

Lecture #19 – Exposition of II Kings 3-8

Chapter 3 – Jehoram’s Reign

vs. 1-3 – Overview of Jehoram’s Reign Over Israel – 896 B.C.

Jehoram (“whom Jehovah has exalted”)¹. He was not a good king by any stretch but was an improvement in some ways from Ahab and Ahaziah in that he seems to have rejected the idol worship of Baal and restored the corrupted worship established by Jeroboam.

Knapp writes of his character:

“His character was neither strong, nor very marked in anything. He appears to have had leanings toward the worship of Jehovah, but as a patron rather than in heart-subjection to Him as the one true God of Heaven and earth. He evidently considered Elisha’s miracles as matters of speculation, in idle curiosity inquiring of the prophet’s disgraced servant Gehazi. ‘And the king talked with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, Tell me, I pray thee, all the great things that Elisha hath done.’ These marvelous signs of Jehovah were to him merely material for entertainment, as the miracles of Elisha’s great antitype (John the Baptist) were to Herod (see Mark 6:14, 20; Luke 9:9; 23:8). He counseled Jehoram king of Judah to his destruction (2 Chron. 22:4-5). Such was his unpopularity with his subjects that Jehu had little difficulty in effecting a revolution, and usurping his throne.

“He appears to have been, in spiritual matters, one of those undecided, neutral characters who puzzle most observers, and who never seem to know themselves just where they stand or belong. He put away the Baal statue made by his father Ahab, but never became a real believer in Jehovah. The reading of the inspired record of his life leaves the impression on one’s mind that he was, in all matters of faith, both skeptical and superstitious. God, who knew him and his ways perfectly, has caused it to be recorded of him, ‘He wrought evil in the sight of the Lord.’ As such, we and all posterity know him. And as such he will be revealed in the coming day, when great and small shall stand before the throne to be judged, ‘every man, according to his works.’”²

vs. 4-20 – Preparing for War Against Moab

When the kingdom divided, the client states of Moab and Edom were divided also. Judah controlled Edom, and Israel controlled Moab. Sensing weakness after the death of Ahab and his defeat at the hands of the Syrian, Moab rebels under the leadership of Mesha³ (“freedom”)⁴

¹ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

² <https://bibletruthpublishers.com/the-kings-of-judah-and-israel/c-knapp/lbd1021> - accessed 11-3-2022

³ An artifact known as the “Moabite Stone” or the “Mesha Stele” has been found that is inscribed with a history of Mesha’s exploits. The text can be found at <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/onet/320-the-stela-of-mesha/>

⁴ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

An alliance of the kings of Israel (Jehoram), Judah (Jehoshaphat), and Edom (an unnamed client king, I Kings 22:47) gather their troops and sweep around south into Edom to attack Moab from an unexpected direction. The combined armies find themselves in the arid territory without water.

At Jehoshaphat's insistence, the prophet Elisha is brought in. Elisha's spirit is stirred in agitation at the presence of the wicked Jehoram, and even though he would prophesy for Jehoshaphat he was in no state to do so. Gaebelein writes:

“But there was also a rebuke for the good King of Judah. The Spirit of God was grieved and Elisha had not the power of prophecy. He needed a minstrel first to calm his own agitated spirit and get into the condition of soul to utter the needed message. How it should have humbled the king, who served Jehovah, that after calling for a prophet of the LORD, the divine mouthpiece was unable to prophesy at once! Unholy alliances hindered the manifestation of the Spirit of God. Such is the case almost everywhere in our days of departure from the truth of God.”⁵

The direction from God is to fill the dry valley with ditches. Water would come sweeping through the valley without warning and fill these prepared retainers with the needed water. This appears to have occurred by rain pouring higher in the hills that gathered and flowed swiftly through the valley. This phenomenon is not unheard of still today, but the fact the prophet knew it was coming and they prepared to catch the water was the truly miraculous part of this.

Carroll writes on the miraculous supply of water:

“It was a miracle in the sense that he foresaw how that water would come from rain in the mountains. I have seen that very thing happen. Away off in the mountains there may be rain – one can't see it nor hear it from where he is in the valley. The river bed is as dry as a powder horn, and it looks as if there never will be any rain. I was standing in a river bed in West Texas once, heard a roaring, looked up and saw a wave coming down that looked to me to be about ten feet high – the first wave – and it was carrying rocks before it that seemed as big as a house, and rolling them just as one would roll a marble. So his miracle consisted in his knowledge of that storm which they could not see nor hear. If they had not dug the trenches they would have still had no water for a mountain torrent is very swift to fall. In that place where I was, in fifteen minutes there was a river, and in two or three hours it had all passed away. But the trenches of Elisha were filled from the passing flood.”⁶

Note how the time is described in vs. 20 – “when the meat offering was offered”. This would be shortly after sunrise.

⁵ Annotated Bible by A.C. Gaebelein. E-Sword module.

⁶ An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Divided Kingdom and Restoration Period, by B.H. Carroll. p. 98

vs. 21-27 – Moab Defeated

The timing of the miracle is even more astounding when we see that it timed with the arrival of the Moabite army. The Moabites see the son reflecting off the pools of water and think that it is blood from a fight between the three kings. They are not expecting any resistance when they approach the camp and are driven from the field.

The land of Moab is razed by the allied armies. Not only are the armies defeated, but the resources of the land broken and destroyed.

