

## 2 Kings 17-25

### 2 Kings 17: Problems in Israel, Assyria Carries Away the Ten Tribes

1. Hoshea reigns in Israel, and does evil in the sight of the Lord (2 Kgs. 17.1-2).
2. The king of Israel sent envoys to Egypt,<sup>1</sup> and did not pay tribute to the Assyrians, and so the king of Assyria arrested Hoshea and put him in prison (2 Kgs. 17.3-4).<sup>2</sup>
3. The king of Assyria lays siege to Israel, and takes away the people and places them in foreign lands (2 Kgs. 17.5-6).<sup>3</sup>
  - a. The author of kings relates that the reason this happened was due to false worship (2 Kgs. 17.9-23).<sup>4</sup>
  - b. וַיִּירָאוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים “They feared other gods” (2 Kgs. 17.7).<sup>5</sup>
4. Diverse worship among the inhabitants of Israel (2 Kgs. 17.24-34).
  - a. Lions come among these people due to their false worship (2 Kgs. 17.25-26).<sup>6</sup>
  - b. The king of Assyria request that a priest come to instruct the locals on the right way to worship (2 Kgs. 17.27).
  - c. The people worship the Lord, but also their personal gods from their native lands (2 Kgs. 17.30-33).
5. “They did not hearken,” rather, they “feared the Lord” and also “served their graven images” ... “unto this day” (2 Kgs. 17.35-41).

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<sup>1</sup> The text mentions that envoys were sent to So, king of Egypt. According to the sources available, there was not a king of Egypt under this name. As Berlin and Brettler relate, “There was no pharaoh named So. Some historians consider it an Egyptian word for a high officer of the king; others consider So a reference to the delta city Sais whose kings of the 24<sup>th</sup> dynasty in the 720s were not friends of Assyria. In any case, the king of Assyria believed that Hoshea . . . had sent envoys to Egypt in order to enlist Egyptian aid in throwing off Assyrian domination.” [The Jewish Study Bible](#), p. 758.

<sup>2</sup> Though Shalmaneser in fact attacked Israel and other territories in Canaan-Phoenicia in 725 B.C.E., he died in 721 and, according to Assyrian royal inscriptions, the actual conquest was consummated by Sargon II. Either this information was not available to the Hebrew historian, writing perhaps a century and a half after the events, or he chose to simplify his narrative by speaking of a single “king of Assyria” invading Samaria. Robert Alter, [The Hebrew Bible, A Translation with Commentary](#), Volume 2, p. 582.

<sup>3</sup> Cuneiform documents attribute the conquest of Samaria to both Shalmaneser V and Sargon II. Possibly, Shalmaneser died just before the capitulation of the city. The author of Kings, however, knows only Shalmaneser (see 2 Kings 18.9-12). Assyrian policy called for dispersing hostile populations throughout its empire. Israelites from Samaria were sent to Gozan on the Upper Habor river, to Halah, beyond the Tigris northeast of ancient Nineveh, and to towns on the Persian plateau. Large Jewish communities, descendants of these exiles, lived continuously in these or adjacent regions of Syria, Iraq, and Iran until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. [The Jewish Study Bible](#), p. 758.

<sup>4</sup> The catastrophic event of the utter destruction of the kingdom of Israel calls for a grand theological explanation, cast in Deuteronomistic terms, and so a ringing sermonic catalogue of the transgressions of the Israelites is introduced that runs all the way to verse 23. **It is notable that all the transgressions are cultic —there is no mention of ethical failings or injustice.** Alter, p. 582.

<sup>5</sup> “They feared other gods” (2 Kgs. 17.7)... This is the core meaning of this reiterated Hebrew verb, although in cultic contexts it obviously refers to modes of worship rather than to the emotion of fear. Alter, p. 582.

<sup>6</sup> Lions were abundant in ancient Israel, a fact reflected in the five different terms for “lion” in biblical Hebrew; and so it is possible that the displacement of population, with hunting perhaps in abeyance, created the circumstances for an incursion of lions. In any case, the lion attacks seem to be represented as a miraculous intervention against the new inhabitants of Samaria. Alter, p. 584.

