. Jesus taught us to bless those who curse us.

Chapter 3 tells of a war against Moab. Joram, Ahab's son and the new king of Israel, teams up with Jehoshaphat, the good king of Judah, and the king of Edom. They march through the desert and run out of water. Jehoshaphat asks for a prophet of the LORD, and someone mentions Elisha.

Elisha isn't impressed with Joram. Go ask your father's prophets, he says. If it weren't for Jehoshaphat, I wouldn't even look at you. But for Jehoshaphat's sake, he agrees to help. Then he does something interesting. "But now bring me a musician." When the musician plays, the LORD's hand comes on Elisha, and he prophesies that God will fill the dry valley with water without any rain. The next morning, the valley is full of water, and Israel wins the battle.

Music helped Elisha hear from God. David's harp had calmed Saul. Throughout the Bible, music is one of the ways people connect with God, express their hearts, and quiet their minds enough to listen.

> **REAL TALK** **Carrying the Mantle**
>
> Elisha picked up Elijah's cloak and kept going. Every generation of believers has to do that: pick up the faith of the people who came before them and carry it forward. Maybe you have a parent, grandparent, pastor, or teacher whose faith has shaped you. Someday you'll have to make that faith your own. Elisha's question, where is the LORD, the God of Elijah, is a great question to ask. It's not enough to know that God was real for someone else. You need to know He's real for you. The good news is that the same God who was with Elijah is with Elisha, and He can be with you.

KEY VERSE

When they had gone over, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be on me."

2 Kings 2:9 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Elisha refused to leave Elijah three times. What does that tell you about him?
2. What did Elisha mean by asking for a double portion? Why do you think Elijah called it a hard thing?
3. How does understanding the word ne'arim change the way you read the story of the bears? What questions do you still have?
4. Whose faith has shaped you? What would it look like to pick up their mantle?

TRY THIS *Ask someone whose faith you respect how they came to know God. Then ask God to make Himself real to you in the same way.*

CHAPTER 2

Oil, Life, and Bread

2 Kings 4

Chapter 4 is like a highlight reel of Elisha's ministry. In one chapter, he helps a desperate widow, a wealthy woman, a dying boy, and a group of hungry prophets. In each story, God meets people right where they are, in the kitchen, the bedroom, and the dinner table.

The first story begins with a woman crying out to Elisha. Her husband was one of the prophets, a man who "feared the LORD." Now he's dead, and he left debts. The creditor is coming to take her two sons as slaves to pay off what's owed. In that world, debt slavery was a real and terrifying possibility for the poor.

Elisha asks her, "What should I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?"

She says she has nothing, except a pot of oil.

Elisha tells her to do something strange. Go to all your neighbors and borrow empty jars. "Don't borrow just a few containers." Then go inside with your sons, shut the door, and start pouring oil from your little pot into the empty jars.

She does it. Her sons bring jar after jar, and she keeps pouring, and the oil keeps coming. Finally she says, bring me another one. Her son says, there aren't any more. And the oil stops.

She goes back to Elisha, and he tells her to sell the oil, pay off her debts, and live on what's left. The miracle was exactly as big as her faith. The number of jars she gathered determined how much oil she got.

> **REAL TALK** **What Do You Have in the House?**
>
> Elisha didn't start with a miracle out of nowhere. He started by asking the widow what she already had. A little pot of oil didn't seem like anything. But God used it. That's often how He works. When you feel like you have nothing to offer, a small talent, a little time, a few dollars, a kind word, God can take what you have and do more with it than you imagined. The widow also had to trust Him enough to collect a lot of jars. Sometimes faith means preparing for God to do more than you expect.

The second story is about a very different woman. In the town of Shunem lives a "prominent woman," wealthy and respected. Whenever Elisha passes through, she invites him in for a meal. Eventually she tells her husband, this man is a holy man of God. Let's build him a little room on the roof, with a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so he has a place to stay.

Elisha is so grateful that he wants to do something for her. He asks if she'd like him to put in a good word for her with the king or the army commander. Her answer is lovely: "I dwell among my own people." She's content. She doesn't need anything.

But Elisha's servant Gehazi notices something. She has no son, and her husband is old. So Elisha calls her and makes her a promise. "At this season next year, you will embrace a son." She can hardly bear it. "No, my lord, you man of God, do not lie to your servant." She had given up on that dream, and she doesn't want to hope again only to be disappointed.

But a year later, she has a son.

Years pass. The boy grows up. One day, he's out in the fields with his father during the harvest, and suddenly he cries out, my head, my head! He's carried home to his mother, sits on her lap until noon, and dies.

She doesn't scream or tell anyone. She carries his body up to Elisha's room, lays him on the prophet's bed, shuts the door, and asks her husband for a donkey and a servant. She's going to see the man of God. Her husband doesn't understand. It isn't a holy day. Why go today? She only says, "It is well," or as some translate it, it will be all right.

She rides hard to Mount Carmel. Elisha sees her coming and sends Gehazi to ask if everything's okay. She says, "It is well." But when she reaches Elisha, she falls down and grabs his feet. Gehazi tries to push her away, but Elisha says, leave her alone. She is in deep distress, and the LORD has hidden it from me.

Then she says what's in her heart. "Did I ask you for a son, my lord? Didn't I say, 'Do not deceive me'?" I didn't ask for this. I told you not to get my hopes up. And now he's gone.

> **REAL TALK** **It Is Well, and It Isn't**
>
> The Shunammite woman said "It is well" to everyone until she got to the one person who could help. Then she let it all out. Many of us do that. We tell everyone we're fine, because it's easier. But it's important to have at least one person, and God Himself, with whom you can be completely honest about how not okay you are. Her honesty wasn't a lack of faith. Going to Elisha was an act of faith. If you're carrying something heavy behind a smile, find a safe person, a parent, counselor, pastor, or trusted friend, and tell them the truth. And if you're ever thinking about hurting yourself, call or text 988 right away.

Elisha sends Gehazi ahead with his staff to lay on the boy's face, but nothing happens. The mother refuses to leave Elisha, so he goes

himself. When he gets to the house, the boy is lying dead on his bed. Elisha goes in, shuts the door, and prays to the LORD. Then he stretches himself out over the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands, and the child's body begins to grow warm. Elisha gets up, paces the room, and stretches out over him again. And "the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes."

That's one of the most delightfully specific details in the Bible. Seven sneezes. Life comes back with a sneeze.

Elisha calls the mother and says, "Take up your son." She falls at his feet, bows to the ground, and picks up her boy.

Later in the book, there's a postscript to her story. Elisha warns her of a seven-year famine, and she moves away to the land of the Philistines. When she comes back, her house and land have been taken. She goes to the king to ask for them back, and at that very moment, Gehazi happens to be telling the king about the boy Elisha raised from the dead. Gehazi says, this is the woman, and this is her son! The king gives her back everything, plus all the income from her land while she was away. God's timing is perfect.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Poison Stew and Twenty Loaves**

The chapter ends with two short miracles about food. During a famine, someone gathers wild gourds for a stew for the prophets, but they turn out to be poisonous. "Man of God, there is death in the pot!" they shout. Elisha throws in some flour, and the stew becomes safe to eat. Then a man brings Elisha twenty small loaves of barley bread. Elisha tells his servant to give it to a hundred men. The servant protests that it's nowhere near enough. Elisha insists, "for the LORD says, 'They will eat, and will have some left over.'" They eat, and there are leftovers. Centuries later, when a boy brought Jesus five barley loaves and two fish and the disciples asked, "what are these among so many?" people who knew this story would have remembered Elisha. But Jesus fed five thousand men, and the leftovers filled twelve baskets.