The final refuge for the Moabites was the fortified town of Kirharaseth (“brick fortress”)⁷. Mesha attempts to flee with 700 soldiers but is unable to break through the siege.

Verse 27 has caused some discussion. Whose “eldest son”. Some say the king of the Edomites, but this seems unlikely since that is an appointed position (I Kings 22:47) and would likely harden the resolve of the attackers. Some point to Amos 2:1 as proof that it was the Edomite’s son, but Amos refers to a “king” and the burning of his “bones” which sounds like a different event. The best explanation is that it was the son of Mesha, king of Moab. He is offering up a human sacrifice of his own son to his god. The powerful effect of this sacrifice is either in its display of resolve to fight on or in its presumed power as a sacrifice.⁸

Chapter 4 – Elisha’s Ministry

vs. 1-7 – The Widow’s Oil

A widow of one of the sons of the prophets is in distress over a debt that must be repaid. The creditor is prepared to exercise his right to take her sons into bond service to pay the debt (see Leviticus 25:39-42).

On the type of oil used, the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges states:

“The word may be noticed because it indicates the poverty of the widow. It was not the finest oil, such as would be used for cooking food, that she had, but the more common kind which every Oriental makes use of after a bath.”⁹

While there seems to be nothing untoward about the debt, it is a great reminder of the dangers of debt in a preacher’s life.¹⁰ Carroll comments:

⁷ Smith’s Bible Dictionary. Also appears in Isaiah 15:1 as Kir of Moab, in Isaiah 16:7 as Kirhareseth, and in Isaiah 16:11 as Kiharesh.

⁸ On this last option, see *Israel: From Conquest to Exile* by John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb, p. 242.

⁹ https://biblehub.com/commentaries/2_kings/4-2.htm - accessed 11-4-2022

¹⁰ See Proverbs 22:7

“The influence of a preacher is handicapped to a painful degree, when, from any cause, he fails to meet his financial obligations promptly. In a commercial age this handicap becomes much more serious.”¹¹

vs. 8-17 – The Shunammite Woman’s Son

Shunem (“double resting-place”)¹² was a village a few miles north of Jezreel on the southwestern side of Mount Moreh. As Elisha travelled by this village a wealthy woman was moved to bless the prophet. She had an addition added to their home to give him a room to stay in when he travelled through. This room was furnished with not just a bed but also a table and chair so that the prophet could stay and work.¹³

Note vs. 13 where Elisha says that he has the power to speak to the king and general on behalf of the woman. The place of the prophets has elevated significantly.

God rewards the kindness paid to Elisha by giving the woman a son.

vs. 18-37 – The Raising of the Shunammite Woman’s Son

Chronologically there may be a jump in time here. The story and others are likely placed here thematically as the miracles of Elisha grouped together. Reese estimates the boy is now grown to 20 years of age¹⁴, but that does cause some chronological issues.¹⁵

Most commentators believe that the unnamed son suffered a sun stroke.¹⁶

The woman travels around 20 miles to reach Elisha at Carmel. Elisha’s servant Gehazi (“valley of vision”)¹⁷ is sent ahead but the boy is dead.¹⁸ Gehazi has not the spiritual power to help.

Davis writes:

“Somehow, the Shunammite woman knew that Gehazi lacked the depth of faith that Elisha possessed. And so, hurrying to Mt. Carmel (ten miles¹⁹ to the west) where she and others had received from Elisha systematic instruction in God's Word in times past, she insisted on seeing the prophet himself in her hour of deepest need (II Kings 4:24, 27, 30). Gehazi, whose spiritual shallowness was later fully exposed (II Kings 5), was completely helpless in the presence of death,

¹¹ An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Divided Kingdom and Restoration Period, by B.H. Carroll. p. 114

¹² Smith’s Bible Dictionary

¹³ Ever wonder where we get the term “prophet’s chamber” from

¹⁴ The Reese Chronological Study Bible, p. 648

¹⁵ See notes on II Kings 8:1-6.

¹⁶ So says Barnes, Carroll, Gill, and Poole.

¹⁷ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

¹⁸ This is the meaning of “not awaked”, see also vs. 20.

¹⁹ Every other resource I consulted said around 20 miles.

even with Elisha's equipment and methods at his disposal. This is an exceedingly important point. God is a glorious Person, and cannot be manipulated by sinful man under any circumstances.

“Doubtless remembering Elijah's explanation to him of how God had raised the widow's son at Zarephath (I Kings 17), Elisha demanded privacy and time for fervent prayer. Elijah had stretched himself three times upon the dead child before God granted life. But Elisha did this only twice, and after the first time he could detect warmth returning to the boy's flesh.

“Why God directed Elijah and Elisha to employ such methods we cannot know; but it is emphatically clear that God, not the methods, brought life. But great as these miracles were, we cannot help but contrast them with the simplicity and majesty of our Lord's work of raising the dead: a mere word (Lazarus and the widow of Nain's son) or touch of the hand (Jairus' daughter).”²⁰

vs. 38-41 – Healing the Deadly Stew

One of the sons of the prophets makes a mistake and puts a dangerous gourd into their pottage. The type of gourd that was used in the poisonous pottage was likely the *Citrullus colocynthis*, which is known by many names including colocynth, bitter apple, or bitter cucumber. It has been used for centuries in medicine, usually used topically on the skin but sometimes ingested. WebMD states of the side effects of ingesting colocynth:

“Taking even small amounts of colocynth can cause severe irritation of the stomach and intestine lining, bloody diarrhea, kidney damage, bloody urine, and inability to urinate. Other side effects include convulsions, paralysis, and death. There have been reports of death following ingestion of less than 2 grams of the powder. In clinical trials, mild diarrhea has been reported with as little as 300 mg of colocynth powder.”²¹

Elisha has them put flour into the pottage and it is made wholesome. While adding flour might make a small difference in the bitter flavor, this transformation is truly miraculous.