## 2 Kings 18: Hezekiah's Reign in Judah and the Assyrian Incursion Into the South

1. Hezekiah reigns in Judah when he was 25 years old (2 Kgs. 18.1-2).
2. Hezekiah was attributed with proper worship, removing the high places, cutting down the *Asherah*, and removing the brazen serpent from the temple (2 Kgs. 18.3-4).<sup>7</sup>
3. Hezekiah is credited for being great in his piety, "so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him" (2 Kgs. 18.5).
  - a. Hezekiah smote the Philistines, even unto Gaza (2 Kgs. 18.8).
4. The king of Assyria took Israel captive due to their transgressing the covenant (2 Kgs. 18.11-12).
  - a. The Assyrians were brutal. Their methods involved terror and submission.<sup>8</sup>
5. In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, King Sennacherib of Assyria marched against all the fortified towns of Judah and seized them. King Hezekiah sent this message to the king of Assyria at Lachish: "I have done wrong; withdraw from me; and I shall bear whatever you impose on me." So the king of Assyria imposed upon King Hezekiah of Judah a payment of three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was on hand in

<sup>7</sup> הוא הסיר את־הבמות וְשָׁבַר אֶת־הַמִּצְבֹּת וְקָרַת אֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרָה – He removed the high places and broke the altars (*maššēbâ*), and cut down the Asherah (KJV uses "groves" - 'āšērâ). The Asherah was a tree, which represented the goddess to the people that set these images up throughout the region. See: [Daniel C. Peterson, Nephi and his Asherah, BYU Studies, 2000, Volume 9, Number 2, Article 4.](#)

<sup>8</sup> Chris Stewart puts it this way:

**If the term terrorism could apply to any regime, it certainly could apply to the Assyrian method of conquest,** for they were as savage as any regime known in the history of man. Their policy, described with a bit of understated passiveness as "calculated frightfulness," had proven very effective. Yet it was fairly straightforward. In order to weaken a nation's major cities or capitals, its smaller towns and lesser cities were assaulted. (Note the Assyrian record quoted at the beginning of this chapter describing the "forty-six of [Hezekiah's] strong, walled cities, as well as the small towns in their area" that were destroyed before their army fell upon Jerusalem.)

**Brutality then reigned:** A captured city was usually plundered and burnt to the ground, and its site was deliberately denuded by killing its trees. The loyalty of the troops was secured by dividing a large part of the spoils among them; their bravery was ensured by the general rule of the Near East that **all captives in war might be enslaved or slain. Soldiers were rewarded for every severed head they brought in from the field,** so that the aftermath of a victory generally witnessed the wholesale decapitation of fallen foes. Most often the prisoners, who would have consumed much food in a long campaign, and would have constituted a danger and nuisance in the rear, were dispatched after the battle; they knelt with their backs to their captors, who beat their heads in with clubs, or cut them off with cutlasses. Scribes stood by to count the number of prisoners taken and killed by each soldier, and apportioned the booty accordingly; the king, if time permitted, presided at the slaughter. The nobles among the defeated were given more special treatment: their ears, noses, hands and feet were sliced off, or they were thrown from high towers, or they and their children were beheaded, or flayed alive, or roasted over a slow fire... Ashurbanipal boasts that "I burned three thousand captives with fire, I left not a single one among them alive to serve as a hostage." Another of his inscriptions reads: "These warriors who had sinned against Ashur and had plotted evil against me... from their hostile mouths have I torn their tongues, and I have compassed their destruction. As for the others who remained alive, I offered them as a funerary sacrifice; . . . their lacerated members have I given unto the dogs, the swine, the wolves. . . . By accomplishing these deeds I have rejoiced the heart of the great gods." Another monarch instructs his artisans to engrave upon the bricks these claims on the admiration of posterity: "My war chariots crush men and beasts... The monuments which I erect are made of human corpses from which I have cut the head and limbs. I cut off the hands of all those whom I capture alive." Reliefs at Nineveh show men being impaled or flayed, or having their tongues torn out; one shows a king gouging out the eyes of prisoners with a lance while he holds their heads conveniently in place with a cord passed through their lips. Chris Stewart, [The Miracle of Freedom: 7 Tipping Points that Saved the World](#), Shadow Mountain, 2011, p. 43-44/327 electronic version, emphasis added.

the House of the Lord and in the treasuries of the palace. At that time Hezekiah cut down the doors and the doorposts of the Temple of the Lord, which King Hezekiah had overlaid [with gold], and gave them to the king of Assyria. (2 Kgs. 18.13-16, JPS Translation).<sup>9</sup>

- a. "Whatever you fix for me I will bear" (2 Kgs. 18.14).<sup>10</sup>
6. Rabshakeh taunts the people of Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 18.17-35).<sup>11</sup>
  - a. Eliakim, Shebna and Joah beg Rabshakeh to speak "in the Syrian language" (Aramaic)<sup>12</sup> rather than "the Jew's language" (2 Kgs. 18.26).<sup>13</sup>
  - b. Rabshakeh taunts them: Don't let Hezekiah deceive you, do not listen to Hezekiah, for the Lord will not deliver you! (2 Kgs. 18.27-35).
  - c. "Did he not send to these men sitting on the wall?" (2 Kgs. 18.27).<sup>14</sup>
  - d. "Let not Hezekiah have you trust in the Lord!" (2 Kgs. 18.30).<sup>15</sup>
7. The people held their peace and Eliakim and Shebna rent their clothes (2 Kgs. 18.36-37).