In this one chapter, Elisha provides oil for a widow, a son for a woman who had given up hope, life for a dead child, safe food in a famine, and bread for a hungry crowd. While the kings of Israel were busy with wars and politics, God was quietly caring for ordinary people through His prophet.

KEY VERSE

So he set it before them and they ate and had some left over, according to the LORD's word.

2 Kings 4:44 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Elisha asked the widow, "what do you have in the house?" What small things do you have that God could use?
2. Why do you think the Shunammite woman said "It is well" to everyone except Elisha?
3. Is it a lack of faith to tell God you're upset or disappointed? Why or why not?
4. How do Elisha's miracles in this chapter point forward to Jesus?

TRY THIS *Think of one small thing you have, a skill, some time, or something you own, and offer it to God this week by using it to help someone.*

CHAPTER 3

Naaman

2 Kings 5

Naaman has it all. He's the commander of the army of Syria, Israel's enemy to the north. He's a great man, respected by his king, a successful general, and "a mighty man of valor." And then the writer adds four words that change everything: "but he was a leper."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Leprosy in the Bible**
>
> The Hebrew word often translated leprosy covered a range of skin diseases, not only what doctors today call leprosy, or Hansen's disease. Some were mild, and some were serious and contagious. In Israel, people with these diseases were considered ceremonially unclean and often had to live outside the community. In other nations, the rules were different; Naaman still had his job, so his condition may not have been the most severe kind. But it was serious enough that no one could cure it, and it threatened his career and his future.

Now meet the bravest person in the story. During one of Syria's raids into Israel, soldiers captured "a little girl" and brought her back to serve as a slave in Naaman's house. She was taken from her family and her country, and she had every reason to hate the man she worked for.

Instead, she says to Naaman's wife, "I wish that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would heal him of his leprosy."

We never learn her name. But her faith and compassion set the whole story in motion. She could have kept quiet. She could have been glad her captor was suffering. Instead, she pointed him to the God who could help him.

REAL TALK **The Girl Who Spoke Up**

The servant girl was young, enslaved, far from home, and powerless. And yet she was the only person in Naaman's house who knew where real help could be found, and she was brave enough to say it. You might feel like you don't have much influence because of your age or your situation. But one sentence from a young person who trusts God can change someone's life. Maybe someone you know is struggling, and you know where help can be found: a counselor, a trusted adult, a church, or God Himself. Don't underestimate what your words can do. And her story is also a reminder that kindness to people who have hurt you, when it's safe, is one of the most powerful ways to show God's love. That doesn't mean staying in an unsafe situation; it means refusing to let bitterness win.

Naaman tells his king, and the king of Syria sends him to the king of Israel with a letter and a fortune in gifts: silver, gold, and ten sets of clothing. The letter says, I'm sending my servant Naaman to you so you can heal him.

The king of Israel reads it and panics. He tears his clothes. "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends to me to heal a man of his leprosy?" He assumes the Syrian king is trying to start a fight. Notice that the king of Israel doesn't even think about the prophet of God living in his own country. A little servant girl had more faith than the king.

Elisha hears about it and sends a message: send him to me, "and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel."

So Naaman arrives at Elisha's house with his horses and chariots, the whole impressive convoy. And Elisha doesn't even come to the door. He sends a messenger out with instructions: "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall come again to you, and you shall be clean."

Naaman is furious. "Behold, I thought, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leper.'" He had a picture in his head of how this would go, and this wasn't it. He expected a show. And wash in the Jordan? It's a muddy little river. "Aren't Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" He turns and storms away in a rage.

> **REAL TALK** **When God Doesn't Do It Your Way**
>
> Naaman's biggest obstacle wasn't his disease. It was his pride. He wanted to be treated like an important man. He wanted a dramatic healing. He didn't want to do something simple and humbling. People often approach God that way. We want Him to work on our terms, in our timing, in impressive ways. Sometimes what He asks is simple: confess, forgive, apologize, ask for help, show up, read, pray, obey. The hard part isn't figuring out what to do. It's being humble enough to do it.

His servants follow him and gently reason with him. "My father, if the prophet had asked you to do some great thing, wouldn't you have done it? How much rather then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" If he'd asked you to do something hard, you would have done it. Why not something easy?

Once again, servants are the wisest people in the story.

Naaman listens. He goes down to the Jordan and dips himself in the water seven times. And "his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." The great general comes out of the

water with skin like a little child's, and in a way, he has become like a child, humble enough to trust and obey.

He goes back to Elisha with his whole company, stands before him, and says, "See now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel." A foreign enemy general has come to faith in the LORD. He offers Elisha a gift, and Elisha refuses. This healing isn't for sale. Grace is free.

Naaman asks for two mule-loads of Israelite dirt to take home, so he can worship the LORD on it. He also asks forgiveness in advance for one thing: when his king goes to worship in the temple of the Syrian god Rimmon, leaning on Naaman's arm, Naaman will have to bow too. Elisha simply says, "Go in peace." It's a gentle answer to a new believer in a complicated situation.

But the story has a dark ending. Elisha's servant Gehazi can't believe Elisha turned down all that money. "As the LORD lives, I will run after him, and take something from him." Notice that he uses God's name to justify his greed.

He runs after Naaman's chariot. Naaman sees him and gets down to meet him. Gehazi makes up a story: my master sent me. Two young prophets just arrived, and he'd like a talent of silver and two sets of clothes for them. Naaman gladly gives him twice as much. Gehazi hides the silver and clothes in his house and goes back to Elisha as if nothing happened.

Elisha asks, "Where did you come from, Gehazi?" Gehazi says, "Your servant went nowhere."

Elisha says, my spirit was with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you. Is this the time to take money and clothes and

olive groves and vineyards? And then the consequence: Naaman's leprosy will cling to you. Gehazi walks out, his skin white as snow.

> **REAL TALK** **Greed and Lies**
>
> Gehazi had spent years with one of the greatest prophets who ever lived. He had seen dead children raised and lepers healed. And he still threw it all away for some silver and clothes. Greed often starts with a thought like Gehazi's: they have so much, they won't miss it; I deserve something too. Then it leads to lying, hiding, and pretending. Paul wrote, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." It's not that money itself is evil. It's that loving it can lead us to do almost anything to get it. Gehazi's story is also a warning about how lies grow. He lied to Naaman, then hid what he took, then lied to Elisha's face. If you've taken something or told a lie, the best time to come clean is now, before it grows.

The story is full of reversals. The foreign enemy general is healed and comes to faith. The prophet's own servant, an Israelite, ends up with the disease. The little slave girl knows more than the king. And the man who wanted a big show finds healing in a simple, humble act of obedience.

When Jesus preached His first sermon in Nazareth, He brought up this story. "There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed, except Naaman, the Syrian." His hometown crowd was so angry they tried to throw Him off a cliff. They didn't like being reminded that God's grace reaches outsiders and enemies, sometimes before it reaches people who think they deserve it.

KEY VERSE

He returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him; and he said, "See now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel. Now therefore, please take a gift from your servant."

2 Kings 5:15 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the servant girl spoke up for the man who held her captive?
2. Naaman almost missed his healing because of pride. What's one way pride gets in the way of what God wants to do in your life?
3. Why did Elisha refuse Naaman's gift? What does that say about grace?
4. Gehazi had seen amazing miracles and still gave in to greed. How can someone close to God still fall into sin?

