

SECOND KINGS 11-20
&
SECOND CHRONICLES 22 - 32

¹When Athaliah, Ahaziah's mother, had seen that her son was dead, she set about to destroy all the royal family. ²But Jehosheba, King Joram's daughter, Ahaziah's sister, took Joash son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king's children who were being killed; she put him and his nurse in a bedroom. Thus she hid him from Athaliah, so that he was not killed; ³he remained with her six years, hidden in the house of YHWH, while Athaliah reigned over the land.

⁴But in the seventh year Jehoiada summoned the captains of the Carites and of the guards and had them come to him in the house of YHWH. He made a covenant with them and put them under oath in the house of YHWH; then he showed them the king's son. ⁵He commanded them, "This is what you are to do: one-third of you, those who go off duty on the sabbath and guard the king's house ⁶(another third being at the gate Sur and a third at the gate behind the guards), shall guard the palace; ⁷and your two divisions that come on duty in force on the sabbath and guard the house of YHWH ⁸shall surround the king, each with weapons in hand; and whoever approaches the ranks is to be killed. Be with the king in his comings and goings."

⁹The captains did according to all that the priest Jehoiada commanded; each brought his men who were to go off duty on the sabbath, with those who were to come on duty on the sabbath, and came to the priest Jehoiada. ¹⁰The priest delivered to the captains the spears and shields that had been King David's, which were in the house of YHWH; ¹¹the guards stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, from the south side of the house to the north side of the house, around the altar and the house, to guard the king on every side. ¹²Then he brought out the king's son, put the diadem and the jewels on him; they proclaimed him king, and anointed him; they clapped their hands and shouted, "Long live the king!"

Athaliah is Omri's daughter (2Kings 8:26), of the house of Ahab (8:18), wife of King Jehoram of Judah (8:18). Hearing of the death of her husband's son, Ahaziah, king of Judah (2Kings 9:27-28), and the slaughter of all her family in Israel at the hands of Jehu (2Kings 10:1-7), she attempted to have all the members of the royal family killed. Had she succeeded this would have brought an end to the Davidic dynasty. However, the one-year old Joash (King Ahaziah's son; see 12:2) was spirited away.

Queen mothers traditionally had an important role in the court. Athaliah is the only queen mother to rule in Judah's history. She did so for six years (c. 841-835).

We can assume that she espoused the values of her father, brother and nephews in Israel. It is not, therefore, surprising that it was a Yahwist priest who had Joash proclaimed king when he was seven years old (see 11:22).

The 'jewels' (verse 12) must have been part of the royal insignia.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler copies this passage (2Chronicles 22:10 - 23:11), making special mention of the role of Levites.

Athaliah is surprised to see the seven-year old prince, Joash, standing in the temple as king, with the approval of the leading landowners ('the people of the land'). She realises that she has been outwitted, cries 'Treason', but is immediately killed. She is the last of the Omrides and her death frees Judah from their corrupting influence.

The priest takes advantage of the youth of the new king to insist on the conditions governing his rule. This is followed by a purging of the city from everything associated with Baal. We recall the following:

You must demolish completely all the places where the nations whom you are about to dispossess served their gods, on the mountain heights, on the hills, and under every leafy tree. Break down their altars, smash their pillars, burn their sacred poles with fire, and hew down the idols of their gods, and thus blot out their name from their places.

– Deuteronomy 12:2-3

The young king is taken in procession to the throne room (see 1Kings 7:7). At last the city is 'quiet' (verse 20); that is to say, years of chaos are put behind, and YHWH's governance is restored.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler copies this passage (see 2Chronicles 23:12-21), adding the following (verses 18-19):

Jehoiada assigned the care of the house of YHWH to the levitical priests whom David had organized to be in charge of the house of YHWH, to offer burnt offerings to YHWH, as it is written in the law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, according to the order of David. He stationed the gatekeepers at the gates of the house of YHWH so that no one should enter who was in any way unclean.

He identifies Jehosheba (Jehoshabeath) as the wife of the priest Jehoiada.