## 2 Kings 19: Hezekiah seeks Isaiah's Counsel

1. Hezekiah rends his clothes and calls for Isaiah (2 Kgs. 19.1-5).
2. Isaiah tells Hezekiah to not be afraid (2 Kgs. 19.6-7).

<sup>9</sup> *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 762. The author focuses only on what happened at Jerusalem and hints that Hezekiah precipitated the Assyrian response (v. 14). Sennacherib's own accounts mention that he conquered 46 strong cities and forts, that he captured over 200,000 people, that he made "Hezekiah a prisoner in Jerusalem, like a bird in a cage," and that Hezekiah paid him a large tribute, including his daughters, palace women, and male and female singers. See excerpt from [The Annals of Sennacherib](#), by Daniel David Luckenbill, Ph.D., pp. 23-35. See also: [Sennacherib's Annals](#).

<sup>10</sup> Hezekiah's act of submission, expressed in his readiness to pay whatever tribute Sennacherib imposes, is contradicted by the narrative episode that begins in verse 17, where Hezekiah is represented as part of an alliance with Egypt opposing the Assyrians. **It would appear that two different sources, for reasons that are unclear, have been spliced together rather than blended.** Alter, p. 587.

<sup>11</sup> His speech, although formally directed to the leaders, was intended for the ears of the common folk so that they would pressure their king to give in to Assyria.

<sup>12</sup> The text reads דַּבֵּר־נָא אֶל-עַבְדֶּיךָ אַרְמִית "speak, I pray thee, to your servants in Aramaic/אַרְמִית" (2 Kgs. 18.26)

<sup>13</sup> Berlin and Brettler explain, "Aramaic was the diplomatic language in the southwestern parts of the Assyrian empire. **Assyrian reliefs depict two scribes recording events, one in cuneiform and one in Aramaic.** Judean refers to the local dialect of Hebrew. Hebrew remained a spoken language, albeit in different dialectal forms, along with Aramaic until the 3rd century CE. Then it evolved into a liturgical language and a language of learned discourse and writing, like Classical Arabic and Latin. After 1,600 years, Hebrew was conscientiously revived as a mother tongue during the 19th and 20th centuries CE among Jews living in Israel. Aramaic remained an important language in the Middle East until displaced by Arabic in the 7th to 8th centuries CE. Aramaic remains a liturgical language in some Eastern tradition churches. At the end of the 20th century, it was spoken by some Jews in Kurdistan (northern Iraq) and in dialect form by Jews in other parts of Iraq, in Iran, and in a few places in Lebanon." *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 763.

<sup>14</sup> The verb "send" is merely implied in the Hebrew. Rabshakeh makes clear that his entire speech —itself a brilliant deployment of political rhetoric—is precisely intended for the ears of the people. **His purpose is to drive a wedge between the rebellious Hezekiah and the people, convincing them that the uprising is hopeless**, and that, in fact, the fate of deportation to Assyria will be a happy one. Alter, p. 588, emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup> **This part of Rabshakeh's message contradicts his earlier statement in verse 25.** Rabshakeh appears to be shifting grounds. **First he claimed that it was YHWH Who sent the Assyrians against Judah (verse 25), which was a way of conveying to the people the idea that their destruction was divinely ordained and irreversible. Now he takes a different tack: no national god has ever availed against the great king of Assyria.** Alter, p. 589.

3. Rabshakeh responds to Hezekiah, telling him that no god has ever defeated the Assyrian forces (2 Kgs. 19.8-13).
4. Hezekiah, upon hearing Rabshakeh's responds, goes to the Lord in prayer (2 Kgs. 19.14-19).
5. Isaiah responds on behalf of Jehovah, stating that the Lord has heard Hezekiah's prayer (2 Kgs. 19.20-34).
  - a. "I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips" (2 Kgs. 19.28).<sup>16</sup>
  - b. Isaiah's main prophecy: "He shall not come into this city!" (2 Kgs. 19.31-34).
6. The result: "They were all dead corpses!" (2 Kgs. 19.35).<sup>17</sup>
  - a. Sennacherib is defeated, and his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer<sup>18</sup> kill him (2 Kgs. 19.36-37).
7. These events in the Hebrew Bible were **a tipping point that changed the world**.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Sennacherib had imagined himself a god. Now the God of Israel describes him as a dumb helpless beast to be driven where God wants. Alter, p. 593.