TRY THIS *Do one simple, humble thing this week that you've been putting off because of pride: apologize, ask for help, or admit you were wrong.*

CHAPTER 4

More Are with Us

2 Kings 6–8

Chapter 6 opens with a problem that sounds like a youth group building project. The prophets who study with Elisha say, "See now, the place where we live and meet with you is too small for us." They want to go down to the Jordan, cut logs, and build a bigger meeting place. Elisha says, "Go!" and agrees to come along.

While one of them is chopping down a tree, the iron ax head flies off the handle and splashes into the river. He cries out, "Alas, my master! For it was borrowed."

That detail matters. In those days, iron tools were expensive. A poor student prophet couldn't easily replace one, and since it was borrowed, he might have had to work off the debt. This was a real crisis for him.

Elisha asks where it fell. The man shows him. Elisha cuts a stick, throws it into the water, and the iron floats to the surface. "Take it," Elisha says, and the man reaches out and grabs it.

> REAL TALK **God Cares About Small Things**
>
> The floating ax head is one of the smallest miracles in the Bible. No one was dying. No army was attacking. A guy lost a borrowed tool. And God cared enough to help. Sometimes we think God is only interested in big spiritual things, so we don't bother praying about a lost phone, a hard test, an

> awkward friendship, or money we owe. But this story says that nothing that matters to you is too small for God to care about. You can bring Him anything. Also notice that the man was upset because the ax wasn't his. He cared about returning what he'd borrowed. That's a small mark of integrity worth copying.

Next, the king of Syria is at war with Israel, and he keeps setting ambushes. But every time, Elisha warns the king of Israel exactly where the Syrians will be, and Israel avoids the trap. The king of Syria is convinced there's a spy among his officers. One of them says, no, my lord. It's Elisha, the prophet in Israel. He tells the king of Israel the words you speak in your bedroom.

So the king of Syria sends a huge army with horses and chariots to capture one prophet. They surround the town of Dothan during the night.

The next morning, Elisha's servant gets up early, walks outside, and sees an army surrounding the city. He runs back in panic. "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"

Elisha's answer is one of the great lines of the Bible. "Don't be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

The servant must have thought Elisha had lost his mind. There were two of them and an entire army outside. So Elisha prays. "LORD, please open his eyes, that he may see." And God opens the young man's eyes, "and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha."

The same fiery chariots that carried Elijah away are now surrounding Elisha. They were there all along. The servant just couldn't see them.

> **REAL TALK** **When Fear Surrounds You**
>
> Sometimes it feels like you're surrounded: by pressure, by problems, by anxiety, by people who are against you, by things you can't control. Elisha's servant saw only the enemy. Elisha saw what was really there. The point of this story isn't that bad things never happen to believers. It's that you're never as alone or outnumbered as you feel. God is present even when you can't see Him. If fear or anxiety is overwhelming you, pray Elisha's prayer for yourself: open my eyes so I can see. And tell a trusted adult. Anxiety is real and treatable, and asking for help from a doctor or counselor is a wise and faithful thing to do. If you ever feel like you can't go on, call or text 988.

What happens next is surprising. As the Syrian soldiers come toward him, Elisha prays that God will strike them with blindness, probably a kind of confusion, since they can still walk. Elisha goes out and says, you're on the wrong road. Follow me, and I'll take you to the man you're looking for. He leads them right into Samaria, Israel's capital, surrounded by Israel's army. Then he prays for their eyes to be opened, and they realize where they are.

The king of Israel is thrilled. "My father, shall I strike them?" he asks.

Elisha says no. "You shall not strike them. Would you strike those whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, then go to their master."

So the king throws a feast for the enemy soldiers and sends them home. And "the bands of Syria stopped raiding the land of Israel." Kindness accomplished what war couldn't.

> **REAL TALK** **Feeding Your Enemies**
>
> Elisha could have had his enemies killed. Instead, he fed them. Paul later wrote, "Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." That

> doesn't mean letting people hurt you, and it doesn't mean pretending wrong is right. It means refusing to let revenge be your goal. Sometimes the most powerful way to stop a cycle of hurt is to respond in a way the other person never expects.

The peace doesn't last forever. Later, the king of Syria, Ben-hadad, besieges Samaria, and the famine inside the city becomes so terrible that a donkey's head sells for a fortune. The writer describes the desperation honestly but briefly, and the king of Israel blames Elisha and God for the disaster. Elisha makes a prediction: by this time tomorrow, food will be cheap again in Samaria. One of the king's officers laughs at him. Even if the LORD opened windows in heaven, could that happen? Elisha says, you'll see it with your own eyes, but you won't eat any of it.

Now the story shifts to four men with leprosy sitting at the city gate. They're outcasts, starving like everyone else. "Why do we sit here until we die?" they ask each other. If we go into the city, we'll starve. If we stay here, we'll starve. Let's go over to the Syrian camp. If they kill us, we were going to die anyway.

When they get to the camp at twilight, it's empty. God had made the Syrian army hear the sound of a huge army approaching, chariots and horses, and they panicked and ran for their lives, leaving everything behind: tents, horses, food, silver, gold, and clothes.

The four men go from tent to tent eating and drinking and hiding treasure. Then they stop. "We aren't doing right. Today is a day of good news, and we keep silent." They go and tell the city, and the people rush out and plunder the camp. By the next day, food is cheap, just as Elisha said. And the officer who laughed at him is trampled in the gate by the crowd, seeing the food but never eating it.

REAL TALK **A Day of Good News**

The four lepers were outsiders, the last people anyone expected to save the city. And they realized that keeping good news to themselves was wrong. Christians have often used their words as a picture of sharing the gospel. If you've found something good, the forgiveness and hope that Jesus offers, it's not right to keep it to yourself while people around you are starving for it. You don't have to be a preacher. You just have to be someone who found food and says, come and see.

Chapter 8 tells of Elisha traveling to Damascus, the capital of Syria. King Ben-hadad is sick and sends his officer Hazael to ask whether he'll recover. Elisha stares at Hazael until Hazael is uncomfortable, and then Elisha begins to weep. He sees the terrible things Hazael will do to Israel when he becomes king. Hazael acts shocked. But the next day, he murders Ben-hadad and takes the throne.

Meanwhile, the kings of Judah are making bad choices too. Jehoram, king of Judah, marries a daughter of Ahab, and he walks in the ways of the kings of Israel. But the writer pauses to make an important statement: "However, the LORD would not destroy Judah, for David his servant's sake, as he promised him to give to him a lamp for his children always."

That lamp is the promise God made to David in 2 Samuel 7: someone from his family would always sit on his throne. No matter how bad Judah's kings get, God won't let that lamp go out. Keep an eye on it. It's going to be tested again and again in the rest of the book.

KEY VERSE

He answered, "Don't be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

2 Kings 6:16 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think God cared about a lost ax head? What small things do you hesitate to pray about?
2. What made the difference between what Elisha saw and what his servant saw?
3. Elisha fed his enemies instead of killing them. What might that look like in your life?
4. The four lepers said, "We aren't doing right." What good news do you have that someone else needs to hear?

TRY THIS *This week, when you feel afraid or surrounded, pray Elisha's prayer: LORD, please open my eyes. Write down anything you notice about how God is with you.*

CHAPTER 5

Jehu and the Hidden King

2 Kings 9–12

Back in 1 Kings, God told Elijah on Mount Sinai to anoint a man named Jehu as king over Israel. Elijah never got around to it. Now Elisha sends one of the young prophets to do it. The young man finds Jehu, a commander in Israel's army, sitting with other officers. He takes Jehu into a private room, pours oil on his head, and gives him God's message: "I have anointed you king over the people of the LORD, even over Israel." You will wipe out the house of Ahab, for the blood of the prophets that Jezebel shed. Then the young prophet opens the door and runs.