¹³When Athaliah heard the noise of the guard and of the people, she went into the house of YHWH to the people; ¹⁴when she looked, there was the king standing by the pillar, according to custom, with the captains and the trumpeters beside the king, and all the people of the land rejoicing and blowing trumpets. Athaliah tore her clothes and cried, "Treason! Treason!" ¹⁵Then the priest Jehoiada commanded the captains who were set over the army, "Bring her out between the ranks, and kill with the sword anyone who follows her." For the priest said, "Let her not be killed in the house of YHWH." ¹⁶So they laid hands on her; she went through the horses' entrance to the king's house, and there she was put to death.

¹⁷Jehoiada made a covenant between YHWH and the king and people, that they should be YHWH's people; also between the king and the people. ¹⁸Then all the people of the land went to the house of Baal, and tore it down; his altars and his images they broke in pieces, and they killed Mattan, the priest of Baal, before the altars. The priest posted guards over the house of YHWH. ¹⁹He took the captains, the Carites, the guards, and all the people of the land; then they brought the king down from the house of YHWH, marching through the gate of the guards to the king's house. He took his seat on the throne of the kings.

²⁰So all the people of the land rejoiced; and the city was quiet after Athaliah had been killed with the sword at the king's house.

^{12:1}Jehoash was seven years old when he began to reign. ²In the seventh year of Jehu, Jehoash began to reign; he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beer-sheba. ³Jehoash did what was right in the sight of YHWH all his days, because the priest Jehoiada instructed him. ⁴Nevertheless the high places were not taken away; the people continued to sacrifice and make offerings on the high places.

⁵Jehoash said to the priests, "All the money offered as sacred donations that is brought into the house of YHWH, the money for which each person is assessed—the money from the assessment of persons—and the money from the voluntary offerings brought into the house of YHWH, ⁶let the priests receive from each of the donors; and let them repair the house wherever any need of repairs is discovered." ⁷But by the twenty-third year of King Jehoash the priests had made no repairs on the house. ⁸Therefore King Jehoash summoned the priest Jehoiada with the other priests and said to them, "Why are you not repairing the house? Now therefore do not accept any more money from your donors but hand it over for the repair of the house." ⁹So the priests agreed that they would neither accept more money from the people nor repair the house. ¹⁰Then the priest Jehoiada took a chest, made a hole in its lid, and set it beside the altar on the right side as one entered the house of YHWH; the priests who guarded the threshold put in it all the money that was brought into the house of YHWH. ¹¹Whenever they saw that there was a great deal of money in the chest, the king's secretary and the high priest went up, counted the money that was found in the house of YHWH, and tied it up in bags.

Jehoash (Joash) began his reign 'in the seventh year of Jehu'; that is, in 835. He reigned till 796. He is the son of Ahaziah (see 11:2) and Zibiah. He is given a positive verdict, though it is acknowledged that pagan (non-Yahwist) cult continued in Judah during his reign.

In his determination to repair the temple, Jehoash is witnessing publicly to his commitment to YHWH. He is also strengthening his hold on power by associating himself closely with the God of the temple.

It appears that the priests were pocketing the donations and not passing them on to the contractors to fix up the temple.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler's version (2Chronicles 24:1-11) omits verse 3, and adds:

Jehoiada had Joash marry two wives and he fathered sons and daughters.

He mentions Levites along with priests. In place of verses 7-8, the Chronicler writes (referring to Exodus 30:12-16; 38:25-28):

So the king summoned Jehoiada the chief, and said to him, "Why have you not required the Levites to bring in from Judah and Jerusalem the tax levied by Moses, the servant of YHWH, on the congregation of Israel for the tent of the covenant?" For the children of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken into the house of God, and had even used all the dedicated things of the house of YHWH for the Baals.

– 2Chronicles 24:6-7

According to verse 14 the state of the temple is nothing like its state as described at the time of Solomon (see 1Kings 7:50). One obvious explanation is that here the Deuteronomists are drawing on records, whereas the description of Solomon's temple belongs to the mythical 'Golden Age' that is an invention of the Deuteronomists. On the 'purification offerings'(verse 17) see Leviticus 4:1 - 15:13 and 6:24-30.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler replaces verse 13 with the following (2Chronicles 24:14):

When they had finished, they brought the rest of the money to the king and Jehoiada, and with it were made utensils for the house of YHWH, utensils for the service and for the burnt offerings, and ladles, and vessels of gold and silver. They offered burnt offerings in the house of YHWH regularly all the days of Jehoiada.