<sup>17</sup> The lifting of the siege is a historical event, though the reason for it is uncertain. **If the report here is authentic, it would be because a plague swept through the Assyrian camp.** But one must say that the writer has a vested interest in representing this event as a miraculous intervention, demonstrating God's commitment to protect Jerusalem (in contrast to Samaria, destroyed by an Assyrian king twenty years earlier). Alter, p. 594. Chris Stewart shares this insight:

If the plague did happen, modern-day scholars assert that **it was likely the result of the Gihon Spring project undertaken by Hezekiah that diverted the local water supply** into Jerusalem and deprived the Assyrian army of the clean water that was vital to sustaining such a massive army on the Judean plain. If so, it wouldn't have been the first time an army had been decimated by the plague. Stewart, *The Miracle of Freedom*, p. 58/327 electronic version, emphasis added.

<sup>18</sup> We now know from Assyrian sources that Sennacherib was killed by Arad-Ninlil, rather than his sons Adrammelech and Sarez; Sennacherib was, however, as stated in the Bible, succeeded by his son Esarhaddon. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 767.

<sup>19</sup> **Did the Battle for Jerusalem Change the World?**

if Jerusalem had met the same fate as the nation of Israel, Cowley states "Judaism would have disappeared from the face of the earth and the two daughter religions of Christianity and Islam could not possibly have come into existence. In short, our world would be profoundly different in ways we cannot really imagine." (Robert Cowley, *What if?*, p. 5-6.)

One eminent American scholar of the Near and Middle East, Bernard Lewis, reached this same conclusion: The advent and triumph of Islam in the seventh century was preceded and in a sense made possible by the rise and spread of Christianity, which itself was deeply indebted to its religious and philosophic predecessors. Both Christian and Islamic civilization have common roots in the encounter and interaction in the ancient Middle East of three universalist traditions— those of the Jews, the Persians, and the Greeks. (Bernard Lewis, [The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2,000 Years](#), p. 26)

In short, **the survival of Jerusalem and Judaism was essential for the ultimate birth of Christianity into the world.** Regarding the importance of the Assyrian battle for Jerusalem and its subsequent impact upon world history, the Quarterly Journal of Military History asked thirty-seven historians to identify the single most important military battle in history. Many critical battles were mentioned: the Greek navy's victory over Persia in the Battle of Salamis in 480 BC, England's defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, and many others. But one preeminent scholar, **William H. McNeill**, author of [The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community](#) (for which he was awarded the National Book Award for History), **believes the Assyrian battle for Jerusalem exceeds them all in importance.** Believing that the nation of Judah was saved by an unexplained plague, and while writing for the journal and representing the historians' collective view, Mr. McNeill states: Had the Assyrian army remained healthy in 701

## 2 Kings 20: Hezekiah's Lengthened Life

1. Hezekiah is ill, and Isaiah comes to tell him he is about to die and to set his house in order (2 Kgs. 20.1).
2. Hezekiah prays that the Lord will remember him (2 Kgs. 20.2).
3. Isaiah is told that Hezekiah's life is to be extended by 15 years (2 Kgs. 20.3-6).<sup>20</sup>
  - a. He is told to get a cake of figs (2 Kgs. 20.7), which was to be applied as a poultice. The same medication is prescribed for horses in a text from Ugarit.<sup>21</sup>
4. The sign: A Movement of a Shadow
  - a. "shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees?" (2 Kgs. 20.10)<sup>22</sup>
5. The king of Babylon communicates with Hezekiah (2 Kgs. 20.12-13).<sup>23</sup>
6. Hezekiah shows the Babylonians "all that was found in his treasures," and as a result, the Babylonian conquest is foretold by Isaiah (2 Kgs. 20.14-18).
7. Hezekiah responds, "Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken" (2 Kgs. 20.19).<sup>24</sup>
8. Hezekiah's other acts, building a pool and a tunnel (2 Kgs. 20.20).<sup>25</sup>

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[BC], Jerusalem would probably have been captured and its people dispersed, as had happened to Samaria only 20 years before. Think of what that would mean! **For without Judaism, both Christianity and Islam become inconceivable. And without these faiths, the world as we know it becomes unrecognizable: profoundly, utterly different.** (Quoted in Henry T. Auben, "The Rescue of Jerusalem," *Assyrian Campaigns: Ancient Mesopotamia*, [http://joseph\\_berrigan.tripod.com/ancientbabylon/id21.html](http://joseph_berrigan.tripod.com/ancientbabylon/id21.html).)

