

2 Kings-by Nathan White

Chapter 1

2 Kings opens with the death of Ahab, remembered as one of the primary enemies of the prophet Elijah. However, like his father Omri, he was a mostly capable military figure, so his death gave Moab a perfect opportunity to cause trouble for Israel. The inability of Ahab's son to keep the nations at bay also serves as a contrast to Jehoshaphat, the king who was reigning in Judah at the time. Ahaziah, struggling to recover from a significant injury and in the midst of a Moabite rebellion, does exactly what his father would have done and turns to a false god. Also like his father, Ahaziah will stand opposed to Elijah. God sends Elijah to tell the king that he will die for his rebellion. Like most wicked kings, Ahaziah does not take the news well. He further rebels against God by sending men after Elijah, but Elijah calls fire down from heaven to consume his would-be captors. Ahaziah repeats this process two more times and each time results in the destruction of the men he sends. Elijah goes back to Ahaziah and repeats the prophecy to him, which ultimately comes to pass. His brother would succeed him.

Chapter 2

Understandably, Elijah has made something of a name for himself. In this chapter, we see Elijah's mantle passed to Elisha, who had regarded Elijah as his master. Elisha makes a request that might sound odd to our 21st century ears. He requests a double portion of Elijah's spiritual power. To us, it might seem presumptuous or even faithless. After all, could God not do through Elisha what he had already done through Elijah? In reality, it reveals the relationship between Elijah and Elisha. Elisha asks for the inheritance that a firstborn son would receive upon the death of his father, but rather than land, he requests the ability to carry out the tasks ahead of him. His request sheds light on the love and respect that Elisha had for Elijah as well as how seriously he took the responsibilities being passed to him. In Jericho, Elisha proves that he can bless in the Lord's name (v.19-22). In Bethel, one of the centers of Israel's apostasy, and thus unsurprisingly the home of people who hated the Lord's prophets, he proves that he can curse in the Lord's name as well (v. 23-25).

Chapter 3

Here we see what became of the Moabite rebellion introduced in chapter 1. Jehoram mustered his army and surprisingly, Jehoshaphat agreed to march with him bringing the forces of Israel and Judah, as well as Edom, currently under the rule a deputy appointed by Jehoshaphat, against Mesha, the Moabite king. On the march, the armies ran out of water. The three kings turn to Elisha for help, who tells them that God will provide, but only because of he has regard for Jehoshaphat. When the Moabites saw the newly formed streams gleaming red in the sunrise, they assumed the marching nations attacked each other, creating streams of blood, and ran out to plunder them. What they found were three very healthy armies. Moab faced certain destruction and Mesha, in desperation, burned his son alive as a sacrifice. As this was an abhorrent practice to the Lord, the wrath against Israel (v. 27) should not be understood as God's wrath, but instead the wrath of the Moabites, enraged at the sight of their prince sacrificed to Chemosh. The retreat of Israel and Judah, then, could be understood as a faithless act undertaken either in fear or belief that the false god Chemosh would actually help Moab.

Chapter 4

2 Kings 4 begins a series of episodes that lasts for several chapters detailing Elisha's miracles. The narrative centers heavily on Elisha with a rotating cast of supporting figures, including his servant Gehazi, the sons of the prophets, a Shunammite woman, kings, and military commanders. There is much that we could say about the miracles in this chapter and what they each reveal about the character of God, but a clear and common thread that runs through each one is the legitimacy of Elisha's ministry. As we noted in recent days, following Elijah would be a daunting task. These miracles, and all that will follow, echo Elijah's ministry, but they also point us to another Prophet as well. In this chapter, Elisha miraculously redeems hopeless captives (v. 1-7), exercises power over life (v. 8-17), overturns death (v. 18-37), and miraculously multiplies food to feed a large crowd, leaving leftovers (v. 38-42). All of these miracles point us forward to Christ, the long-awaited fulfillment of Elisha's office.