Carroll writes:

“I once took that as the text for a sermon on ‘Theological Seminaries and Wild Gourds,’ showing that the power of seminaries depends much on the kind of food the teachers give them. If they teach them that the story of Adam and Eve is an allegory, then they might just as well make the second Adam an allegory, for his mission is dependent on the failure of the first. If they teach them the radical criticism; if they teach anything that takes away from inspiration and infallibility of the divine Word of God or from any of its great doctrines – then, ‘O man of God, there is death in the pot’ – that will be a sick seminary.”²²

²⁰ Israel: From Conquest to Exile by John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb. p. 411.

²¹ <https://www.webmd.com/vitamins/ai/ingredientmono-798/colocynth> - accessed 11-4-22

²² An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Divided Kingdom and Restoration Period, by B.H. Carroll. p. 115 I very badly want to get my hands on a copy of this sermon. It was published in a sermon book titled “Christian Education and Some Social Issues.” Published in 1948. The few copies I have found have been a little out of my price range.

vs. 42-44 – Miraculous Meal

Davis writes:

“Soon afterwards a believer from a nearby town brought the first recorded ‘seminary offering’ – an inadequate supply in the form of barley loaves and grain. Gehazi revealed his typical lack of faith (cf. II Kings 4:27; 6:15), but God chose to multiply the offering and thus to anticipate the far greater miracle of our Lord beside the Sea of Galilee. Little things become great when they are dedicated to God.”²³

Chapter 5 – Elisha and Naaman

This event is also further along chronologically but placed here thematically. Reese dates it to 875 B.C.²⁴ See II Kings 10:29-33 for probable setting.

vs. 1-7 – Naaman’s Need

Evidently lepers were not the societal outcasts in Syria as they were in Israel. Naaman (“pleasantness”)²⁵ maintains his position as general in the Syrian army. Carroll thinks that he had gained favor in defending against Assyrian incursions.²⁶

The gift that is sent with Naaman is 10 talents of silver (\$220,635),²⁷ 6,000 shekels²⁸ of gold (\$4,032,340),²⁹ and ten changes of clothes.³⁰

The king of Israel is unnamed but is perhaps Jehu.³¹ This would make sense that he does not know of Elisha since he has not had experience with him.

²³ Israel: From Conquest to Exile by John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb. p. 409

²⁴ The Reese Chronological Study Bible, p. 649

²⁵ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

²⁶ An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Divided Kingdom and Restoration Period, by B.H. Carroll. p. 119

²⁷ 10,582 ounces according to <https://www.convertunits.com/from/talents/to/ounce> and silver valued at \$20.85 per ounce on 11-4-22.

²⁸ We assume shekel would be the common weight used in such a situation.

²⁹ 2,413 ounces according to <https://www.unitconverters.net/weight-and-mass/shekel-biblical-hebrew-to-ounce.htm> and valued at \$1,671.09 on 11-4-22.

³⁰ A common gift, see Genesis 41:42, Esther 6:8, Daniel 5:7

³¹ At least according to Reese’s chronology.

vs. 8-14 – Naaman’s Healing

Whatever Naaman’s expectations were (and they would have pluralistic and pagan), nothing about the encounter goes the way Naaman expects. Elisha communicates with him through a messenger. No dramatic miracle. Just a command to go and dip in the Jordan River seven times. Naaman finally submits to the command after his servants intercede.

vs. 15-27 – Gehazi’s Folly

Though Elisha refused any payment or honor for aiding Naaman, but Gehazi’s greed causes him to chase after Naaman and take a reward dishonestly. Gehazi received two garments and two talents of silver.³² For his greed and dishonesty, Gehazi receives Naaman’s leprosy as judgement.

On the request of “two mules’ burden of earth”, Poole writes:

“...wherewith I may make an altar of earth, as was usual, Exodus 20:24. He desires the earth of this land, because he thought it more holy and acceptable to God, and proper for his service; or because he would by this token profess and declare his conjunction with the Israelites in the worship of God, and constantly put himself in mind of his great obligations to that God from whose land this was taken. And though he might freely have taken this earth without asking any leave, yet he rather desires it from the prophet’s gift, as believing that he who had put so great a virtue into the waters of Israel, could put as much into the earth of Israel, and make it as useful and beneficial to him in a better way. And these thoughts, though extravagant and groundless, yet were excusable in a heathen and a novice, who was not yet thoroughly instructed in the true religion.”³³

Chapter 6 – Elisha’s Ministry

vs. 1-7 – The Swimming Axe head

The school of the prophets was growing, and a new location was planned. The students went out to cut lumber, and in the process a borrowed axe head flew off its handle and landed in the river.

The need is highlighted in that it was borrowed. We have already seen that these sons of the prophets were not wealthy by any stretch. In all likelihood the one that lost the axe head would have to work off his debt in replacing the cost of it.