Why Jerusalem and the culture of Judaism survived was because of either a mysterious plague or the softened heart of a brutal Assyrian king. Either way, it doesn't matter. Both were miraculous and unexplainable events. Further, the fact that **the Jewish religion survived clearly paved the way for the birth of Christianity**. And... without the foundation of Christianity, the freedom and democracy that we enjoy in this golden age would not have been possible. Little did the people living in the days of the Assyrians comprehend the critical role that Sennacherib, Hezekiah, and the retreat of the Assyrian army back to Nineveh would play in the development of freedom and democracy during the centuries yet to come. Chris Stewart, *The Miracle of Freedom, 7 Tipping Points that Saved the World*, p. 63-67 electronic version, emphasis added.

<sup>20</sup> Note that this is "for David's sake" (verse 6). "In those days," (2 Kgs. 20.1) is a noncommittal temporal indicator, and it is unclear whether Hezekiah's grave illness occurred before or after the siege of Jerusalem reported in the previous chapter. Alter, p. 595.

<sup>21</sup> *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 768.

<sup>22</sup> The text reads *וַיֹּאמֶר יְחִזְקִיָּהוּ נִקְל לִצֵּל לְנִטּוֹת עֶשְׂרִי מֵעֵלּוֹת לֹא כִּי יָשׁוּב הַצֵּל אַחֲרַיִת עֶשְׂרִי מֵעֵלּוֹת* "And Hezekiah said, it is an easy thing for the shadow to stretch out (לִצֵּל לְנִטּוֹת) ten steps, but not for the shadow to return/recede ten steps." What is going on here? The text may be a bit confusing when read this way, with "steps" *מֵעֵלּוֹת* ma'alot, instead of "degrees." Robert Alter explains, "What is evidently in question is a kind of sundial, but one that is not a horizontal disk but rather a series of steps set into a wall, ten on the left side to show the shadow of the ascending sun and ten on the right side for the descending sun. A device of this sort has been found in Egypt. The King James Version and modern Hebrew understand ma'alot as "degrees," but these were probably actual steps, which is what the word usually means." Alter, p. 596.

<sup>23</sup> The Babylonians were threatened by the Assyrian empire to the north and were eager to make an alliance with the kingdom of Judah. Alter, p. 596.

<sup>24</sup> This is something I (Mike Day) have always struggled with. I do not see this in any way as something that Hezekiah would say is "good" *טוֹב דְּבַר יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ* reads, "Good is the word of Yahweh which you have said" (2 Kgs. 20.19).

<sup>25</sup> The [Siloam Tunnel](#) diverted water from the Spring of Gihon, which near the confines of the City of David, and routed the water from the spring into Jerusalem and within the protective confines of its walls. Having a fresh water source within the confines of its walls helped to secure the position of the city of Jerusalem in the time of

- a. It can be argued that Hezekiah blocked the source of the Gihon Spring, covering it up, in order that the enemies that laid siege to the city of Jerusalem could not have access to fresh water (2 Chronicles 32.1-5, 30).<sup>26</sup>

## 2 Kings 21: Manasseh Turns to Pagan Worship, and the Reign of Amon

1. Manasseh, 12 years old at the time of taking control of the kingship, reigns for 55 years (2 Kgs. 21.1). He is described in very negative terms.
  - a. He did evil (2 Kgs. 21.2), built up high places (21.3), and made his sons to “pass through the fire” (21.6).
2. The king is blamed for the problem (2 Kgs. 21.11), and at other times, the people are blamed (2 Kgs. 22.16-17).
3. God says, “I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down” (2 Kgs. 21.13).
4. Manasseh sheds innocent blood (2 Kgs. 21.16).<sup>27</sup> The JPS version reads, “Moreover, Manasseh put so many innocent persons to death that he filled Jerusalem [with blood] from end to end—besides the sin he committed in causing Judah to do what was displeasing to the Lord.”<sup>28</sup>
  - a. Legends exist that state that King Manasseh killed the prophet Isaiah by sawing him in half.<sup>29</sup>