Chapter 5

Naaman, a commander in the Syrian army contracted leprosy. At some point, he conscripted an Israelite girl as a servant for his wife. Being an Israelite, she knew of Elisha and suggested that Naaman consult him. Naaman contacted Israel's king, which attracted Elisha's attention. After some protest, Naaman washes himself in the Jordan seven times like Elisha told him to and was healed. The miracle results in Naaman professing faith in the God of Israel. Naaman gratefully offers Elisha's gifts, but he rejects them, simply pleased that Naaman now trusts Yahweh. Gehazi, however, wants to cash in. He chases Naaman, lies to him, receives goods, and then unsuccessfully lies to Elisha. Elisha then curses Gehazi with Naaman's leprosy. This narrative provides us with more than just an example of poetic justice. It reveals that the key issue has always been faith. Naaman, a gentile military commander, displayed a sincere faith and repentance, in contrast to Gehazi, the Hebrew servant of prophet who has seen multiple miracles. Between the two, it is Naaman who walks away blessed by God.

Chapter 6

This chapter opens with another Elijah performing another miracle of provision: recovering a borrowed axe head, which fell into the waters of the Jordan while the prophets were building a new home. The chapter then moves to the events surrounding an attempted raid on Israel. Elisha miraculously informs the Israelite king of Syria's troop movements and when the Syrian king finds out about it, he sends a group of soldiers to capture him. Elisha's servant sees the army coming after them and is fearful, but Elisha asks that his servant's eyes be opened, and he immediately saw an angelic army surrounding them. Elisha then prays that the eyes of the Soldiers be shut, and blindness comes over the men sent to capture him. He then leads them directly to the heart of Israel's capital, Samaria, where the king takes them captive. This does not sit well with Ben-hadad, Syria's king, whose tactics escalate from sending raiding parties to besieging Samaria. Conditions in the city become tragically dire, but instead of turning to Elisha for help, the Israelite king blames him for enraging Ben-hadad with his actions in verses 8-23 and vows to kill the prophet.

Chapter 7

Before the king can have Elisha murdered, Elisha promises that commerce will commence at the gate of Samaria by the next day. The king's captain openly doubts the prophet, suggesting that such a thing would be impossible even if God opened heaven itself. Elisha curses the captain, telling him that when food does return, he will not even taste it. The scene then cuts to lepers living outside the city who know that if they stay where they are, they'll starve, but if they got back into the city, they'd still starve. They decide to turn themselves over to the Syrians and hope for mercy. Upon arriving at the Syrian camp, they discover the army has fled because God caused them to hear chariots, reminding us of the angelic armies of chapter 6, leading the

Syrians to believe Israel hired foreign mercenaries. The lepers first plan to plunder the camp and let the city find out on its own but decide to inform all of Samaria. The king thinks it is a trap, but a scouting party returns with a positive report. The people plundered the camp and commerce began exactly as Elisha prophesied. However, when the doubting captain was sent to monitor the situation, he was trampled by the crowd, fulfilling Elisha's curse against him as well. Again, we see life and death under God's sovereign command.