Jehu goes back to the other officers, who ask what that crazy man wanted. When he tells them, they immediately spread their cloaks on the steps, blow a trumpet, and shout, "Jehu is king!"

Jehu jumps in his chariot and races to Jezreel, where King Joram of Israel is recovering from battle wounds. King Ahaziah of Judah is visiting him. A watchman on the tower sees Jehu's group approaching and reports that "the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi, for he drives furiously." Even three thousand years ago, some people were known for their reckless driving.

Joram and Ahaziah ride out to meet him, and they meet at, of all places, the field that once belonged to Naboth, the man Ahab and

Jezebel had murdered for his vineyard. Jehu kills Joram there, and his men chase and kill Ahaziah too. The justice Elijah predicted is coming true in the very place where the crime was committed.

Then Jehu rides into Jezreel. Jezebel hears that he's coming. She puts on her makeup, fixes her hair, and looks out the window. She knows what's coming, and she meets it like a queen. As Jehu enters the gate, she calls down an insult, comparing him to a man who murdered his king and reigned only seven days. Jehu looks up and calls out, "Who is on my side? Who?" Two or three of her own servants look out at him, and at his command they throw her down from the window. She dies there.

Later, Jehu sends men to bury her, because she was a king's daughter. But they find that very little is left. Jehu says this was the word Elijah spoke years earlier: Jezebel would not have a grave. The queen who had hunted God's prophets and murdered Naboth meets the end the prophet said she would.

> **REAL TALK** **Justice Comes, but Not Always Fast**
>
> Jezebel did evil for years. She killed God's prophets. She framed and murdered Naboth. She threatened Elijah's life. For a long time, it seemed like she got away with it. But Elijah's prophecy didn't fail. It just took time. If you've been hurt by someone who seems to get away with it, this story says God sees, and His justice is real, even when it's slow. That doesn't mean we should take revenge into our own hands. It means we can trust God to handle what we can't. Paul wrote, "Don't be deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." And if you're being hurt right now, don't wait. Tell a trusted adult who can help keep you safe.

Jehu doesn't stop there. He kills Ahab's seventy sons and all of Ahab's officials, friends, and priests. Then he announces a huge festival for Baal, gathers all the priests and worshipers of Baal into

the temple, and has them killed. He tears down the temple of Baal and turns it into a toilet. "Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **Was Jehu a Hero?**
>
> 2 Kings gives Jehu mixed reviews. God commends him for carrying out judgment on Ahab's house, and He promises that Jehu's descendants will sit on Israel's throne for four generations. But the writer adds, "But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart." He kept the golden calves Jeroboam had set up. A century later, the prophet Hosea announced that God would "avenge the blood of Jezreel on the house of Jehu," which many scholars think means that Jehu's bloodshed went far beyond what God commanded, driven by his own ambition. Christians read these passages differently. Some think Hosea condemns Jehu's excess and cruelty; others think it refers to his family's later sins. Either way, the lesson is clear: doing a job God gives you doesn't mean your heart is right with God. Jehu could destroy Baal and still not love the LORD.

Archaeologists found an ancient black stone monument from Assyria, called the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, that shows a man bowing before the Assyrian king and bringing tribute. The inscription calls him Jehu, son of Omri. It may be the oldest surviving picture of an Israelite king.

Meanwhile, in Judah, something terrible happens. King Ahaziah, killed by Jehu, had a mother named Athaliah. She was a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and she had her mother's ruthlessness. When she hears her son is dead, she seizes the throne and tries to kill the entire royal family, her own grandchildren.

If she succeeds, the line of David is gone. God's promise is dead. The lamp is out.

But one woman stops her. "But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole

him away from among the king's sons who were slain." She grabs a baby, Joash, and his nurse, and hides them in a bedroom. Then she hides him in the temple, where her husband, Jehoiada, is the high priest. "He was with her hidden in the LORD's house six years while Athaliah reigned over the land."

Think about that. For six years, the entire hope of God's promise to David is a little boy hiding in the temple, growing up among the priests, while a murderous queen rules outside.

> **REAL TALK** **The Brave Ones Behind the Scenes**
>
> Jehosheba and Jehoiada risked their lives to protect a child. If Athaliah had found out, they would have been killed. We don't know much else about them, but because of their courage, the line of David survived. God's biggest plans often depend on ordinary people who quietly do the right thing when it's dangerous. Protecting the vulnerable, standing up for someone who can't defend themselves, telling the truth when it costs you, are all ways of being like Jehosheba. And if you know a child who isn't safe, the brave thing is to tell a trusted adult or call the Childhelp hotline at 1-800-422-4453.

In the seventh year, Jehoiada makes his move. He gathers the captains of the royal guard in the temple, makes them swear an oath, and shows them the king's son. They had thought David's line was gone. Jehoiada carefully organizes the guards in shifts around the temple. Then he brings out the boy, "and put the crown on him, and gave him the covenant; and they made him king and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, 'Long live the king!'"

Athaliah hears the noise and runs into the temple. She sees the boy king standing by the pillar, surrounded by guards and cheering people blowing trumpets. She tears her clothes and screams, "Treason! Treason!" which is ironic, since she's the one who stole the throne. The guards take her out of the temple and put her to

death. Then Jehoiada makes a covenant between the LORD, the king, and the people, "that they should be the LORD's people." The people tear down the temple of Baal in Jerusalem.

"Jehoash was seven years old when he began to reign." (Joash and Jehoash are two forms of the same name.)

Joash grows up under the guidance of Jehoiada the priest, and he's a good king. He organizes a fund to repair the temple, which has been neglected. Jehoiada drills a hole in the lid of a chest and sets it by the altar, and people put their offerings in it. It might be the first offering box in history. The money is used to pay carpenters, builders, and stonemasons, and the workers are so honest that no one needs to check their accounts.

But there's a sad note. The writer says, "Jehoash did that which was right in the LORD's eyes all his days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him." 2 Chronicles tells us that after Jehoiada died, Joash turned away from God. His faith had been borrowed from his mentor, and when the mentor was gone, his faith faded.

> **REAL TALK** **Borrowed Faith**
>
> Joash's story is a warning for anyone who has grown up in church. It's a great gift to have a Jehoiada in your life, a parent, pastor, or mentor who teaches you about God. But at some point, your faith has to become your own. If you only follow God because the people around you do, what happens when they're gone, or when you move away from home? Now is a great time to ask yourself whether you believe because someone told you to, or because you have come to know God for yourself.

KEY VERSE

Jehoash did that which was right in the LORD's eyes all his days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him.

2 Kings 12:2 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Jehu destroyed Baal worship but still didn't follow God with all his heart. How is that possible?
2. What do you think it was like for Joash to grow up hidden in the temple?
3. Why do you think Jehosheba risked her life to save a baby?
4. Is your faith your own, or is it borrowed from someone else? How can you tell?

TRY THIS *Write down three reasons you believe in God, or three questions you have about Him, in your own words. Then talk to a mentor about one of them.*

CHAPTER 6

The Fall of Israel

2 Kings 13–17

The next few chapters move fast, covering about a hundred years and a long list of kings. If you've ever read these chapters and felt lost in a blur of names, you're not alone. Here's the big picture: the northern kingdom of Israel keeps getting worse, and the clock is ticking.

Elisha's long ministry finally comes to an end in chapter 13. Even on his deathbed, he's still helping Israel. King Jehoash of Israel (not the same as Joash of Judah, though they have the same name) comes to see him and weeps, calling out the same words Elisha once said about Elijah: My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen. Elisha tells him to shoot an arrow out the window, the LORD's arrow of victory over Syria. Then he tells him to strike the ground with the arrows. The king strikes three times and stops. Elisha is angry. You should have struck five or six times! Then you would have completely defeated Syria. Now you'll only win three times. Half-hearted obedience brings half-hearted results.