As so often happens with Biblical miracles, a “sign” element is used that is not the cause of the miracle. The bitter waters of Mara could have been cleansed without tossing a tree into them, but God added a human element to the miracle (Exodus 15:25). So here, where Elijah casts in a stick, not to fetch

³² 1 talent is roughly 66 pounds or 1,058 ounces. Silver is around \$23 on 10-13-23, making this over \$24,000.

³³ Matthew Poole’s Commentary. E-Sword module.

the axe head but to draw attention to the miracle that was about to take place. The axe head was not caught, it swam up and was able to be retrieved.

vs. 8-23 – Deliverance from the Syrians – 891 B.C.

The Syrians are at war with Israel again. Multiple times Jehoram was delivered from Syrian attacks by warning from the prophet. The Syrian king sends a great force at night to capture Elisha at Dothan (“two wells”).³⁴

The next morning the town awoke to find themselves surrounded by the Syrian forces. Elisha’s servant (Gehazi?) panicked and ran to his master with the news. Elisha prayed that the servant’s eyes to be opened, and then he saw the angelic forces that had the Syrians surrounded. God was in control and Psalm 34:7 was proven true.

On the “blindness” that struck the Syrians, Gill writes:

“The word for ‘blindness’ is only used here [Genesis 19:11] and in II Kings 16:18, and denotes a peculiar sort of blindness; not an entire blindness with respect to every object, but only with regard to that they were intent upon; for otherwise they would not have continued about Lot's house, or fatigued themselves with searching for the door of it, but would rather have been glad to have groped to their own houses as well as they could: and thus it was with the Syrians, when they were smitten at the prayer of Elisha, it was not total, for they could follow the prophet in the way he went and led them, but they could not see their way to the place where they intended to go; and so these men of Sodom could see other objects, but not the door of Lot's house, their heads were so confused, and their imaginations so disturbed as in drunken men; or the medium of the visive faculty, the air, so altered, or the form of the object to be seen so changed, that they could not discern it; when they saw the door, it looked like the wall, and that which seemed to them to be the door, proved to be the wall”³⁵

Elisha leads the blinded Syrians into Samaria, some ten miles away. King Jehoram wanted very much to kill the prisoners³⁶. Instead, Elisha told him to “kill them with kindness” by feeding them and letting them go.

This humiliating loss by the Syrians caused them to stop sending raiding parties into Israel. As we will see in the next section, the next invasion would be massive.

³⁴ Smith’s Bible Dictionary.

³⁵ John Gill’s Exposition of the Bible on Genesis 19:11. E-Sword module.

³⁶ Emphasis in Hebrew is shown by doubling a word or phrase, as we see in the two “smites” of vs. 21.

vs. 24-33 – Benhadad's Siege of Samaria – 891 B.C.

Benhadad II returns with his mighty army and besieges Samaria. It was a time of famine, so food was scarce to begin with. As the siege wore on, food became extremely scarce. The head of a donkey – the least desirable part of the least desirable animal – was sold for 80 shekels, or \$668.³⁷ A quarter of a *cab*³⁸ (roughly 1 cup) of “dove’s dung”³⁹ sold for 5 shekels, or \$42.⁴⁰ Jehoram finally breaks down when he hears two women discussing eating their own babies.

Jehoram blames Elisha and God for their misfortune and pledges to kill the prophet. God warns Elijah of the king’s plan. The messenger that was sent is halted at the door until the king arrives. The last words of vs. 33 appear to be the king’s words, even if delivered from the messenger. He blames God for what is happening and says he cannot wait any longer for God to move.

Chapter 7 – The Deliverance of Samaria

vs. 1-20 – The Deliverance of Samaria – 891 B.C.

Elijah declares that the siege will be lifted, and food will be abundant again. He proclaims that one *seab* (7 quarts) of fine flour and two *seabs* (14 quarts)⁴¹ of barley be sold for one *shekel*, or roughly \$8.34.⁴² A doubting aristocrat is told that he will see it happen but will not taste it.

Outside the city gate, four lepers make a desperate move to seek mercy from the Syrians. As they leave at dusk to go to the camp, God makes the Syrians hear an approaching army. The Syrians flee for their lives, and the lepers find the camp empty. When the lepers return with the news, scouts are sent out to verify. The doubting aristocrat is killed in the stampede of people rushing out to find food in the abandoned camp.

Carroll records this humorous anecdote illustrating how easily an army could be put to flight:

“I once saw sixteen steers put an army of 4,000 to flight, and I was one of the men. We were in a lane with a high fence on one side and a bayou on the other side, and suddenly, up the lane we heard the most awful clatter, and saw the biggest cloud of dust, and one of the men shouted, ‘The

³⁷ <https://www.unitconverters.net/weight-and-mass/shekel-biblical-hebrew-to-ounce.htm> - 80 shekels is about 32 ounces and silver at \$20.86 – calculated 11-6-22

³⁸ <https://www.gotquestions.org/biblical-weights-and-measures.html> - accessed 11-6-22 - 1/18 of an *ephah*, about 1 quart.

³⁹ Whether this was literally bird excrement or a type of plant is not completely clear. If literal dung, it could have been used for fuel or even eaten. There could have been a supply at hand as doves were often used in sacrifices. If a plant (carob beans? *Ornithogalum umbellatum*?), we must question how they gathered it or why they had it in storage. Honestly, the best evidence points to this being literal dung despite how our civilized sensitivities rebel at the thought.