Chapter 8

This chapter reintroduces the Shunammite woman from the earlier Elisha narratives. After waiting out a famine in Philistia like Elisha commanded, she returned to find that her land had been seized. It is possible that it was seized by the king himself, potentially committing sins like Ahab (1 Kings 21). After Gehazi testifies to the truth of the Shunammite's story, the king restores her land to her. This short episode confirms the resurrection that Elisha performed. Even the king trusted the veracity of the miracle. Next, we see Elisha in Syria's capital. Ben-hadad, the king who besieged Samaria, was ill and sent Hazael to ask Elisha if he would recover. The grammar of verses 10 and 11 is a bit tricky. The simplest explanation of v. 10 is that the king would not die from the illness but would die by other means. V. 11 seems to indicate that Elisha stared at Hazael, pondering the tragedy to come, until Hazael was uncomfortable. Elisha weeps at the knowledge that after Hazael kills Ben-hadad, he will be a source of great sorrow for Israel. We also learn that during Jehoram's (sometimes spelled Joram) wicked reign in Judah, Edom rebelled against the rule of Judah. After his death, Ahaziah, his wicked son, reigned in Judah and marched with Joram of Israel (not Joram, his dead father) against Hazael.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 introduces us to Jehu, who is anointed as the new king of Israel. At the time of Jehu's anointing the kings of both Israel and Judah were from the line of the notorious king Ahab. In addition to being anointed as king, Jehu is commissioned to kill every member of Ahab's house. The wicked line of Ahab, antagonists throughout much of 1-2 Kings, will now be destroyed by Jehu. Joram was still recovering from the battle against Hazael and Ahaziah came to visit him. Upon hearing of Jehu's approach, they sent messengers to ask if Jehu was coming peacefully. Each time, the messengers changed their allegiance and fell in line with Jehu. Finally, Joram and Ahaziah ride out to meet him. There, Jehu kills Joram, leaving his body on the land that belonged to Naboth, repaying the blood that Ahab had shed there. Jehu then assassinates Ahaziah as well. Jezebel adorned herself and leaned out of her window, assuming a look and posture which evoke ancient imagery of one of Baal's wives, embodying her idolatry. The very eunuchs once tasked with guarding her heeded their new king's command and threw her down. God's promise to end Ahab's house is nearly fulfilled.

Chapter 10

This relatively lengthy chapter sees the fulfillment of God's promise to end Ahab's lineage. Jehu puts an end to every participant in Ahab's reign over Israel, serving as the instrument of God's judgment for leading Israel into mass apostasy. Fascinatingly, Jehu professes to do so out of zeal for the Lord (v. 16), but he never turns back from the sin of Jeroboam (v. 31). He leaves the golden calves in Bethel and Dan. Jehu might best be described as one of the less wicked kings of Israel. The northern kingdom never had a truly good king, but Jehu came close. This might cause us to wonder why he'd leave those golden calves in place. One of the practical purposes of the calves was to legitimize worship in the north so Israelites wouldn't have to travel to Jerusalem. Israel's citizens having to travel to Judah for worship could destabilize the monarchy of Israel. The temptation to leave them was one of power and convenience. Jehu was obedient

only when it served his own purposes, which is a temptation many of us understand, but such half-hearted faithfulness is not faithfulness at all.

Chapter 11

After discovering that her son was dead, Ahaziah's mother and Ahab's daughter, Athaliah, immediately began to kill all of the remaining royal family in the south in order to secure her own reign. She was so ruthless that even her young grandson Joash was at risk. Ahaziah's sister, Jehosheba, hid him from Athaliah until he could be crowned king. The risky protection of Joash, a future leader for God's people, reminds us of Moses before him and, more importantly, Jesus after him. What is interesting is that Athaliah's ruthlessness helped pave the way for Joash, a Davidic heir to the throne, to eventually reign. Any other possible heirs old enough to have been influenced by Ahaziah's own wickedness, as well as any heirs in Judah with ties to Ahab, are eliminated and her violence leads the people to desire another ruler. They actually rejoice when she is overthrown (v. 20). Her wickedness could not thwart God's purpose to preserve the Davidic line which would eventually bring forth Jesus Christ, the true and final king of God's people.

Chapter 12

Joash, also called Jehoash, took the throne as at the age of seven. We're told immediately that he was righteous all the days of his life, but Judah did not repent of her idolatry. We also see a great deal of external turmoil during Joash's reign. Even under a good king, conditions within Judah are deteriorating and they are facing great dangers from surrounding nations. Generations of idolatry and infighting are taking their toll. Positively, we do see Joash restore the temple after it fell into disrepair during the previous years of Judah's apostasy. This project cannot continue in peace, however, as Syria turns its attention toward Jerusalem. To stave off the coming attack, Joash sends Hazael tribute from both the royal treasury and the treasury of the temple. This brings to our attention the distress of Judah. Rather than tribute coming to Jerusalem from Syria as it once did, it now goes to Syria from Jerusalem. The internal strife is only further highlighted by Joash's assassination at the hands of his own officials. The people's desperate desire for a king who could secure peace led them to violence.