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the [siege of the Assyrian army](#) in 701 BCE. In 1880, the [Siloam Tunnel inscription](#) commemorating the completion of the tunneling project was found on the tunnel's wall. This 583-yard long tunnel conveyed water from outside Jerusalem into the city, assuring a water supply even in the time of siege. With a 6% gradient, the tunnel was able to convey water from the Spring of Gihon to a pool. It is possible that in David's day, this is how he was able to take possession of the city from the Jebusites. For example, in 2 Samuel 5.8 we read that David said, "Those who attack the Jebusites <·shall reach **the water channel** and [strike down] the lame and the blind, who are hateful to David." (2 Sam. 5.8 JPS Tanakh). The meaning of the Hebrew word translated (צְנוּר) *water channel* is unclear. It may refer to the tunnel (known today as Warren's shaft) that connected the city on the hill with the spring in the valley. In that case, the target may have been cutting off the water supply or entering the city through that tunnel. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 627.

<sup>26</sup> We had a conversation with a local at the Pool of Siloam about this in the summer of 2022. He stated that Hezekiah covered the Gihon Spring's entrance with earth in order to disguise it from the enemy. The conduit made it so that the city had a constant source of fresh water in the time of the siege.

<sup>27</sup> Moral offense compounds the cultic offenses. The victims of these many murders are in all likelihood loyalists to YHWH, perhaps the prophets of the LORD just mentioned, who were slaughtered as Jezebel slaughtered the prophets of the LORD. It may have been this that led the Israeli biblical scholar Yehezkel Kaufmann to describe Manasseh as “the Jezebel of the South.” Alter, p. 599.

<sup>28</sup> *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 769.

<sup>29</sup> For example, we read in [The Ascension of Isaiah 1.7-10](#): Isaiah said to Hezekiah the king . . . “And Sammael Malkira [that is, Satan] will serve Manasseh and will do everything he wishes, and [Manasseh] will be a follower of Beliar [that is, Satan] rather than of me. He will cause many in Jerusalem and Judah to desert the true faith, and Beliar will dwell in Manasseh, and by his hands I will be sawn in half.” (This translation is from Kalmin, [Migrating Tales: The Talmud's Narratives and Their Historical Context](#), University of California Press, 2014, 66). Later we read that Manasseh's heart is taken by Satan/Beliar, and Manasseh's saws Isaiah in half, “Because of these visions, therefore, Beliar was angry with Isaiah, and he dwelt in the heart of Manasseh, and **he sawed Isaiah in half with a wood saw**. (Ascension of Isaiah 5.1-2, Kalmin translation, emphasis added). Kalmin works to trace the roots of the story:

We cannot be sure where and when the story of Manasseh's murder of Isaiah originated, but the earliest attestation of it is evidently in the Ascension of Isaiah. **While there is no unanimity on the subject, most scholars**

5. The Reign of Amon (2 Kgs. 21.19-26). The author indicates that Amon's short reign (641-640 BCE) did not differ from that of his father with regard to religious policies.

## 2 Kings 22: The Reign of Josiah & the Discovery of the Book of the Law

1. The Reign of Josiah (2 Kgs. 22.1-23.30).
  - a. Josiah begins “reigning” at 8 years old (v. 1), and Hilkiah the high priest “finds” a book of the law in the temple (v. 8) during the renovations of the temple,<sup>30</sup> and when the king hears the words of this book he “rends his clothes” (v. 11), and commands the high priest to “inquire of the Lord” concerning the book (v. 13). They do, in that they

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**today date the Ascension of Isaiah to the end of the first and the beginning of the second century C.E.** It is also not entirely clear where the Ascension was authored, although according to the consensus of scholars it derives from western Syria or Palestine, and several scholars express a cautious preference for the latter. This scholarly consensus makes it likely that the legend of Manasseh’s murder of Isaiah originated in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire, a conclusion supported by the fact that crucial aspects of the legend are also attested by several second- and third-century Church Fathers from the Greek and Roman world. Kalmin, p. 68. See also: Robert G. Hall, “The Ascension of Isaiah: Community Situation, Date, and Place in Early Christianity,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109, no. 2 (1990): 300–306. See his summary of scholarly dating on p. 300. See also idem, “Isaiah’s Ascent to See the Beloved: An Ancient Jewish Source for the Ascension of Isaiah?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113, no. 3 (1998): 463. See n. 2 there for references to earlier scholarship on the question of a preexisting Martyrdom source.)