⁴⁰ <https://www.unitconverters.net/weight-and-mass/shekel-biblical-hebrew-to-ounce.htm> - 5 shekels is about 2 ounces and silver at \$20.86 – calculated 11-6-22

⁴¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/biblical-weights-and-measures.html> and https://www.traditionaloven.com/conversions_of_measures/flour_volume_weight.html - accessed 11-7-22

⁴² <https://www.unitconverters.net/weight-and-mass/shekel-biblical-hebrew-to-ounce.htm> - accessed 11-7-22 - 1 shekel is about .4 ounces, and silver at \$20.86.

cavalry is on us! The cavalry is on us!’ and without thinking everybody got scared. A lot of the men were found standing in the bayou up to their necks, others had gone over the fence and clear across the field without stopping. I did not get that far, but I got over the fence.”⁴³

Chapter 8 – Jehoram and Ahaziah

vs. 1-6 – The Shunammite Woman’s Land Restored

Reese dates the famine as 893-886 B.C. and places this event between the birth of the Shunammite woman’s son and his raising from the dead.⁴⁴ However, this timing causes a problem in that Gehazi tells the king of the raising of the son, which Reese places in 875 B.C. Davis places the famine as the final years of the of Jehoram’s reign (~885 B.C.?) and identifies the king here as Jehu.⁴⁵

God arranged it so that the woman’s request was made just as Gehazi was telling the king their story. The king is moved to grant her request and restore her property.

vs. 7-15 – Elisha and Hazael

Elisha travels to Damascus where Benhadad II is sick. Hazael (“whom God sees”)⁴⁶ is sent to inquire of Elisha if he will recover. Elisha tells that Benhadad will recover but that Hazael will become king. He also prophesies the atrocities that Hazael will commit as king. Hazael takes matters into his own hands and assassinates Benhadad.

Smith’s Bible Dictionary says of his future reign:

“He was soon engaged in war with the kings of Judah and Israel for the possession of the city of Ramoth-gilead. Ibid. (2 Kings 8:28) Towards the close of the reign of Jehu, Hazael led the Syrians against the Israelites (about B.C. 860), whom he ‘smote in all their coasts,’ (2 Kings 10:32) thus accomplishing the prophecy of Elisha. Ibid. (2 Kings 8:12) At the close of his life, having taken Gath, ibid. (2 Kings 12:17) comp. Amos 6:2 he proceeded to attack Jerusalem, (2 Chronicles 24:24) and was about to assault the city when Joash bribed him to retire. (2 Kings 12:18) Hazael appears to have died about the year B.C. 840, (2 Kings 13:24) having reigned forty-six years.”⁴⁷

⁴³ Interpretation of the English Bible, E-sword module.

⁴⁴ The Reese Chronological Study Bible, p. 635

⁴⁵ Israel: From Conquest to Exile by John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb. p. 411.

⁴⁶ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

⁴⁷ <https://www.christianity.com/bible/dictionary/smiths-bible-dictionary/hazael.html> - accessed 11-7-22

vs. 16-24 – The Reign of Jehoram over Judah

↪ II Chronicles 21:4-11, 18-20

Yes, we have a Jehoram/Joram on the throne of Israel and a Jehoram/Joram on the throne of Judah. Two different kings, same name.

Jehoram was not a good king and walked in the ways of the wicked Ahab and not those of his good father, Jehoshaphat. Knapp comments: “He undid, so far as lay in his power, all the good work of his father, Jehoshaphat.”⁴⁸

Jehoram weakened Judah. Edom revolted and could not be quelled. Libnah,⁴⁹ an independent city-state near Philistia, also rebelled.

One of his wives is Athaliah (“afflicted of the Lord”)⁵⁰, daughter of Ahab,⁵¹ king of Israel. This marriage was presumably made to solidify the alliance between the houses of Omri and Jehoshaphat.

Jehoram died after a reign of only eight years and was succeeded by his son Ahaziah (“sustained by the Lord”)⁵². He appears to have been a co-regent for the first years of his reign (vs. 16).

vs. 25-29 – The Reign of Ahaziah over Judah

↪ II Chronicles 22:1-9

Ahaziah’s mother is Athaliah, who undoubtedly had a major influence on the boy. He was not a good king and followed the wicked pattern of Ahab.

He will meet his end while visiting his cousin, king Joram of Israel, who is recuperating from a battle wound at Jezreel.

⁴⁸ The Kings of Judah by C. Knapp. p. 67

⁴⁹ In recent years, archaeologists believe they have located this city at a site called Tel Burna. - <https://www.haaretz.com/archaeology/2015-02-08/ty-article/.premium/biblical-city-of-libnah-identified/0000017f-e491-d38f-a57f-e6d3559f0000> - accessed 11-7-22

⁵⁰ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

⁵¹ II Kings 8:18 says she is the daughter of Omri, which should be understood as granddaughter.

⁵² Smith’s Bible Dictionary.

Ahaziah – 22 or 42?

We come now to one of the most debated details in Scripture – the age of Ahaziah when he took the throne.

First, it must be stated that this is not a KJV issue, it is a Hebrew text issue. The Hebrew Masoretic text in II Kings 8:26 says twenty-two years and in II Chronicles 22:2 says forty-two years. To deny the forty-two years in I Chronicles is to deny the text and imagine a mistake was made.

There are other ancient translations that appear to have “corrected” the 42 to 22, including the Septuagint. I do not think this is evidence for an error, but rather that many before were like the critics of today and sought to “correct” perceived errors.