After Elisha dies and is buried, a strange thing happens. Some Israelites are burying a man when they see raiders coming. In a panic, they throw the body into Elisha's tomb. When the dead man touches Elisha's bones, he comes back to life and stands up. Even in death, Elisha is connected to life.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Jonah, Amos, and Hosea**

Some of the prophets whose books are in the Bible lived during this period. In 2 Kings 14, we learn that King Jeroboam II of Israel expanded the kingdom's borders, just as the LORD had promised "by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet." That's the same Jonah who was swallowed by a great fish and sent to preach to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Jeroboam II's reign was a time of wealth for Israel's rich, but the prophet Amos condemned them for cheating and crushing the poor, and the prophet Hosea compared Israel's unfaithfulness to God to an unfaithful spouse. Reading their books alongside these chapters shows what life was really like.

After Jeroboam II, Israel falls into chaos. In about twenty-five years, there are six kings, and four of them are assassinated. Meanwhile, a terrifying new power is rising in the east: Assyria. The Assyrians were famous for their brutality. They destroyed cities that resisted them and deported entire populations, moving conquered peoples to distant parts of their empire so they couldn't unite and rebel.

Judah isn't doing much better. King Ahaz of Judah "walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and even made his son to pass through the fire." That means he sacrificed his own son to a false god. When Syria and Israel attack him, he sends the temple's silver and gold to the king of Assyria, asking for help. Assyria crushes Syria. Then Ahaz goes to Damascus, sees a pagan altar he likes, and has a copy built for the temple in Jerusalem. He makes the kingdom a servant of Assyria to save himself.

The last king of Israel is Hoshea. He stops paying tribute to Assyria and secretly asks Egypt for help. That's a fatal mistake. "Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years." In 722 BC, Samaria falls. The king of Assyria "carried Israel away to Assyria, and placed them in

Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes."

The northern kingdom of Israel is gone. Its ten tribes are scattered across the Assyrian empire. They are sometimes called the ten lost tribes, because most of them never returned as a group. Some fled south to Judah, and many probably mixed into the peoples where they were taken.

Then the writer stops the story to explain why. This is one of the most important passages in 2 Kings. "It was so because the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt." The God who rescued them from slavery had given them a land, a law, and a covenant, and they had turned to other gods.

And He had warned them. Again and again. "Yet the LORD testified to Israel and to Judah, by every prophet and every seer, saying, 'Turn from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes.'" Elijah, Elisha, Micaiah, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, and many others whose names we don't know. For two hundred years, God sent messenger after messenger. "Notwithstanding, they would not listen, but hardened their neck like the neck of their fathers who didn't believe in the LORD their God."

They followed worthless idols, the writer says, and became worthless themselves. You become like what you worship.

REAL TALK **Ignoring Warnings**

Israel didn't fall in a day. It fell after two centuries of warnings ignored. That's how a lot of damage happens in real life too. It's rarely one huge decision. It's a long string of small choices to ignore the voice that says, this isn't right. A friend warns you about someone. A parent warns you about a habit. Your conscience warns you about a choice. Each time you ignore it, it gets a little

easier to ignore the next time. God's warnings aren't threats from someone who wants to ruin your fun. They're like a parent shouting, stop! at a child running toward a busy street. He warned Israel for so long because He loved them and didn't want to lose them.

BACKGROUND CHECK **The Origin of the Samaritans**

After deporting the Israelites, the king of Assyria "brought people from Babylon, from Cuthah, from Avva, and from Hamath and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel." These new settlers brought their own gods, and when lions started attacking them, they decided they needed to learn how to worship the god of the land. So the king of Assyria sent back an Israelite priest to teach them. The result was a mix: "They feared the LORD, and also served their own gods." Over time, the people of this region, mixed with Israelites who remained, became known as the Samaritans. The Samaritans themselves tell a different story; they see themselves as descendants of Israelites who stayed faithful in the land, and a small Samaritan community still lives in Israel and the West Bank today, worshiping on Mount Gerizim. By Jesus' time, Jews and Samaritans had centuries of hostility between them. That's why a Samaritan woman was so surprised when Jesus asked her for a drink: "How is it that you, being a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" And it's why Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan was so shocking. Jesus deliberately crossed a wall of hatred that went back to 2 Kings 17.

When the chapter ends, only one tribe's kingdom is left: "There was none left but the tribe of Judah only." The question hanging over the rest of the book is whether Judah will learn from Israel's mistakes.

KEY VERSE

Yet the LORD testified to Israel and to Judah, by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets."

2 Kings 17:13 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think Israel kept ignoring God's prophets for so long?
2. The writer says that people who follow worthless things become worthless. What do you think it means that we become like what we worship?
3. Have you ever ignored a warning and then regretted it? What happened?
4. How does knowing the origin of the Samaritans change the way you read Jesus' conversations with Samaritans?

TRY THIS *Think of a warning someone has given you that you've been ignoring. Talk to God, or to the person who warned you, about it this week.*

CHAPTER 7

Hezekiah and the Siege

2 Kings 18–20

After the long run of bad kings, Judah finally gets a good one. His name is Hezekiah, and he's the son of the terrible king Ahaz. Having a bad father doesn't decide what kind of person you'll be. "He did that which was right in the LORD's eyes, according to all that David his father had done."

Hezekiah starts tearing down the places where people worshiped idols. He even breaks into pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made in the wilderness. Remember that story? When the Israelites were dying from snakebites, God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole, and whoever looked at it lived. That snake had been kept for over seven hundred years, and by Hezekiah's time, people were burning incense to it as if it were a god. Hezekiah called it Nehushtan, which sounds like a word for a piece of bronze. Something God once used for good had become an idol, and Hezekiah had the courage to destroy it.

> **REAL TALK** **When Good Things Become Idols**
>
> The bronze serpent wasn't evil. God commanded Moses to make it. But over time, people started worshiping the object instead of the God who had used it. That can happen with good things in our lives too: a church tradition, a worship song, a talent, a relationship, a cause, even a spiritual experience. Any good thing can become an idol when we start trusting it, loving it, or

depending on it more than God. Hezekiah's question is a good one to ask: is there anything good in my life that has taken God's place?

The writer gives Hezekiah one of the highest compliments in the whole book. "He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel, so that after him was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among them that were before him." Hezekiah also rebels against Assyria and refuses to pay them tribute.

That's a dangerous move. In the fourteenth year of his reign, about 701 BC, "Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them." The Assyrian army sweeps through Judah, capturing city after city. Hezekiah tries to buy them off, stripping gold from the temple doors to pay the tribute. It doesn't work. The Assyrians surround Jerusalem.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Sennacherib's Prism and Hezekiah's Tunnel**

Sennacherib recorded his own version of this campaign on clay prisms, six-sided clay cylinders covered in writing, that have been found by archaeologists. He boasts that he captured forty-six of Hezekiah's fortified cities and took over two hundred thousand people captive. Then he says of Hezekiah, "Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage." Notice what he doesn't say: that he captured Jerusalem. Ancient kings loved to boast about their victories, and Sennacherib never claims to have taken the city. Carved wall panels in his palace at Nineveh show the brutal siege of Lachish, one of Judah's major cities, but not Jerusalem. Meanwhile, the Bible says Hezekiah "made the pool, and the conduit, and brought water into the city." Preparing for a siege, he had workers dig a tunnel through solid rock, about a third of a mile long, to bring water from the Gihon Spring outside the city walls to a pool inside. Two teams dug from opposite ends and met in the middle. An inscription found in the tunnel describes the moment they heard each other's picks through the rock.