He adds the following (verses 15-22):

¹⁵But Jehoiada grew old and full of days, and died; he was one hundred thirty years old at his death. ¹⁶And they buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, and for God and his house. ¹⁷Now after the death of Jehoiada the officials of Judah came and did obeisance to the king; then the king listened to them. ¹⁸They abandoned the house of YHWH, the God of their ancestors, and served the sacred poles and the idols. And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this guilt of theirs. ¹⁹Yet he sent prophets among them to bring them back to YHWH; they testified against them, but they would not listen. ²⁰Then the spirit of God took possession of Zechariah son of the priest Jehoiada; he stood above the people and said to them, "Thus says God: Why do you transgress the commandments of YHWH, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken YHWH, he has also forsaken you." ²¹But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him to death in the court of the house of YHWH. ²²King Joash did not remember the kindness that Jehoiada, Zechariah's father, had shown him, but killed his son. As he was dying, he said, "May YHWH see and avenge!"

¹²They would give the money that was weighed out into the hands of the workers who had the oversight of the house of YHWH; then they paid it out to the carpenters and the builders who worked on the house of the YHWH, ¹³to the masons and the stonecutters, as well as to buy timber and quarried stone for making repairs on the house of YHWH, as well as for any outlay for repairs of the house.

¹⁴But for the house of YHWH no basins of silver, snuffers, bowls, trumpets, or any vessels of gold, or of silver, were made from the money that was brought into the house of YHWH, ¹⁵for that was given to the workers who were repairing the house of YHWH with it. ¹⁶They did not ask an accounting from those into whose hand they delivered the money to pay out to the workers, for they dealt honestly.

¹⁷The money from the purification offerings was not brought into the house of YHWH; it belonged to the priests.

¹⁸At that time King Hazael of Aram went up, fought against Gath, and took it. But when Hazael set his face to go up against Jerusalem, ¹⁹King Jehoash of Judah took all the votive gifts that Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, and Ahaziah, his ancestors, the kings of Judah, had dedicated, as well as his own votive gifts, all the gold that was found in the treasures of the house of YHWH and of the king's house, and sent these to King Hazael of Aram. Then Hazael withdrew from Jerusalem.

²⁰Now the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ²¹His servants arose, devised a conspiracy, and killed Joash in the house of Millo, on the way that goes down to Silla. ²²It was Jozacar son of Shimeath and Jehozabad son of Shomer, his servants, who struck him down, so that he died. He was buried with his ancestors in the city of David; then his son Amaziah succeeded him.

We recall the terrible words of Elisha who foresaw the harm that Hazael would do to the people of Israel (see 2Kings 8:12). We have already seen how he took all the lands to the east of the Jordan (2Kings 10:32). It is only by paying a huge tribute that Jehoash saves Jerusalem. The assassination of Jehoash hints at continuing tension between the strict Yahwists and those who favour compromise.

The Chronicler (2Chronicles 24:23-27)

The Chronicler omits any mention of the votive gifts and treasures of the temple. He interprets the murder of the king as divine punishment for his infidelity after the death of the priest Jehoiada (see 2Chronicles 24:17-22, page 185).

²³At the end of the year the army of Aram came up against Joash. They came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the officials of the people from among them, and sent all the booty they took to the king of Damascus. ²⁴Although the army of Aram had come with few men, YHWH delivered into their hand a very great army, because they had abandoned YHWH, the God of their ancestors. Thus they executed judgment on Joash.

²⁵When they had withdrawn, leaving him severely wounded, his servants conspired against him because of the blood of the son of the priest Jehoiada, and they killed him on his bed. So he died; and they buried him in the city of David, but they did not bury him in the tombs of the kings.

²⁶Those who conspired against him were Zabad son of Shimeath the Ammonite, and Jehozabad son of Shimrith the Moabite.

²⁷Accounts of his sons, and of the many oracles against him, and of the rebuilding of the house of God are written in the Commentary on the Book of the Kings. And his son Amaziah succeeded him.