Second, it is frankly improbable that this is a copyist’s mistake. Below is an illustration of the mistake that is imagined having been made by a careless scribe.⁵³ The top word is “twenty” and the bottom is “forty”. This would not have been a simple mistake, like making an “O” a “Q”.

H6242 עשרים
H705 ארבעים

Third, there are many misrepresentations of the facts by those who claim there is a copyist mistake here. For instance, it is often stated that these numbers are reckoned using numerical letter values. Thus כ (kaf = 20) and מ (mem = 40) are mistaken for each other. But the text is not using this system and instead spells out the words as seen above.

Another instance is an insistence that Ahaziah’s father Jehoram died at the age of 40, those making it impossible for Ahaziah to ascend the throne at age 42. However, the text never explicitly states how old Jehoram was when he died. It states that Jehoram was 32 when began to reign and reigned for 8 years “in Jerusalem” (II Kings 8:17, II Chronicles 21:5&20). It is therefore assumed that those 8 years begin when he is 32, but that does not have to be the case if there was a coregency between Jehoram and Jehoshaphat before an 8-year solo rule.

Fourth, while I cannot find one conclusive solution to this conundrum, there are multiple theories that are quite possible.

Matthew Poole notes two possible solutions based on the idiomatic language found in II Chronicles 22:2, these being either the 42 years as the age of Ahaziah’s mother Athaliah or the age of Omri’s dynasty:

“In the Hebrew it is, *a son of forty-two years*, &c., which is an ambiguous phrase; and though it doth for the most part, yet it doth not always, signify the age of the person, as is manifest from 1 Samuel 13:1, See Poole ‘1 Samuel 13:1’. And therefore it is not necessary that this should note his age (as it is generally presumed to do, and that is the only ground of the difficulty); but it may note either,

⁵³ Made with screenshots from E-sword module “Hebrew Old Testament (Tanach) w/ Strong’s Numbers”.

“1. The age of his mother Athaliah; who being so great, and infamous, and mischievous a person to the kingdom and royal family of Judah, it is not strange if her age be here described, especially seeing she herself did for a season sway this sceptre. Or rather,

“2. Of the reign of that royal race and family from which by his mother he was descended, to wit, of the house of Omri, who reigned six years, 1 Kings 16:23; Ahab his son reigned twenty-two years, 1 Kings 16:29; Ahaziah his son two years, 1 Kings 22:51; Joram his son twelve years, 2 Kings 3:1; all which, put together, make up exactly these forty-two years; for Ahaziah began his reign in Joram’s twelfth year, 2 Kings 8:25. And such a kind of computation of the years, not of the king’s person, but of his reign or kingdom, we had before, 2 Chronicles 16:1, See Poole ‘2 Chronicles 16:1’. And so we have an account of the person’s age in 2 Kings 8:26, and here of the kingdom to which he belonged.”⁵⁴

The Trinitarian Bible Society has published a solution involving coregencies:

“Again, a number of scholars attribute the apparent discrepancy to a copyist’s error. We are unwilling to do this, particularly as this discrepancy can be reconciled. The Hebrew Masoretic Text has ‘forty-two’ in 2 Chronicles 22.2; and while only the original manuscript was ‘inspired’, God has, in His special providence, preserved the Holy Scriptures so that we do now possess faithful and authoritative copies.

“We must admit, of course, that there is a problem in reconciling these two Scriptures. In 2 Kings 8.17, we are told that Jehoram (Ahaziah’s father) was thirty-two when he became king, and that he died eight years later, *apparently* at the age of forty. Now if Jehoram was eighteen years old when he became a father, this would mean that Ahaziah would have been twenty-two years old when he succeeded his father on the throne of Judah. And that is what the inspired historian says in 2 Kings 8.26. But 2 Chronicles 22.2 states that Ahaziah was forty-two years old when he became king. If Jehoram died at forty and Ahaziah became king at forty-two, then Ahaziah appears to have been two years older than his father!

“There have been various explanations, but we will confine ourselves to just one of these. According to 2 Kings 8.17, Jehoram (the father) was thirty-two when he began to reign. This appears to have been as co-regent with Jehoshaphat, for note the wording of 8.16, ‘Jehoshaphat *being* then king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah began to reign’. If Jehoram, at thirty-two, was co-regent with Jehoshaphat for twenty years, and then sole monarch for another eight years – and Scripture says that ‘he reigned eight years in Jerusalem’ (8.17) – this would mean that he died at the age of sixty (and *not* forty).

“Now this brings us to Ahaziah. Let us suppose that he was admitted to co-regency when he was twenty-two years old (as in 2 Kings 8.26) and that he continued in his office as co-regent for twenty years, he would then have begun to reign *alone* in his father’s sixtieth year, when he himself was forty-two years old – exactly as we have it stated in 2 Chronicles 22.2.

“Co-regency was a common practice in Israel ever since the time of David, who used it to ensure the succession of Solomon (1 Kings 1.29ff). If we take it into account here, we are able satisfactorily to harmonize 2 Kings 8.26 and 2 Chronicles 22.2.