Chapter 13

This chapter introduces us to the next two kings of the northern kingdom, both of whom are wicked. However, it is remarkable to notice that even in the midst of that wickedness, God's mercy extends to his people. When Jehoahaz cries out to God as Israel suffers at the hands of Syria, God hears him (v. 4) in spite of the fact that Israel brazenly continued in their sin. Further, when the next king of Israel, Joash or Jehoash (a different Joash/Jehoash than the righteous one in Judah, although they reigned at the same time) asks Elisha what to do about Syria, God promises him that he will defeat Syria. It even appears that God graciously put it within Joash of Israel's reach to make a final end of their troubles with Syria, however his unenthusiastic obedience results in a lesser victory over Israel's oppressors (v. 19). Note also the hope of resurrection by God's grace after meeting death at the hands of God's enemies (v. 20-21). God's patience and compassion extend to his rebellious people throughout the remainder of the chapter so clearly that the author even makes a point to highlight it (v. 23).

Chapter 14

We are immediately introduced to Amaziah, the son of Joash of Judah. Like his father, Amaziah did what was right in God's eyes. Also like his father, he failed to remove the high places and the people still sacrificed to false gods. However, in delivering the punishment to his father's assassins, he acted justly even though he had the power to destroy their families as well (v. 5-

6). Between this and his victory over the Edomites, we are given a picture of a good king. Unfortunately, his pride eventually gets the best of him. He foolishly and unnecessarily challenges the king of Israel to a battle. Jehoash even tries to talk him out of it but, to put it bluntly, our sin tends to make us too stupid to listen. Amaziah suffers a humiliating and entirely avoidable defeat at the hands of Jehoash because he acted in pride, tarnishing his legacy. It resulted in the loss of his reputation, the throne, and ultimately, his life (v. 19-20). One prideful act undid much of what he had achieved in his life.

Chapter 15

Of the seven kings chronicled in this chapter, five reigned over Israel. We are quickly approaching the end of the northern kingdom. Israel is in a state of nearly perpetual discord. Interestingly, even in such rampant sin and chaos, God is faithful to the promise he made to Jehu to allow his line to reign for four generations in the northern kingdom (v. 12). God's faithfulness is a pleasant highlight within an otherwise discouraging series of events. No king in this chapter puts an end to idolatry in either Israel or Judah and four of the seven are explicitly presented as doing what is evil in the sight of the Lord. As evil increased, so did the instability. The author helps portray this by elevating the pace of the text. Readers can almost share in the frenetic feeling of Israel's rapid deterioration. As we can read in the prophets who correspond to this historical period, God has been exceedingly gracious for a long time, but judgment is on the way.

Chapter 16

The pace slows back down as the text settles into the reign of Ahaz over Judah. Ahaz's reign is not a good one. Oblivious to the clear judgment coming upon Israel, he acted as their kings had. Ahaz was so committed to the false gods he worshipped that he even offered his son as a burnt offering. When Israel and Syria joined together to assault Judah, instead of turning to God for help, he enters into a covenant with the king of Assyria for protection and pays him tribute with the money from the temple. In addition to the obvious idolatry of mimicking their worship (v. 10-16), entering into such an agreement is condemned by God in both the law and the prophets. We might see Ahaz as an extreme example of the dangers of idolatry. After all most of us face no temptation to worship pagan gods or sacrifice our sons as burnt offerings. However, the heart of Ahaz's sin was his willingness to sacrifice anything on the altar of safety, power, and comfort. When viewed through that lens, we might find that, frighteningly, we see a bit of ourselves in the behavior of Ahaz.