We are given the impression in verse 27 that the Chronicler is using as his source, not only the Book of Kings, but also a 'Commentary on the Book of Kings'.

Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, began his reign 'in the twenty-third year of Joash'; that is, in the year 813. This was the year when King Joash instituted his new system for temple repairs (see 12:7). King Jehoahaz of Israel reigned till 797. He receives the standard negative judgment given by the Deuteronomists to the kings of the northern kingdom.

YHWH's punishment was to arrange for Hazael, king of Aram, to continually harass Israel (see 2Kings 10:32-33). Hazael became king in the last year of the reign of Jehoram in Israel (842) and ruled till the end of the century. His son, Ben-hadad III, succeeded him and continued his policy of aggression (verse 3). In answer to Jehoahaz's prayer, YHWH sends a 'saviour' to relieve the situation (verse 5). The saviour is not named. It is likely that Aram had to withdraw at times to defend itself from attack from Adad-nirari III of Assyria.

The 'Asherah pole' [אֲשֵׁרָה, 'ašērāh; verse 6] is a cult object devoted to the Baal's consort, Asherah (1Kings 16:33; 2Kings 10:26-28).

Failure to reserve cult to YHWH leads to a military disaster (verse 7).

The Chronicler

The Chronicler has no interest in the kings of Israel and so omits this passage.

¹In the twenty-third year of King Joash son of Ahaziah of Judah, Jehoahaz son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria; he reigned seventeen years. ²He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH, and followed the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin; he did not depart from them.

³The anger of YHWH was kindled against Israel, so that he gave them repeatedly into the hand of King Hazael of Aram, then into the hand of Ben-hadad son of Hazael. ⁴But Jehoahaz entreated YHWH, and YHWH heeded him; for he saw the oppression of Israel, how the king of Aram oppressed them. ⁵Therefore YHWH gave Israel a saviour, so that they escaped from the hand of the Arameans; and the people of Israel lived in their homes as formerly.

⁶Nevertheless they did not depart from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, which he caused Israel to sin, but walked in them; the Asherah pole also remained in Samaria.

⁷So Jehoahaz was left with an army of not more than fifty horsemen, ten chariots and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Aram had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing.

⁸Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz and all that he did, including his might, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? ⁹So Jehoahaz slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in Samaria; then his son Joash succeeded him.

¹⁰In the thirty-seventh year of King Joash of Judah, Jehoash son of Jehoahaz began to reign over Israel in Samaria; he reigned sixteen years.

¹¹He also did what was evil in the sight of YHWH; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin, but he walked in them.

¹²Now the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, as well as the might with which he fought against King Amaziah of Judah, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

¹³So Joash slept with his ancestors, and Jeroboam sat upon his throne; Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.

Jehoash began his reign in Israel 'in the thirty-seventh year of King Joash of Judah; that is, in the year 799. He was co-regent with his father for the first two years (799-797) and reigned for sixteen years; that is, until 784. King Joash of Judah died in 796, which means that King Jehoash of Israel was still reigning during the early years of the reign of King Amaziah of Judah. Verse 12 tells us that the two kings fought each other. We are told later (see 2Kings 14:8-14) that Judah was the aggressor, but that Israel prevailed.

We know from an inscription on a stele in Assyria that King Jehoash of Israel rendered tribute to the Assyrian king, Adad-nirari III in 796.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler omits this passage, having no interest in the kings of Israel.

Elisha began his ministry during the reign of Jehoram who ruled Israel from 852 to 841 (see 2Kings 2:9-12). He dies during the reign of Jehoash who reigned from 799 to 784. After half a century as the dominant figure in Israel, he is dying. It was Elisha who instigated the process that brought Jehoash's grandfather, Jehu, to the throne (see 2Kings 9). Joash's words to Elisha echo Elisha's words to Elijah (see 2Kings 2:12). Elisha's final prophecy is of victory for Israel over Aram (verses 15-19).

Even in death Elisha continues working miracles (verses 20-21).