⁵⁴ https://biblehub.com/commentaries/poole/2_chronicles/22.htm - accessed 10-13-23

“The explanation given above upholds the Masoretic Text and is perfectly reasonable. The believer in verbal inspiration always takes the position of faith: that is, he always tries to find an answer to a problem posed by the text of Holy Scripture. The believer does not immediately – or indeed after study – jump to the conclusion that there is an error in the text. Instead, he believes there is an answer to all these problems, even if he does not know the answer at that particular time. ‘The scripture cannot be broken’ (John 10.35).”⁵⁵

There is another, to me, less plausible theory that Ahaziah was not the actual son of Jehoram, but his stepson. This theory involves Athaliah being the daughter of Omri and not Ahab, and that Ahaziah was born to another husband before her marriage to Jehoram. This would account for the idea that he is older than his father, if Jehoram did indeed die at 40 and Ahaziah became king at 42. I do not think this is the best interpretation of all the Scriptural evidence.

Fifth, there are deep and convoluted ties between the Northern and Southern Kingdoms at this time that may not be possible to completely unravel. Evidence for this includes:

- In II Chronicles 18:1, it is noted that Jehoshaphat (Judah) enters an “affinity” with Ahab (Israel). This involves a marriage between Jehoshaphat’s son Jehoram and Ahab’s daughter Athaliah. This does not unite the kingdoms, but it does intertwine the ruling houses.
- In II Chronicles 20:35, Jehoshaphat is said to “join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel” (Ahab’s son). The nature of this arrangement is not clear except for a trading venture at Ezeiongeber.
- In II Chronicles 21:2, Jehoshaphat is said to be “king of Israel”. This is often taken as another “copyist’s error” but could use *Israel* generically for the Jewish people⁵⁶ or could be used literally of the Northern Kingdom. That latter option could reflect the alliance between the kingdoms.
- In II Kings 8:27, Ahaziah is said to be the “the son in law of the house of Ahab”. Poole comments: “He was the proper son of Athaliah, daughter of Ahab, and the grandson-in-law of Ahab, because his father was Ahab’s son-in-law”.⁵⁷ Most do not believe that he married someone of Ahab’s house, but that his relation was the son of his son-in-law. The one wife we are aware of is Zibiah (II Chronicles 24:1) but it is possible there could be more, perhaps even a daughter of Ahab.
- In I Kings 22:6, a “king’s son” named Joash is mentioned that some a few⁵⁸ is the same as Joash, king of Judah. The chronology does not seem to support this and most commentators state this is a different Joash.⁵⁹ This is a possible link, but I very doubtful.

⁵⁵ “Brief notes on 2 Samuel 15.7, 2 Kings 8.26 and 2 Chronicles 22.2” by the Rev. M. H. Watts from the Trinitarian Bible Society’s April-June 2004 *Quarterly Record*. Found at: <https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.tbsbibles.org/resource/collection/156A9AA2-2086-4C4E-BE0A-08A4508415DA/Brief-Notes-2-Samuel-2-Kings-2-Chronicles.pdf> - accessed 10-13-23

⁵⁶ So says Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers on this passage.

⁵⁷ Matthew Poole’s Commentary, E-Sword module.

⁵⁸ Ruckman, for example.

⁵⁹ Reese, Gill, and Barnes are examples.

These deep ties could make chronology difficult if, for instance, a prince was raised over a different kingdom for a time until they became king of another kingdom.

MY THEORY

I believe that both of Ahaziah's ages are correct but refer to different occasions of becoming a prince or king. He became a prince or co-ruler at 22 and then sole king at 42.

This theory depends on coregencies going back to at least into the reigns of Asa or Jehoshaphat. Let us look at the evidence from the reigns of the kings of Judah dating back to Rehoboam. Note the ages of when the heirs became king and lengths of their reigns.

- Rehoboam was 41 years old when he became king and reigned 17 years (I Kings 14:21, II Chronicles 12:13).
- Abijah/Abijam was 34 years old⁶⁰ when he became king and reigned 3 years (I Kings 15:1-2, II Chronicles 13:1-2).
- Asa was 18 years old⁶¹ when he became king and reigned 41 years (I Kings 15:9-11, II Chronicles 16:13-14)
- Jehoshaphat was 35 years old⁶² when he became king and reigned 25 years (I Kings 22:41-42, II Chronicles 20:21)
- Jehoram was 32 years old⁶³ when he became king and reigned eight years (I Kings 22:17,20; II Chronicles 21:5).
 - There is definitely a coregency between Jehoshaphat and Jehoram (II Kings 8:16). Reese says this is for 5 years on top of the 8 years, making 13 years total.

The coregency of Jehoram is key. It is unclear if the 8-year reign includes the coregency or not. This falls into the vagaries of chronological studies. I have found differing opinions on the matter. My theory is that it does not and those 8 years are the length of his reign as king.

So, is there a gap between Jehoram becoming coregent with his father and his solo reign of eight years? I believe there is. Gill quotes Lightfoot saying that there are possibly *three* ways to calculate the beginning of his reign:

“...according to Dr. Lightfoot, there were three beginnings of his reign; ‘first’, when his father went with Ahab to Ramothgilead, when he was left viceroy, and afterwards his father reassumed the kingdom; the ‘second’ time was, when Jehoshaphat went with the kings of Israel and Edom

⁶⁰ Reese estimates that Rehoboam was 24 at his son's birth.

⁶¹ Reese estimate that Abijam was 19 at his son's birth.

⁶² Reese estimates that Asa was 24 at his son's birth.