> You can still walk through Hezekiah's Tunnel today, with water up to your knees.

Sennacherib sends his field commander, called the Rabshakeh, to Jerusalem with a large army. He stands outside the city walls and shouts up at Hezekiah's officials in Hebrew, so that all the people listening on the wall can understand him. His speech is a masterpiece of intimidation.

"What confidence is this in which you trust?" he asks. Are you trusting Egypt? Egypt is a broken reed that will stab your hand if you lean on it. Are you trusting the LORD? Didn't Hezekiah tear down His altars? (He's twisting the truth. Hezekiah tore down the idol shrines.) He even claims the LORD Himself sent him to destroy Judah.

Hezekiah's officials beg him to speak in Aramaic, the international language, so the people won't understand. He refuses and shouts even louder in Hebrew to the people on the wall. "Don't let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you out of his hand. Don't let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD." Make peace with me, and I'll take you to a good land. Then he says the most dangerous thing of all: "Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?"

He's comparing the LORD to the idols of the nations he has already destroyed. That's a mistake.

> **REAL TALK** **The Voice Outside the Wall**
>
> The Rabshakeh's strategy was psychological. He wanted the people to doubt their leader, doubt their God, and give up before the fight even started. A lot of the battles we face work the same way. There's a voice that says, you can't do this. God won't help you. Everyone else gave up, so why not you? You

> might hear it in your own head, from people around you, or from things you see online. The people on the wall did something wise: Hezekiah had told them not to answer, and they stayed silent. You don't have to argue with every voice of doubt and fear. Sometimes the best response is to take it straight to God, which is exactly what Hezekiah did next.

When Hezekiah hears the report, "he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the LORD's house." He sends his officials to the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah sends back a message: Don't be afraid of the words you have heard. The king of Assyria will hear a rumor and return to his own land.

Then Sennacherib sends Hezekiah a letter repeating his threats. Hezekiah does something beautiful. He takes the letter up to the temple and spreads it out before the LORD, as if to say, God, look at this.

Then he prays. "LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, even you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth." He asks God to listen and see how Sennacherib has insulted the living God. He admits that the Assyrians really have destroyed many nations and thrown their gods into the fire, because those gods were just wood and stone. And then he asks for rescue, not just for Jerusalem's sake, but for God's glory: "Now therefore, LORD our God, save us, I beg you, out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, LORD, are God alone."

God answers through Isaiah with a long poem mocking Sennacherib's pride. Then He makes a promise: the king of Assyria will not enter this city or shoot an arrow here. "For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for my servant David's sake."

There's that lamp again.

That night, "the LORD's angel went out and struck one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians." In the morning, the camp is full of dead bodies. Sennacherib packs up and goes home to Nineveh. Some time later, while he is worshiping in the temple of his god, two of his sons kill him. The god he trusted couldn't protect him in his own temple. The God he mocked had protected a whole city.

BACKGROUND CHECK **What Happened to the Assyrian Army?**

The Bible says the angel of the LORD struck the Assyrian camp. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus tells a story about an Assyrian army in the region that was overrun by mice, which some scholars think may be a garbled memory of a plague. Christians understand the event in different ways. Some think God sent a sudden disease; others take it as a direct act of an angel without any natural cause. Either way, the Bible and Sennacherib's own records agree on the key point: the mighty Assyrian army went home without taking Jerusalem.

In chapter 20, Hezekiah becomes deathly ill. Isaiah comes and tells him, "Set your house in order; for you will die, and not live." Hezekiah turns his face to the wall, prays, and weeps bitterly. Before Isaiah even leaves the palace courtyard, God sends him back with a new message: "I have heard your prayer. I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you." God gives Hezekiah fifteen more years.

REAL TALK **God Sees Your Tears**

Hezekiah didn't pray a polished prayer. He turned to the wall and cried. And God said, I have seen your tears. Your tears matter to God. You don't have to hide them or clean them up before you pray. If you're going through something painful, a serious illness in your family, a loss, a fear about the future, you can bring it to God exactly as it is. And if your sadness or fear is

> heavy and won't lift, please talk to a trusted adult or a doctor. Getting help is not a lack of faith.

Unfortunately, Hezekiah's story ends on a weaker note. Envoys come from Babylon, a rising power, to congratulate him on his recovery. Hezekiah is flattered and shows them everything in his treasury and armory. Isaiah warns him that someday all of it will be carried off to Babylon, and some of his own descendants will be taken there. Hezekiah's response is disappointing. He says the word is good, thinking, "Isn't it so, if peace and truth will be in my days?" As long as it doesn't happen to me, it's fine. Even the best kings had blind spots.

KEY VERSE

Now therefore, LORD our God, save us, I beg you, out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, LORD, are God alone.

2 Kings 19:19 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. What good things in your life could become idols if you're not careful?
2. How did the Rabshakeh try to make the people of Jerusalem give up? Do you ever hear voices like that?
3. Hezekiah spread the letter out before God. What would it look like for you to do that with something you're worried about?
4. Why do you think Hezekiah didn't care much about what would happen after his lifetime?

TRY THIS *Write down something that's worrying you, like Hezekiah's letter. Spread it out before God and pray about it. Keep the paper and look back at it in a month.*

CHAPTER 8

The Boy King and the Lost Book

2 Kings 21–23

Hezekiah's son Manasseh becomes king at twelve years old. He reigns fifty-five years, longer than any other king of Judah. And he is the worst of them all.

"He did that which was evil in the LORD's sight." He rebuilds every idol shrine his father tore down. He sets up altars to Baal and to the stars in the temple courts. He practices sorcery and consults mediums. He sacrifices his own son in the fire. And "Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." An old Jewish tradition says he had the prophet Isaiah killed.

The writer says he led Judah to do more evil than the nations God had driven out of Canaan. The people who were supposed to show the world what God was like had become worse than the people before them.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Did Manasseh Repent?**

2 Kings presents Manasseh as almost completely evil, and it says his sins were a major reason God later allowed Babylon to destroy Jerusalem. But 2 Chronicles 33 adds a surprising part of the story. It says the Assyrians took Manasseh to Babylon in chains, and there, in his distress, he humbled himself and prayed. God heard him and brought him back to Jerusalem, and he tried to undo some of the damage he had done. Scholars discuss how the two

accounts fit together. Many think Kings focuses on the lasting national damage his reign caused, while Chronicles shows the personal mercy God showed him. Either way, Manasseh's story says something remarkable: even the worst king in Judah's history was not beyond God's reach. But it also shows that repentance doesn't automatically undo the damage sin has done to others.

Manasseh's son Amon is just as bad, and after two years his own servants assassinate him. The people of the land kill the assassins and make Amon's son king.

His name is Josiah. "Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem." Eight years old. Think about what you were like at eight. Josiah's grandfather was the most evil king in Judah's history, and his father was murdered. He had every reason to turn out badly. Instead, "He did that which was right in the LORD's eyes, and walked in all the ways of David his father, and didn't turn away to the right hand or to the left."

REAL TALK **You're Not Too Young**

Josiah became king at eight, and 2 Chronicles says that at sixteen, he began to seek the God of David, and at twenty, he started cleaning out the idols from Judah. Paul wrote to a young pastor named Timothy, "Let no man despise your youth; but be an example to those who believe, in word, in your way of life, in love, in spirit, in faith, and in purity." God doesn't wait until you're an adult to use you. Josiah also didn't let his family history decide his future. If your family has a history of brokenness, addiction, abuse, or unbelief, you are not trapped by it. With God, a new story can start with you.

