



**2 KINGS 8-15 ELIJAH'S PROPHECIES, ISRAEL'S DECLINE & ELISHA'S DEATH**

We now enter the period when Elijah's final prophecies are fulfilled about the destruction of Ahab's descendants (the Omrid dynasty, starting with Ahab's father, king Omri). Also, according to the prophecy, new rulers in Israel and Syria will arise.

Unfortunately, the kings of the house of Israel continue to be very unrighteous and are morally sinking even lower. One noticeable trend, as Israel degenerates, is the increasing violence and number of assassinations of rulers. It reminds us somewhat of today, as society morally degenerates, there is increase in crime, graft and political corruption.

Although Ahab has died, Jezebel, his wicked wife still wields great influence in both northern Israel and Judah through her children who have become its rulers. Her son, Jehoram of Israel, had taken over the throne and one of her daughters had married another Jehoram, the king of Judah. The cult of Baal is thriving again.

Because of this increasing wickedness, God can no longer hope or wait for Israel to repent despite the work of his prophets Elijah, Elisha and others. He begins to act powerfully and causes a seven year drought as punishment. Next, he raises up Jehu, one of Ahab's generals, to eliminate Ahab's dynasty and also Hazael, a Syrian ruler, to greatly punish Israel.

When the seven-year drought begins, Elisha warns the widow of the child that was resurrected to leave the land for those seven years. So, she moved to Philistine territory and after that period ended, she returned home, but found it illegally occupied. So she went to plead with the king to have her property restored. Incredibly, as she arrived at the palace, king Jeroram of Israel was speaking with Gehazi, Elisha's leprous servant, and asking him to relate all of Elisha's great miracles. This reminds us that Elisha had a good working relationship with the kings of Israel and Judah. As Gehazi narrated the story of the resurrection of the widow's son, to his surprise, she and her son were ushered in! Gehazi then tells the king these were the very people he was talking about. The king was so impressed he restored all of her property and even gave her the equivalent of all the produce of her land for those seven years (2 Kings 8:6). The purpose of this account is to corroborate some of Elisha's miracles with a genuine testimony from the king himself that was recorded at that time.

Meanwhile, Elisha had traveled to Damascus, Syria, to prophesy about the coming new ruler that would greatly afflict Israel. When king Benhadad, who was gravely sick, heard Elisha was there, he sent presents to him and wanted to know if he would be healed. He sent his messenger, Hazael, to Elisha for the answer and Elisha told him the king would get well, but then would die anyways. He also told Hazael that he would be the next king and would do Israel great harm.

Hazael could hardly believe it, and delivered the message to the king about being healed, but left out the other part of the prophecy, for he had mulled over what Elisha said and knowing the king would get well, his political ambitions got the best of him. So the next day, he smothered the king with a wet cloth during his sleep and then became the ruler. He thus fulfilled the prophecy that Benhadad would ultimately die, but not of the disease (2 K. 18:15).

Hazael turned out to be a mighty king, and both kings of Israel feared him. So they made an alliance to defeat him before he got stronger, but they were defeated and Jehoram of Israel was seriously wounded. Later, Ahaziah, king of Judah, went to visit him, for he was related to Ahab's kin.

It was at this time that God intervened. He told Elisha to send one of his disciples to anoint general Jehu as the new king and ordered him to avenge all the blood of the righteous that had perished under Ahab and Jezebel dynasty. Jehu was a vigorous warrior, and after being anointed, all of his officers backed him up against Jehoram, the king of Israel. So he assembled his men and headed toward Jezreel where the wounded Jehoram was recovering.

When the watchman in the tower saw Jehu and his troops coming, upon being notified, the king was frightened and rounded up what troops he had, along with king Ahaziah's men. But they were roundly defeated and *both kings* were killed in the battle.

When Jezebel heard of the defeat, she still thought she could seduce Jehu and she fixed herself up. But the ruse didn't work and she was thrown by her attendants down to the floor below. The dogs ate most of her body before she could even be buried. Then Jehu said, "This is the word of the Lord which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'On the plot at Jezreel dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as refuse

on the surface of the field in the plot of Jezreel, so that they shall not say, here lies Jezebel” (2 K. 9:36-37). Amazingly, this patio in Jezreel where Jezebel died has been discovered by archaeologists.