⁶³ Reese estimates that Jehoshaphat was 25 at his son's birth.

against Moab; and this is the time here respected, which was in the fifth of Joram king of Israel; and the ‘third’ time was, at the death of his father; but knew his father was living.”⁶⁴

Interestingly, according to Reese’s chronology, this is roughly the same time (~898 B.C.) the Ahab entering a coregency with his son Ahaziah.⁶⁵ This all seems to involve the combined campaign of Jehoshaphat and Ahab against Syria. There is a likelihood that these coregencies were safeguards in case the coming military campaign went bad.

The ages of Jehoshaphat and Jehoram at the beginnings of their reigns suggest that that their presumptive heirs were born around the time of their ascensions. Then when the heirs were of a respectable age, they were given some authority, perhaps as a secondary ruler or even coruler. Such a thing is not unknown in history. Diocletian would do something similar with the Roman Empire with the establishment of the Tetrarchy in the late third century.

If these assumptions are true, then it is likely that Jehoram is older than Reese’s calculations. He would have been born when Jehoshaphat was perhaps 18-20 years old. He would have been given some authority or title (up to coregency) when he was also around 18-20 years old. This shows he could very well have been elevated to a prince or coregent for most around 20 years of Jehoshaphat’s reign before being the primary ruler for eight years. This scenario allows Jehoram to have a son very early in his father’s reign. This son, Ahaziah, would then follow a similar track, being elevated in his late teens (or perhaps even as an infant or child) to be a prince or coregent. This could feasibly even date back into his grandfather’s reign.

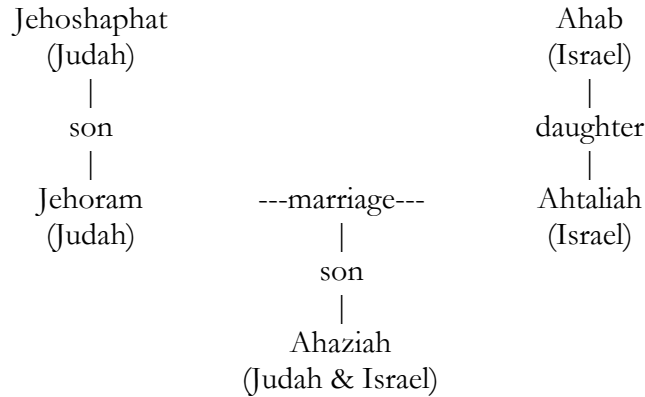
So, it is both possible that Ahaziah became a ruler (prince/coregent) at the age of 22 but the primary ruler (king) at 42. He had twenty years of ruling experience of some lesser type before his ascension to the throne.

Why then does II Chronicles, written after the Babylonian Captivity, give a different age? There are numerous examples where Chronicles has a different approach to numbers than Samuel/Kings. It is commonly theorized that Chronicles was written with access to different sources of information than Samuel/Kings, perhaps even different official records. I think there is also a perspective shift on how some things were calculated that comes from Babylonian and Persian influences. In many cases, I believe the changes where Chronicles varies information in Samuel/Kings are to clarify something that now was confusing with this perspective shift in place.

The answer to why the writer of Chronicles chose to record the age differently is because of the Ahaziah’s ties to the Northern Kingdom and the house of Omri and Ahab. Chronicles focuses on the Southern Kingdom, not the Northern. Ahaziah is technically a prince of both Kingdoms. Note his genealogy:

⁶⁴ Gill’s Commentary on II Kings 8:16 – E-sword module.

⁶⁵ Reese’s Chronological Study Bible, p. 624.



Therefore, in Ahaziah we find an opportunity for the Kingdoms to be united again. The problem with this would be that idolatrous influence of the counterfeit religion of Jeroboam and the corrupted religion of Jezebel that seems to have had a great influence on Ahaziah. It is noted that Ahaziah “walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly.” (II Chronicles 22:3). God intervenes and ends these evil influences with Jehu’s rise in the Northern Kingdom, followed by the execution of Athaliah and the ascension of Joash in the Southern Kingdom. It likely speaks to the wickedness of Ahaziah that he is cut down by Jehu in his purge of Ahab’s house.

On this it is worth noting how Matthew’s genealogy of Christ handles this series of kings: “And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias [a.k.a., Uzziah or Azariah];” (Matthew 1:8). Matthew skips Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah. Gill comments: “either because of the curse denounced on Ahab’s family, into which Joram married, whose idolatry was punished to the third or fourth generation; or because these were princes of no good character; or because their names were not in the Jewish registers.”⁶⁶ It is plausible to assume that the writer of Chronicles and Matthew have a similar approach to approaching the influence of Ahab, that is, ignoring it.

To summarize my theory: Ahaziah was 22 years old when he became a prince/coregent, possibly with connections to the Northern Kingdom. Ahaziah was 42 years old when he became king of Judah. The writer of II Kings chose to include the time as prince/coregent, and the writer of II Chronicles did not.

In my opinion, the burden of proof should lie on those that claim there is an error in the text. They can prove others believed there was an error and that attempts were made to correct this perceived error, but not that there is an actual error. It is merely theorized that there is an error in the text to account for something that does not seem to make sense. The danger here is that because something does not make sense to someone, it is assumed that it is because there is an error. This makes man the final arbiter between what is God-breathed Scripture and what is not. To casually dismiss something as an error when there are multiple plausible scenarios for it to be correct is careless as best.

⁶⁶ Gill’s Commentary, E-Sword Module