

Bible Challenge 2018

Week 13: March 25-31

Outline:

2 Kings 1: Elijah and the Death of Ahaziah
2 Kings 2: Elijah and the Whirlwind; Elisha begins his Ministry
2 Kings 3-8: The Elisha Narratives
2 Kings 9-12: Jehu's Purge and Joash's Reformation
2 Kings 13: The Death of Elisha
2 Kings 14-17: A Litany of Mostly bad Kings and the Fall of Israel
2 Kings 18-20: King Hezekiah
2 Kings 21: Manasseh's Idolatry
2 Kings 22-23: Josiah's Reforms
2 Kings 24-25: Another Litany of Bad Kings and the Fall of Judah

Second Kings is largely the story of the falls of first the Northern Kingdom and then the Southern Kingdom and those events that led up to their fall. In the north, one bad king followed the next, heaping judgment upon judgment on the nation. The south did have some good kings, like Hezekiah and Josiah, but again the idolatrous kings dominated the landscape of their history. And so, over a period of about 266 years, beginning with Ahaziah's death in 852 BC and ending with the Fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, the people pursued their own ways and gods of their own making and even the best of the good kings did not bring reform that lasted much beyond their rule.

Elijah and the Death of Ahaziah

2 Kings continues the Elijah narrative with a summon by King Ahaziah who had fallen through the latticework of his upper chamber, being injured very badly. The significance of this narrative should be obvious — does the king have the authority to summon the prophet? Does the secular government have authority over the government of the church? The answer is a resounding, "no." And so, two Captains and their fifty men were burned up by fire from God because they sought to demand things of God's prophet. The third captain was a wiser man than the first and came to Elijah with a request, which the prophet honors and offers the news that yes, the king will soon die.

Elijah and the Whirlwind; Elisha begins his Ministry

Most of us have learned the story of Elijah and the fiery chariot from our childhood Sunday School classes. He is one of the three people that bodily ascended into heaven without having to die; what an amazing privilege! What often is confused is that Elijah did not ascend into heaven riding in a fiery chariot when in fact, it was the chariot that separated Elijah and Elisha. Then a whirlwind caught Elijah into heaven and he was no more. The mantle was passed then from Elijah to Elisha.

Elisha begins his ministry with a bit of an awkward start. At first, people are unsure that Elijah is really gone and they set out to look for him. Not finding him, they submit to Elisha's rule. Then we run across a story that carries with it a stern warning to parents who do not raise their children to respect the men of God in their midst. After mocking Elisha, two she-bears race from a nearby wood and slash 42 of the boys to bits. What an awful lesson to have to learn.

The Elisha Narratives

In the following chapters, we learn more about the ministry of Elisha, one that is marked by more miracles than that of his predecessor. In fact, next to Moses, Elisha works more miracles than any Old Testament prophet and his miracle working ministry is a shadow of the ministry that will come in Christ when we arrive at the New Testament. In fact, Jesus performs many of the same miracles as does Elisha, but Jesus performs them in far greater ways.

Jehu's Purge and Joash's Reformation

If there were ever a candidate for "good king" in the northern kingdom, it would be Jehu. He is the one who will slay Jezebel and the wicked descendants of Ahab. He also stuck down the priests of Ba'al, who had served Ahab and Jezebel, and then he destroyed the temple that had been erected to worship Ba'al. And after all of this,

we almost expect the words that he walked in the ways of King David. Yet, he didn't. He continued worshipping at the two gold bulls that Jeroboam had erected in Israel. And so, the Israelites had their house cleaned somewhat, but not thoroughly.

Joash (sometimes written, "Jehoash"), on the other hand, in the south brought about genuine reforms. He repaired the Temple, he destroyed the "High Places," which is a reference to pagan altars on the mountaintops, and he listened to the instruction of Jehoiada the priest.

The Death of Elisha

Unlike his predecessor, Elisha died. When his bones had been buried in a cave, later on someone threw the body of an old man into his grave. When his corpse hit the bones of Elisha, the man rose back to life; such was the anointing of this prophet of God.

A Litany of Mostly bad Kings and the Fall of Israel

In the northern kingdom of Israel, we go from bad to worse. Jeroboam II begins his reign in 793 BC, followed by his son Zechariah who was murdered by Shallum who took his place. Shallum was put to death after less than two years and was replaced by Manahem, who was followed by Pekah and then Pekahiah and finally Hoshea. The only bright spot is that during the reign of Jeroboam II, we are introduced to the Prophet Jonah

In the southern kingdom, we follow the reigns of Amaziah (a so-so king), Uzziah (a good king), Jotham (good), and Ahaz (wicked). Then there is the fall of the Northern kingdom of Israel to the Assyrians.

King Hezekiah

Though not perfect by any stretch, we are once again with a good king, though he is raised up during a time of crisis. After Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, conquered the northern kingdom, he kept heading south, even up to the gates of Jerusalem. God sent to Hezekiah the prophet Isaiah (of the prophetic books) to remind him of God's promise and might and not to give in to fear of human enemies. Hezekiah remained faithful and God sent the Angel of Yahweh (the preincarnate Christ) to slay 185,000 Assyrians in the camp (Isaiah 27:36). Sennacherib was forced to retreat.

Manasseh's Idolatry

Unfortunately, Hezekiah's son, Manasseh did not have the spiritual integrity of his father. As a result, he pursued the practices of his neighboring nations, building monuments to Asherah and leading Judah into sin with idols. And if Manasseh wasn't bad enough, he was followed by his son, Amon, in his idolatry.