Chapter 17

Here, in chapter 17, we finally see the fall of the northern kingdom. Hoshea, the king of Israel, became a vassal to Assyria, relying on their strength for protection. However, he tried to cut the same deal with Egypt, provoking an Assyrian attack. The author does not allow us to simply view Israel's fall as the result of this diplomatic error. Ultimately, the fall of Israel was a judgment for their idolatry. Although most of this chapter is relatively straightforward, modern readers might be confused by vs. 24-41. Assyria, like many pagan nations of the time, believed different lands had their own gods so while they did not want Israelites worshiping Yahweh outside of Israel, they did want the people they imported into Israel to worship Yahweh. They thought of each deity as having geographical boundaries and wanted an Israelite priest to teach those who settled in Israel how to worship Yahweh in order to earn His favor. Ironically, this idolatrous syncretism is the very thing that brought God's judgment on Israel in the first place.

Chapter 18

The quick overview of Hezekiah's works leading up to the fall of Israel (vs. 1-12) shows us that he was a righteous king. Verse 13 then begins a narrative about the Assyrian campaign against Judah, which is also found in Isaiah 36-39. Hezekiah faces Sennacherib, a fearsome king, just eight years after he saw Israel fall to this same empire. The messenger sent by Sennacherib addresses the people of Judah directly (vs. 28-35), attempting to prey on the fear the small nation must have felt. In pride, the Rabshakeh speaks against Yahweh, citing the gods of other nations who failed to stop their conquests before. The chapter ends with silence and great tension, however one of the themes of the Old Testament is that Yahweh is the only living God, as opposed to the powerless false gods of other nations. The author highlighting the Rabshakeh's mention of gods who did not stop Assyria might bring that theme to mind. The Rabshakeh proudly brags about Assyria's victories over dead idols. They are about to face the living God.

Chapter 19

Understandably, Hezekiah is distressed by the impending battle against Assyria, but the faithful king trusts God's promise delivered to him through Isaiah. When Sennacherib threatens him again, Hezekiah offers a deeply moving prayer wherein he draws a clear contrast between the false gods that Assyria has overthrown and Yahweh as the Living God. In stark opposition to the Assyrian view that different gods had different geographical boundaries, Hezekiah prays to the God who is over all kingdoms and created heaven and earth (vs. 15). As we should expect, God keeps his promise to defeat Sennacherib's army as well as the promise that the Assyrian king would be killed by a sword in his own land (vs. 35-37). Additionally, Sennacherib is killed while worshipping his god, proving that his own idol is just as unable to save as all the gods he bragged about defeating. Throughout this chapter, we see that God is ultimately sovereign over all the kings of the earth, whether or not they submit to Him. He previously used Assyria to execute judgment Israel, he now defeated Assyria to protect Judah, and he used Sennacherib's own sons to fulfill the promise made through Isaiah.

Chapter 20

This chapter reveals a wide range of behaviors from Hezekiah. In his illness, we see him as humble and dependent, which is characteristic of his previous descriptions as a righteous king like David. Soon after, we see him as self-aggrandizing and proud of his power and wealth (vs. 12-15). Finally, we see him shockingly indifferent to the coming calamity because he was content to know there would be peace in his own time (vs. 16-19). We might read this chapter and wonder how these could be the actions of a man who would be remembered as one of the greatest kings of Judah (2 Kings 18:5), but it forces us to come to terms with the fact that even the most righteous among us are still sinners. Even at our best, the wickedness of our own hearts can lead us in directions we didn't think we'd go. But this narrative also points us away from ourselves. Though Hezekiah was a righteous descendant of David, his failures direct us to Jesus Christ, the truly righteous heir to David's throne who was not indifferent to our calamity for the sake of his own personal peace, but instead took our calamity on himself to purchase peace for us.

Chapter 21

After the death of Hezekiah, his son begins to reign. The text goes to great lengths to display Manasseh's wickedness. Rather than simply stating that he sinned by committing idolatry, the author makes a point to outline his heinous acts. As opposed to many of the previous unrighteous kings who had simply left altars and high places up that had already been built, Manasseh actively pursued rebuilding them. The acts that are likely most shocking to modern readers are likely his divination practices and burning his son as an offering (vs. 6) and those are certainly abominable actions, but we might easily read over another striking statement about

Manasseh. Whereas his father had been compared to David, Manasseh is compared to the notoriously wicked king of Israel, Ahab. In one generation, the moral leadership of Judah has been flipped on its head. We can already see the curse from the previous chapter (2 Kings 20:16-18) begin to work itself out in startling ways.