One rabbinic text that contains important parallels to the Bavli’s version of the tradition of Isaiah’s execution is found in y. Sanhedrin 10:2 (28c):

- (A) [Mishnah:] Three kings and four commoners have no portion in the world to come. Three kings: Jeroboam, Ahab, and Manasseh.

R. Yehudah says, “Manasseh has a portion in the world to come, as it is said, ‘Manasseh prayed to Him, and He granted his prayer, heard his plea, and returned him to Jerusalem to his kingdom’” (2 Chr 33:13).

They said to [R. Yehudah], “He returned him to his kingdom, but He did not return him to life in the world to come.”

- (B) [Talmud:] What did Manasseh do? . . .

(C) When Manasseh became king he ran after Isaiah. He wanted to kill him and [Isaiah] fled from before him. He fled to a cedar tree and the cedar tree swallowed him, except for the fringes of his cloak. They went and said before [Manasseh; that is, they told the king where Isaiah was hiding]. [Manasseh] said to them, “Go and saw the cedar tree.” They sawed the cedar tree and blood was seen flowing.

In the Yerushalmi, therefore, Manasseh alone (along with the unnamed individuals whom he orders to saw the tree) murders the prophet, and the text supplies no motive for the king’s actions. According to the Yerushalmi, the story explains only what Manasseh did to lose his portion in the world to come. Kalmin, R., *Migrating tales: The Talmud’s narratives and their historical context*, University of California Press, 2014, p. 77.

<sup>30</sup> These renovations were recorded as having occurred in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Josiah’s reign, or in 622 BCE when Josiah was 26 years old. See 2 Kings 22.3 and *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 770.

approach Huldah, a “prophetess” (v.14),<sup>31</sup> who tells them that the Lord will “bring evil” upon Jerusalem (v. 16) because the people have “forsaken the Lord” (v. 17).

- b. Josiah is told that because he “rent his clothes” (v. 19) that his eyes will not see all the evil that is about to come upon Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 22.20).
  - c. Bryce shared in the podcast the story of those that are “advocates of the age” and then shared the following quotation from Joseph Smith: “Soon after the foregoing revelation was received, a woman came making great pretensions of revealing commandments, laws and other curious matters; and as almost every person has advocates for both theory and practice, in the various notions and projects of the age, it became necessary to inquire of the Lord, when I received the following: [Section 43] (Joseph Smith, *HC* 1:154).”
2. The Discovery of a Scroll (2 Kgs. 22.1-20).<sup>32</sup>
    - a. The Book of the Law (2 Kgs. 22.8), seen by many scholars as the text (of some of the text) of Deuteronomy, can be seen as a rewriting of history and the placing of many of Josiah’s policies in the mouth of Moses to make a theological point and to give legitimacy to the reforms of King Josiah.<sup>33</sup>

## 2 Kings 23-25: The Reforms of Josiah, The Collapse of Judah and Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple

1. The Reforms of Josiah (2 Kgs. 23.1-25).
2. The inevitability of the end of Jerusalem and her kings (2 Kgs. 23.26-27).
3. The death of Josiah (2 Kgs. 23.28-30).
4. Jehoiaquim’s reign and the collapse of Judah (2 Kgs. 23.34-24.7)
5. Jehoiachin assumes the throne as the Babylonians position themselves to destroy Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 24.8-17).

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<sup>31</sup> She is the only female prophet mentioned in the Book of Kings. She performs in every respect like the male prophets, quoting God’s words directly with the introductory messenger-formula, “Thus said the LORD,” and the large royal delegation that comes to her clearly accepts her authority as fully as they would that of a male prophet. Alter, p. 602.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Alter explains, “For two centuries, the scholarly consensus, despite some dissent, has been that the found book is Deuteronomy. Although attributed to Moses, it would have been written in the reign of Josiah, perhaps drawing on some earlier materials. The book “found” in 621 B.C.E. was also not altogether identical with Deuteronomy as we have it, which almost certainly included some later elements, and was not edited in the form that has come down to us until the Babylonian exile. The major new emphases of the book brought to Josiah were the repeated stress on the exclusivity of the cult in Jerusalem (“the place that I shall choose”) and the dire warnings of imminent disaster and exile if the people fail to fulfill its covenant with God.” Alter, p. 601

<sup>33</sup> Much has been written on this subject. See: Mike Day, [How did Josiah change the religion of the Jewish nation?](#), 2018. See also: Margaret Barker, What did King Josiah Reform? in John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, eds. [Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem](#), Provo, Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2004. 523-542. See also: Margaret Barker, [The Older Testament: The Survival of Themes from the Ancient Royal Cult in Sectarian Judaism and Early Christianity](#), London, SPCK, 1987. Richard Friedman also breaks down some of the arguments in his classic [Who Wrote the Bible?](#) Harper One, 1997. See also: Martin Noth, [The Deuteronomistic History](#), Sheffield, Department of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield, 1957. Moshe Weinfeld, [Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School](#), Eisenbrauns (April 1, 1992). Berlin and Brettler write, “Most, but not all, modern scholars consider this account to be largely historical, reflecting the “(re)discovery” of Deuteronomy in this period.” *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 770.