In the eighteenth year of his reign, when he's about twenty-six, Josiah sends his secretary Shaphan to the temple to arrange repairs. The temple has been neglected for decades. During the work, the

high priest Hilkiah makes an amazing discovery. "I have found the book of the law in the LORD's house."

Imagine that. The Book of the Law, God's word to His people, had been lost in the temple. It had been neglected so long that people had forgotten what it said.

Shaphan reads it to the king. "When the king had heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes." He's horrified. He realizes how far Judah has wandered from what God commanded. He sends officials to ask the LORD what to do, "for great is the LORD's wrath that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book."

> **BACKGROUND CHECK** **What Book Was It?**
>
> The Bible doesn't say exactly what the book was. Most scholars think it was all or part of Deuteronomy, because Josiah's reforms match what Deuteronomy commands so closely: worship at one central place, destroy the idols, celebrate the Passover, and keep the covenant. Its warnings about curses for disobedience would explain why Josiah was so terrified. Some scholars think the book was written or edited around this time; others think it was an ancient copy of Moses' law that had been hidden or lost during Manasseh's long, wicked reign. Christians hold different views on the details of how Deuteronomy took its final form, but the story's main point is clear: when God's word was rediscovered, it changed a king and a nation.

Josiah's officials go to a prophet named Huldah, a woman respected for her wisdom. Her message is hard: disaster is coming on Jerusalem, because the people have abandoned God. But she has a personal message for Josiah. "Because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place," God has heard you. The disaster won't come in your lifetime.

Josiah doesn't just feel bad. He acts. He gathers all the leaders and people of Judah, "both small and great," at the temple and reads the entire book to them. Then he stands by the pillar and makes a covenant before the LORD to follow Him and keep His commands "with all his heart and all his soul." And all the people join the covenant.

Then he launches the biggest reform in Judah's history. He removes from the temple everything made for Baal, Asherah, and the stars, and burns it. He removes the idolatrous priests. He tears down the houses of the male shrine prostitutes. He defiles Topheth, the place in the valley of Hinnom where children were sacrificed, "that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech." He tears down the altars Manasseh built. He even goes north to Bethel and destroys the altar Jeroboam built there, fulfilling a prophecy made three hundred years earlier in 1 Kings 13, which actually named Josiah before he was born.

Then he commands the people, "Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this book of the covenant." It's the biggest Passover celebration since the days of the judges.

The writer's verdict on Josiah is the highest praise given to any king. "There was no king like him before him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; and there was none like him who arose after him." That's an echo of the greatest commandment in Deuteronomy, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." Josiah lived it.

> **REAL TALK** **Finding the Book**
>
> Judah lost God's word in the temple, the very place where it should have been treasured. It's possible to lose it in our lives too. A Bible can sit on a shelf

> at home, or an app on your phone, for years without being opened. When Josiah heard what God said, it changed everything. You don't have to wait for a dramatic rediscovery. The book is right there. Try reading one chapter a day, starting with one of the Gospels. Ask God to make your heart tender, like Josiah's, to what you read.

Sadly, Josiah's story ends suddenly. In 609 BC, Pharaoh Necho of Egypt marches north to help Assyria against Babylon. Josiah goes out to stop him at Megiddo, and Necho kills him there. Josiah is only thirty-nine. The nation mourns him deeply, and the prophet Jeremiah writes laments for him.

Even Josiah's reforms couldn't undo the damage of Manasseh's reign. The writer says God's anger against Judah didn't turn away. Josiah's sons didn't follow his example. Within twenty-five years, Jerusalem would be destroyed. Josiah's story shows that one person's faith can make a huge difference, but it also shows that each generation has to choose God for itself.

KEY VERSE

There was no king like him before him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; and there was none like him who arose after him.

2 Kings 23:25 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Josiah came from a terrible family and still followed God. What does his story say to someone whose family history is painful?
2. How do you think God's word could get lost in a temple? How could it get lost in a person's life?
3. Why do you think Josiah tore his clothes when he heard the book read?
4. What would it look like for you to love God with all your heart, soul, and might, like Josiah?

TRY THIS *Pick one book of the Bible, such as Mark or John, and read one chapter a day for a week. Write down one thing from each chapter that stands out to you.*

CHAPTER 9

The Fall of Jerusalem

2 Kings 24–25

After Josiah, Judah's last kings come and go quickly, and they're all bad. Pharaoh Necho of Egypt removes Josiah's son Jehoahaz after only three months and puts another son, Jehoiakim, on the throne. Then a new superpower takes over the world stage: Babylon, led by its brilliant and ruthless king, Nebuchadnezzar.

"In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant for three years. Then he turned and rebelled against him." That was a mistake. The writer says this was the LORD's judgment, coming "for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did, and also for the innocent blood that he shed; for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the LORD would not pardon."

BACKGROUND CHECK **Daniel and Jeremiah**

Some of the most famous people in the Bible lived through these events. In about 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar took some young men from Judah's royal and noble families to Babylon to train them for his service. One of them was a teenager named Daniel, along with his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, better known by their Babylonian names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Meanwhile, the prophet Jeremiah stayed in Jerusalem, warning the kings to stop rebelling and surrender to Babylon. They mostly ignored him, and sometimes threw him in prison or into a muddy pit. His book and

> the book of Lamentations give us a heartbreaking inside view of Jerusalem's last days.

Jehoiakim dies, and his eighteen-year-old son Jehoiachin becomes king. Three months later, the Babylonian army besieges Jerusalem, and Nebuchadnezzar himself arrives. Jehoiachin surrenders. He, his mother, his wives, and his officials are taken captive to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar carries off the treasures of the temple and the palace and cuts up the gold objects Solomon had made. He takes ten thousand captives, including the leaders, the soldiers, and all the skilled craftsmen and metalworkers. "No one remained except the poorest people of the land." One of the captives taken in this group was the young priest Ezekiel, who would become a prophet in exile.

Nebuchadnezzar makes Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, king over what's left. Zedekiah is weak and indecisive. Jeremiah begs him to submit to Babylon, but eventually he rebels too.

So in 588 BC, Nebuchadnezzar comes back with his whole army and builds siege walls around Jerusalem. For about a year and a half, no one gets in or out. Inside, the famine becomes so severe that there is no food left.

Finally, the Babylonians break through the wall. Zedekiah and his soldiers escape by night through a gate near the king's garden and flee toward the Jordan. The Babylonians catch him near Jericho, close to where Joshua had first led Israel into the promised land. They take him to Nebuchadnezzar, who punishes him severely: he is forced to see the deaths of his sons, and then he is blinded and taken in chains to Babylon. The writer reports it briefly, without dwelling on it, but it's a tragic picture. The last king of Judah, who wouldn't listen to God's prophet, ends his life in darkness.

A month later, in 586 BC, Nebuzaradan, commander of Nebuchadnezzar's guard, arrives in Jerusalem. "He burned the LORD's house, the king's house, and all the houses of Jerusalem." The Babylonian army tears down the city walls. The temple that Solomon built, where God's glory had filled the room, where the ark had rested for nearly four hundred years, is burned to the ground. The bronze pillars and the great bronze sea are broken up and carried to Babylon.

Most of the remaining people are taken into exile. Only some of the poorest are left "to work the vineyards and fields." Then the writer states it plainly: "So Judah was carried away captive out of his land."