Chapter 22

We are introduced to Josiah, who will be the final righteous king of Judah. Every ruler after him will do what is evil in the sight of the Lord until Judah finally falls to Babylon. However, for the duration of Josiah's reign, he will do everything in his power to turn Judah back to right worship of God. During his lifetime, Assyria's power begins to diminish and the Babylonian empire begins to expand. The momentary lapse of one dominant international power will give Josiah some degree of freedom to enact his reforms without too many immediate external concerns. We should also take note of how far the monarchy of Judah has fallen since the time of Hezekiah. Not only have the previous kings been wicked, but the Book of the Law had been lost altogether (vs. 8). Josiah, it seems, had never even read it before (vs. 11) even though kings were commanded not only to study the law, but to write a copy of it with their own hand (Deut. 17:18-20). Though Judah will ultimately still fall, God graciously promises to delay the judgment until after Josiah's death because of his repentance (vs. 14-20).

Chapter 23

The bulk of this chapter details Josiah's exact reforms after hearing the Law. He is remarkably thorough, not only destroying altars and high places, but burning and defiling them so that their cults cannot reuse them. We also find that he is not content to simply correct the sins of the people in Jerusalem. He destroys the high place at Bethel which had been built by Jeroboam, the very first king over the divided northern kingdom. He continues to destroy cults throughout the land that had belonged to the northern kingdom of Israel, highlighting that Assyria was now too weak control the land that they once conquered. Notably, Josiah also reinstates the Passover, seeking complete obedience to God's laws. However, God's judgment would still fall on Judah because of their sins (vs. 26-27). Though Assyria was no longer a threat, Babylon would be. In fact, Josiah died trying to stop Egyptian armies from coming to Assyria's aid against Babylon. Josiah actually died aiding the very empire that God would soon use to judge Judah.

Chapter 24

The fall of Judah took place over the course of multiple Babylonian attacks. The capture of Jerusalem in this chapter was not the final fall of Jerusalem, which happens in chapter 25, still it is clear that the judgment of God is now falling on Judah just as it fell on Israel. One of the particularly interesting but easily missed parts of this chapter is the description of Zedekiah's reign (vs. 18-20). We might think Zedekiah would at least attempt to be a righteous king if for no other reason than the fact that God is being faithful to do exactly what He said He would do. God promised to judge Judah using Babylon. He is. God promised to withhold that judgment until after the time of Josiah because of Josiah's righteousness. He did. But Zedekiah still walked in the wickedness that brought about God's judgment in the first place. In this way, Zedekiah is a tragic window into just how rebellious our sinful hearts can be. Even when face to face with the obvious reality of God's justice, he refused to repent.

Chapter 25

After the first Babylonian victory in Jerusalem in 597 BC (2 Kings 24:10-17), the city is finally overthrown and the people of Judah are sent into exile in 586 BC. This is the final fulfillment of the oracles of judgment that have been made against Judah for years. Their assumptions that

God would not send the Davidic line into exile or see His temple destroyed proved false. They could not hold God hostage with their bloodline and the temple. They could not manipulate Him. It would be easy witness these events and wonder exactly how God is going to keep His promise to David. How will David's heir rule of God's people if David's heir is captured and imprisoned? In this respect, the book actually ends on an incredibly hopeful note. Nebuchadnezzar's son later releases Jehoiachin from prison and welcomes him at his table, effectively saving the Davidic line from destruction. Even in judgment, God would not abandon His eternal plan of redemption through the person and work of Christ, the final Davidic King.

-Reflecting on 2 Kings-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in 2 Kings. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish 2 Kings before we move forward?

"The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him." 2 Timothy 2.11