- a. The first exile from Judah 597 BCE (2 Kgs. 24.10-12). The 18 year old king Jehoiachin and his officers are taken out of Jerusalem and placed in the custody of their Babylonian overlords.<sup>34</sup>
6. The Reign of Zedekiah (597-586 BCE) and the Destruction of the Temple (2 Kgs. 24.18-25.21).
  - a. Zedekiah “rebelled against the king of Babylon” (2 Kgs. 24.19). On the basis of remarks in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, it is apparent that Zedekiah joined a coalition that included coastal Phoenicians and Transjordanian kingdoms in planning a revolt. Nebuchadnezzar managed to stop it, but then, in 589/8, set out to punish Zedekiah.<sup>35</sup>
  - b. The siege of Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 25.1-3) lasted 17 months. Starvation led to the fall of Jerusalem (see Deuteronomy 28.57).
  - c. The walls of the city were breached on the 9<sup>th</sup> of the month of Tammuz (2 Kgs. 25.4).<sup>36</sup>
7. The First Appendix (2 Kgs. 25.22-26).<sup>37</sup>
8. The Second Appendix (2 Kgs. 25.27-30). Jehoiachin is released from prison by the ruler of Babylon. This leaves readers of Kings with a ray of hope. After 37 years in prison, a Davidic king lives on. This sparks the hope of a return of the Davidic dynasty.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Jehoiachin’s father, Jehoiakim, had incurred the wrath of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar by continually shifting his loyalties between Babylonia and Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar was determined to punish Jehoiakim for these intolerable vacillations, but the king died before the Babylonians could punish him. They instead captured the 18 year old Jehoiachin and exiled him to Babylon in 597 BCE. David Glatt-Gilad, [Jehoiachin’s Exile and the Division of Judah, The Torah.com](#), accessed 6.27.2022.

<sup>35</sup> *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 777.

<sup>36</sup> Tammuz (Tamuz) is the fourth of the 12 months of the Jewish calendar, counting from Nisan. The month of Tammuz begins the “season” of the summer. The three months of this season are Tammuz, Av and Elul. [The Hebrew Month of Tammuz, Chabad.org](#). Jewish tradition observes the seventeenth of Tamuz as a fast day marking the breaching of the walls. The difference between the day of the breach and the fast is explained by claiming that it was only on the seventeenth that the Babylonians exploited the breach to enter the city. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 777.

<sup>37</sup> The last administrative overseer of the people of Judah in the land was Gedaliah. His grandfather had been a high official in Josiah's cabinet (22.3), while his father had been in Josiah's court (22.12) and Jehoiakim's and had supported Jeremiah in counseling nonresistance to the Babylonians ( Jer. 26.24). This was the same counsel he provided refugee bands of fighters and their leaders (v. 24). The writer of this appendix simply reported events without commenting on their meaning. *The Jewish Study Bible*, p. 778.

<sup>38</sup> One author puts it this way:

It is **not entirely clear**, however, what message the author of 2 Kings 25:27–30 was trying to convey. The fact that Jehoiachin was released from prison does not in and of itself indicate that he or his sons were being groomed for a return to the Judean throne. **At most, the author of this passage, who was in all likelihood writing in the Babylonian diaspora himself, was signaling to his fellow Judeans that their collective national fortunes were taking a turn for the better and that God was giving them an opening, so to speak, to engage in full repentance.** David Glatt-Gilad, [Jehoiachin’s Exile and the Division of Judah, The Torah.com](#), accessed 6.27.2022.

Robert Alter gives this analysis of the final statement in Kings:

This concluding image, however, seeks to intimate a hopeful possibility of future restoration: a Davidic king is recognized as king, even in captivity, and is given a daily provision appropriate to his royal status. As he sits on his throne elevated above the thrones of the other captive kings, **the audience of the story is invited to imagine a scion of David again sitting on his throne in Jerusalem.** Alter, p. 613.