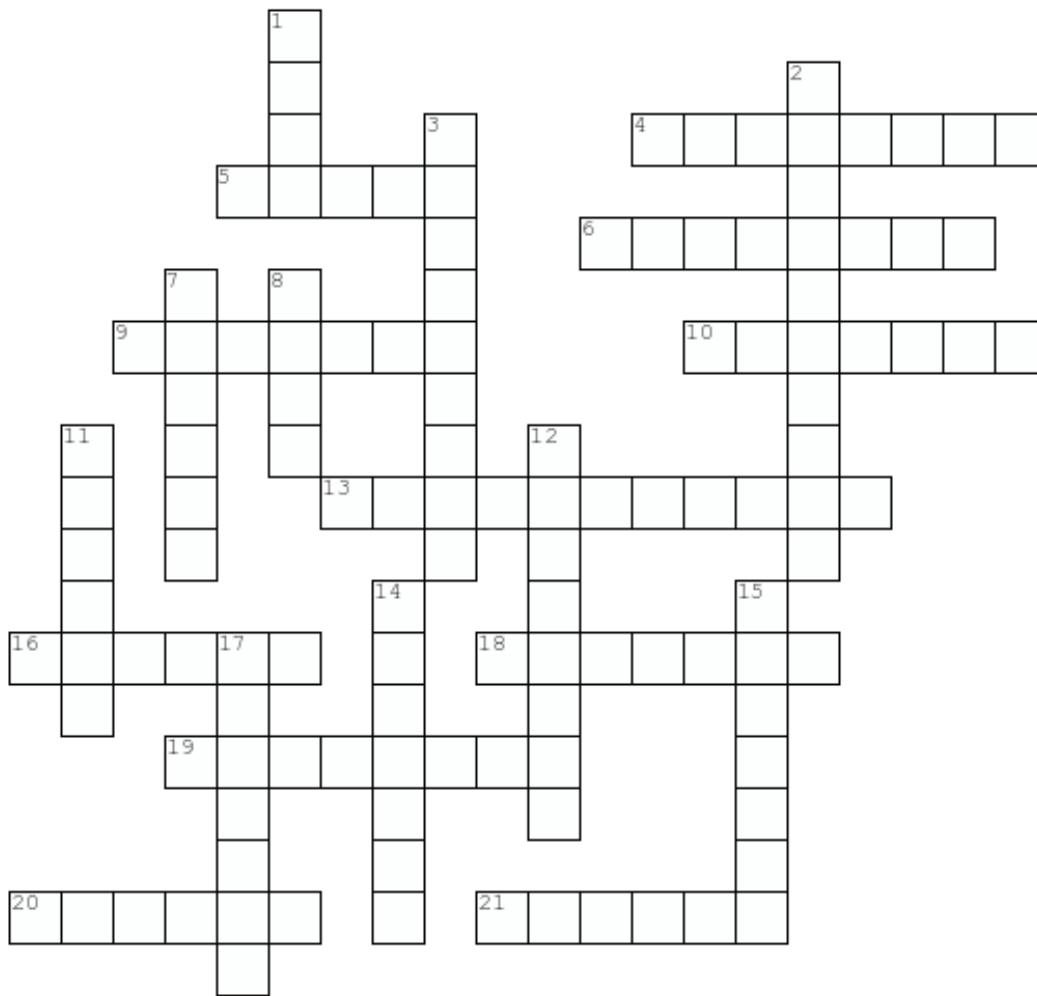
Josiah's Reforms

While Manasseh's son was as bad, God worked something wonderful in the life of his grandson, Josiah. He became king at eight-years old and he was a king that would walk in the ways of the Lord. How did the reform begin? In cleaning out the Temple, the Word was found, read, and applied. How simple a solution that was (and is), but how radical an idea it is to most people -- even to those in the church today. People want to do what they want to do — hence idolatry. God commands us to submit to His authority and to obey. Josiah and the people did and God blessed them with reform and spiritual renewal in the land.

Another Litany of Bad Kings and the Fall of Judah

Unless one generation teaches truth to the next, it will fall back into idolatry and that is what happened. The final chapters of this book remain rather sad with the enemies of God encroaching more and more on Jerusalem until finally Jerusalem fell and the Temple was destroyed. As grim as these chapters are, though, they end with a bit of hope as Jehoiachin, one of the former kings of Judah, was freed from prison and invited to dine at the table of the Babylonian king — a sign of great mercy to him and a reminder that in God's timing (70 years), all of Israel would be freed from their Babylonian exile.

Week 13: 2 Kings



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Across

4. This southern king built a conduit to bring water from the Spring of Gihon into Jerusalem.
5. This prophet shows up during the reign of Jeroboam II.
6. Josiah restored this festival as part of his reforms.
9. This wicked woman had her blood licked up by dogs.
10. This king only reigned one month in Israel before he was put to death.
13. The King of Assyria that tried to conquer Jerusalem and failed,
16. This Syrian general was plagued by leprosy which Elisha healed.
18. This king fell through the lattice work of the upper chamber and was mortally injured in the fall.
19. This quick-thinking priest saved Joash from being killed by his grandmother.
20. This prophet will come to Hezekiah's aide when he fears destruction.
21. Elijah crossed this river before God took him to heaven.

Down

1. Josiah dies in battle against this Pharaoh of Egypt.
2. This Judean king was given his freedom at the end of the book.
3. God took Elijah to heaven in a _____.
7. The name of Elisha's selfish assistant.
8. If there ever were a candidate for a 'good king' of the northern kingdom of Israel it would be him.
11. The godly king who descended from two godless kings.
12. The boys of Bethel taunted Elisha by calling him this (2 words).
14. The sons of the prophets from this town first recognized Elisha as Elijah's successor.
15. When Judah falls, the people are taken to this region for 70 years of exile.
17. Elisha made this float (2 words).