After the news that Jehu had killed both kings of Israel, he sent a message ordering the officials in Samaria, the capital, to kill all of Ahab’s seventy sons or they would all die. They were so terrified of Jehu that they sent him the heads of Ahab’s seventy sons. Thus was fulfilled Elijah’s prophecy about the sons of Ahab being totally destroyed (2 K. 10:10).

Then, on the way to Samaria, he met a delegation from Judah that had no idea what had happened. They were brothers of king Ahaziah from Judah that had come to see all of Ahab’s kin. He killed all 42 of them and thus stamped out many of these followers of Baal through their relative Jezebel. Once he arrived in Samaria, he killed the rest of Ahab’s family and then devised a clever ruse to stamp out the Baalism there. He acted as if he was a great follower of Baal and invited all the followers of Baal to a great ceremony at their temple. Then, he killed them all.

The Bible says, “Then they broke down the sacred image of Baal, and tore down the temple of Baal and made it a refuse dump to this day. Thus Jehu destroyed Baal from Israel. However, Jehu did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin, that is, from the golden calves that were at Bethel and Dan. And the Lord said to Jehu, ‘Because you have done well in doing right in My sight, and have done to the house of Ahab all that was in My heart, your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.’ But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart, for he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, who made Israel sin. In those days the Lord began to cut off parts of Israel; and Hazael conquered them in all the territory of Israel...So Jehu rested with his fathers, and they buried him in Samaria” (2 Ki. 10:27-35).

Interestingly, Jehu’s name appears in the Assyrian annals as having paid tribute to Shalmaneser III. Since he was the ruler of “the house of Omri” as the Assyrians called Israel, he is called, “Jehu, the son of Omri” in the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser.

Meanwhile, in Judah, after king Ahaziah died, we still see the ruthlessness of Ahab’s lineage, since instead of one of his sons taking over, his mother Athaliah, Ahab’s sister, took the throne and killed all of the successors except one, the infant Joash, who

was hidden in God’s temple for seven years. Her rule was so wicked that after seven years, Jehoiada, the high priest brought the child prince out and she was killed. The Bible says, “So all the people of the land rejoiced and the city was quiet, for they had slain Athaliah with the sword in the king’s house” (2 K. 11:20). Joash then began a fairly righteous rule of forty years, especially as long as Jehoiada the high priest was alive. Later he did allow some Baalism to exist. Toward the end of his rule, king Hazael of Syria invaded Israelite territory and went as far south as Jerusalem. Joash had to pay a very heavy tribute, stripping the temple of gold, to spare Jerusalem, and Hazael then returned to Damascus. Afterwards, Joash was assassinated and his son, Amaziah took over.

In the north, Jehu’s son, Jehoahaz, assumed the throne and was a wicked king, so God punished them, allowing Hazael to conquer much of the land. But, in his distress, he prayed to God and was heard. After all, he was still Jehu’s son. So Hazael, afraid of a pending Assyrian invasion, returned home, and the house of Israel had some peace, although its army had been decimated (2 K. 13:7). Jehoahaz died and his son, Jehoash, took over.

It was at this time that Elisha became gravely ill and the king of Israel went to visit him. This shows that Elisha, although he had denounced all the sins of Israel, was still diplomatic enough to have been respected and appreciated by the kings of Israel. Jehoash truly lamented Elisha’s illness and proclaimed, “Oh, my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and their horsemen! (2 K. 13:14). *The K & D Commentary* explains, “Just as Elisha had mourned over the departure of Elijah with those words (2 K. 2:12), this lamentation of the king at the approaching death of the prophet shows that he knew how to value his labors [as the protector of Israel.] And on account of this faith, the Lord gave the king a gracious assurance through the dying Elisha, which was confirmed by means of a symbolical action.”