REAL TALK **When Everything Falls Apart**

For the people of Judah, the destruction of Jerusalem was like the end of the world. They lost their homes, their city, their king, their temple, and their land. Many wondered whether God had abandoned them, or whether He even existed. Psalm 137 records their grief: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down. Yes, we wept, when we remembered Zion." Maybe you've had a season when everything seemed to fall apart: a divorce, a move, a death, a breakup, a diagnosis. The Bible doesn't pretend that those seasons aren't devastating. It gives us words to grieve with. Lamentations, written about this very disaster, says, "It is because of the LORD's loving kindnesses that we are not consumed, because his mercies don't fail. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness." If you're going through a season like that, please don't go through it alone. Talk to a trusted adult, a counselor, or a pastor. And if you're thinking about ending your life, call or text 988 right now.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Why Did God Let It Happen?**

2 Kings answers that question clearly. The people of Judah had broken their covenant with God for generations, and they had refused to listen to prophet after prophet. Deuteronomy had warned that if they did that, they would be scattered among the nations. The exile wasn't God breaking His promise; it

was God keeping His word. But it also wasn't the end. The same prophets who warned about exile also promised return. Jeremiah told the exiles to settle down in Babylon, build houses, plant gardens, and pray for the city, because after seventy years God would bring them home. He wrote, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you," says the LORD, "thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you hope and a future." That promise was spoken to people in exile, people who had lost everything.

The book could have ended there, in ashes. Instead, the writer adds four verses that are easy to skip, but they might be the most important in the book.

Thirty-seven years after Jehoiachin was taken captive, a new king named Evil-merodach (his name has nothing to do with the English word evil; in Babylonian it meant man of the god Marduk) comes to power in Babylon. In the year he becomes king, he "released Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison, and he spoke kindly to him and set his throne above the throne of the kings who were with him in Babylon."

Jehoiachin takes off his prison clothes. "Jehoiachin ate bread before him continually all the days of his life." For the rest of his life, he has a seat at the king's table, with a daily allowance from the king.

Why end with this? Because Jehoiachin is a son of David. He's alive. He's out of prison. He's sitting at a king's table. The lamp God promised David is still burning, flickering, small, far from home, but not out. The story of God's promise isn't over.

BACKGROUND CHECK **Jehoiachin's Rations**

In the early 1900s, archaeologists excavating Babylon found clay tablets listing rations of oil and food given to captives and foreign workers. Several of them mention "Ya'ukin, king of the land of Yahud," that is, Jehoiachin, king of Judah, along with his five sons. They were written while he was still a

> prisoner, years before his release, but they show that Babylon was keeping the king of Judah and his family alive. A family line that could have ended in Babylon continued.

The end of 2 Kings is like the end of a season of a show where nearly everything has gone wrong, but in the final scene there's one small hint that the story will continue. And it does. Jehoiachin, called Jeconiah or Jechoniah, has a grandson named Zerubbabel, who will lead the first exiles home to rebuild the temple. And centuries later, Matthew's Gospel will trace the line of David right through the exile: "Josiah became the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. After the exile to Babylon, Jechoniah became the father of Shealtiel. Shealtiel became the father of Zerubbabel." The line keeps going until it reaches "Joseph, the husband of Mary, from whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ."

KEY VERSE

In the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, Evilmerodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison, and he spoke kindly to him and set his throne above the throne of the kings who were with him in Babylon, and changed his prison garments. Jehoiachin ate bread before him continually all the days of his life; and for his allowance, there was a continual allowance given him from the king, every day a portion, all the days of his life.

2 Kings 25:27–30 (WEB)

REAL TALK

1. Why do you think the people of Judah kept ignoring Jeremiah's warnings, even as the Babylonians were at the gates?
2. How would you feel if you were an exile sitting by the rivers of Babylon? What questions would you ask God?
3. Why do you think the writer chose to end the book with Jehoiachin's release instead of with the destruction of Jerusalem?
4. Have you ever seen a small sign of hope in a hard season? What was it?

TRY THIS *Read Lamentations 3:19–26. Then write down one way God's mercies have been new for you this week, even in something hard.*

THE END (AND THE BEGINNING)

Where This Points

2 Kings ends with the temple in ashes, Jerusalem in ruins, and God's people in exile. But it also ends with a son of David, released from prison, eating at the king's table. God had promised to keep a lamp burning for David's family, and even in Babylon, the flame hadn't gone out.

Jewish readers treasure 2 Kings as a sobering history of the exile and a call to faithfulness, and they remember Elijah at every Passover, setting a cup for him in hope of his return. The New Testament writers, who were Jewish themselves, saw in Elijah and Elisha a preview of Jesus. Elisha fed a hundred men with twenty loaves and had some left over; Jesus fed five thousand with five loaves and two fish, and the leftovers filled twelve baskets. Elisha raised the Shunammite's son; Jesus raised a widow's son and Lazarus. Elisha healed Naaman the foreigner, and Jesus pointed to that story in His very first sermon: "There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed, except Naaman, the Syrian." Then Jesus Himself reached out and touched a leper and said, "I want to. Be made clean." And Matthew's genealogy traces David's line straight through the exile, through Jehoiachin, called Jechoniah, to Joseph, "the husband of Mary, from whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ." The lamp never went out.

Here's what the Bible says about where that story leads, as plainly as I can put it.

1 God made you, and He loves you.

God made you on purpose, and He loves you. He is patient, sending warning after warning because He wants His people to come home.

> *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only born Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.* **John 3:16 (WEB)**

2 We've all refused to listen.

Israel and Judah kept ignoring God's prophets. The Bible says all of us have sinned and gone our own way.

> *for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;* **Romans 3:23 (WEB)**

3 Sin has a real cost.

God is good, so He doesn't shrug off evil. 2 Kings shows sin leading to exile. The Bible says its result is death, separation from God forever.

> *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* **Romans 6:23 (WEB)**

4 Jesus is the true Son of David.

David's line survived the exile. Jesus, the Son of David, died on the cross for our sins and rose again, to bring us home from exile for good.

> *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* **1 John 4:10 (WEB)**

5 You can't earn it. You receive it.

Naaman couldn't pay for his healing. He just had to trust and obey. Salvation is a gift you receive by trusting Jesus.

> *for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8–9 (WEB)**

6 Wash and be clean.

Turn from running your own life, and trust Jesus as your Savior and King. Then you can know, not just hope, that you have eternal life.

> *that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (WEB)**

So what do you do with that? You don't need perfect words. You can talk to God honestly, right now, wherever you are. If it helps, you could pray something like this:

> *God, I haven't listened to You the way I should. I've sinned against You, and I can't fix that myself. Thank You for being patient with me and for keeping Your promises. Thank You that Jesus, the Son of David, gave His life for me, and that You raised Him from the dead. Wash me and make me clean. Open my eyes to see that those who are with me are more than those who are against me. I trust Jesus as my Savior, and I want Him to be my King. In Jesus' name, amen.*

If You Just Said Yes

Tell someone. A parent, a youth leader, a pastor, or a Christian friend. Start there.

Read the real thing. Read 2 Kings 5 and 22–23, then read Luke 4 and Luke 7, where Jesus does what Elisha did and more.

Find your people. Get connected to a church where the Bible is taught and Jesus is honored. Ask about being baptized.

Find the book. Josiah's life changed when he heard God's word. Start a habit of reading the Bible every day, even a little.

Not Sure Yet?

Not ready? That's honest, and honesty is a good place to start. Keep asking. Keep reading. Naaman almost walked away angry, but he listened in the end. Just don't settle for "I already know all that."

Because if 2 Kings is right, the God who kept David's lamp burning through the exile is still keeping His promises, and there is still a seat at the King's table for you.

However, the LORD would not destroy Judah, for David his servant's sake, as he promised him to give to him a lamp for his children always.

2 Kings 8:19 (WEB)