Elisha, under God’s inspiration, told the king to shoot an arrow toward the east, telling him this represented his future victories against Syria. Then he told him to strike some arrows on the ground. The king did this, but only three times. Elisha then scolded him for his lack of vigor, for this symbolized how many times he would have defeated the Syrians. This shows the importance of enthusiastically doing and backing God’s work.

Elisha's final miracle strangely took place--after he was dead! He died and was buried and later, they were burying a man close by when a band of raiders came so they had to throw the corpse inside Elisha's grave. Incredibly, when the dead man's body touched Elisha's bones, he was resurrected! (2 K. 13:21).

In Judah, king Amaziah was a righteous king, as his father Joash had been, and God blessed his rule. He defeated the Edomites and took over Sela, their capital (known also as Petra). But with the victory, he became haughty and decided to attack the house of Israel. King Jehoash warned him, but he foolishly went ahead and was defeated. So Jehoash became the first ruler to conquer Jerusalem, and he plundered God's temple. Amaziah survived but was eventually assassinated and his son Azariah became king. He reigned for 52 years and was a righteous king, although he contracted leprosy toward the end of his rule and after his death, his son Jotham began to rule.

In the north, king Jeroboam II took over after his father Jehoash died and he was a mighty king that defeated the Syrians and conquered Damascus. God gave him favor, for, although he was not a righteous king, the Syrians had been very ruthless against Israel. After his death, his son Zechariah took over.

Things really deteriorated in the house of Israel after this. Zechariah was assassinated only after reigning for six months. This was the fourth generation of Jehu that had ruled, just as God had predicted (2 K. 15:12). Shallum, his killer, then took over the throne for only a month before he in turn was killed by Menahem, who avenged Zechariah. He ruled for ten years and was a wicked king.

God had had enough, and with Menahem, His protection of Israel ended. As Isaiah prophesied during this time, God would use mighty Assyria as His rod to punish Israel (Isaiah 10:5).

The Assyrians Empire began to reach northern Israel, and Pul, the Assyrian king suddenly arrived. "Pul, king of Assyria came against the land and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to strengthen the kingdom under his control. And Menahem exacted the money from Israel, from all the very wealthy, from each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and did not stay there in the land" (2 K. 15:19-20).

Pul is the Babylonian name for the Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.). He is mentioned nine times in the Bible and is depicted in his murals

at his palace in Calah, Assyria. There, he refers to several of the kings of Israel, such as Menahem and Pekah. Both the Iran Stele and his own annals mention "Menahem of Samaria" paid him tribute in his eighth year, approximately 738 B.C.

*The Archaeological Bible* states, "Menahem's tribute to Tiglath-Pileser III was 1,000 talents, amounting to a tax of 50 shekels from each of 60,000 men of middle and upper class status. The data give us some idea of the population at that time. Fifty shekels, the price of a slave in Assyria, indicates the status of Israel before Assyria. A similar tribute was exacted from Pekah and by Sennacherib from Hezekiah." So they paid a tribute equivalent to the price of an Assyrian slave to redeem themselves.

The assassinations continue in northern Israel. After Menahem died, his son, the wicked Pekahiah ruled for two years and was killed by his officer, Pekah, who began to rule. He allied himself with the Syrians against Assyria. In 732 B.C., some four years after his first military campaign against Israel, Tiglath-Pileser III came to punish the anti-Assyrian coalition and this time was not content to exact tribute. He conquered most of upper Israel. The Bible tells us, "He took Ijon, Abel Beth Maachah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and he carried them captive to Assyria. Then Hosea the son of Elah led a conspiracy against Pekah...and struck and killed him, so he reigned in his place" (2 K. 15:29-30). This was the beginning of the deportation of the house of Israel.

In the meantime, king Jotham of Judah had a righteous rule of sixteen years, but did not remove the high places dedicated to Baal. The Bible mentions God sent the Syrian king Rezin and king Pekah of Israel to punish Judah for its sins as well (2 K. 15:37). As we can see, the handwriting is on the wall for northern Israel, and from now on, it's all downhill because of their corruption and sins. It's a lesson for this country as well, as it sinks lower into corruption and sin. Remember, God does not change and his longsuffering does have a limit.