The Deuteronomists take us back to the time of Jehoash's father, Jehoahaz, when Hazael oppressed Israel. Thanks to YHWH's graciousness and compassion for his people, Jehoash was able to regain territory from Ben-hadad III, Hazael's son (verses 22-25). YHWH's compassion for Israel, however, is not forever. It is only until this time (verse 23).

In light of the constant criticism of Israel's kings, verse 23 comes as a surprise (and a welcome one). Transcending all other images of YHWH is the faith of the people of the covenant that God is a God of graciousness and compassion (see Exodus 34:6).

¹⁴Now when Elisha had fallen sick with the illness of which he was to die, King Joash of Israel went down to him, and wept before him, crying, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" ¹⁵Elisha said to him, "Take a bow and arrows"; so he took a bow and arrows. ¹⁶Then he said to the king of Israel, "Draw the bow"; and he drew it. Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands. ¹⁷Then he said, "Open the window eastward"; and he opened it. Elisha said, "Shoot"; and he shot. Then he said, "YHWH's arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram! For you shall fight the Arameans in Aphek until you have made an end of them." ¹⁸He continued, "Take the arrows"; and he took them. He said to the king of Israel, "Strike the ground with them"; he struck three times, and stopped. ¹⁹Then the man of God was angry with him, and said, "You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck down Aram until you had made an end of it, but now you will strike down Aram only three times."

²⁰So Elisha died, and they buried him. Now bands of Moabites used to invade the land in the spring of the year. ²¹As a man was being buried, a marauding band was seen and the man was thrown into the grave of Elisha; as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he came to life and stood on his feet.

²²Now King Hazael of Aram oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. ²³But YHWH was gracious to them and had compassion on them; he turned toward them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them; nor has he banished them from his presence until now. ²⁴When King Hazael of Aram died, his son Ben-hadad succeeded him. ²⁵Then Jehoash son of Jehoahaz took again from Ben-hadad son of Hazael the towns that he had taken from his father Jehoahaz in war. Three times Joash defeated him and recovered the towns of Israel.

¹In the second year of King Joash son of Joahaz of Israel, King Amaziah son of Joash of Judah, began to reign. ²He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddin of Jerusalem.

³He did what was right in the sight of YHWH, yet not like his ancestor David; in all things he did as his father Joash had done. ⁴But the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places.

⁵As soon as the royal power was firmly in his hand he killed his servants who had murdered his father the king. ⁶But he did not put to death the children of the murderers; according to what is written in the Book of the law of Moses, where YHWH commanded, "The parents shall not be put to death for the children, or the children be put to death for the parents; but all shall be put to death for their own sins."

⁷He killed ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt and took Sela by storm; he called it Jokthe-el, which is its name to this day.

⁸Then Amaziah sent messengers to King Jehoash son of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, of Israel, saying, "Come, let us look one another in the face." ⁹King Jehoash of Israel sent word to King Amaziah of Judah, "A thorn bush on Lebanon sent to a cedar on Lebanon, saying, 'Give your daughter to my son for a wife'; but a wild animal of Lebanon passed by and trampled down the thorn bush. ¹⁰You have indeed defeated Edom, and your heart has lifted you up. Be content with your glory, and stay at home; for why should you provoke trouble so that you fall, you and Judah with you?"

According to verses 1-2 (see also verse 17), King Amaziah of Judah became king 'in the second year of King Joash of Israel'; that is in 798. He 'reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem'; that is, from 798-770. From 798 to 796 he was coregent with his father, Joash, who died in 796 (see page 184).

He is given a positive verdict, but the Deuteronomists acknowledge that shrines to other gods still existed in Judah (verse 4).

He executes those responsible for the assassination of his father, Joash (verses 5-6; see 12:20-21). However he does so with restraint, following 'the Book of the law of Moses'(verse 6 quotes Deuteronomy 24:16).

He then engages in a successful campaign against Edom (verse 7). On Edom see also 3:8-26 and 8:20-22. Sela is in the vicinity of Petra. Emboldened by this victory he challenges Israel, a challenge scoffed at by King Jehoash of Israel (verses 8-10).

The Chronicler

The Chronicler copies verses 1-3 and 5-6, but omits verse 4 (see 2Chronicles 25:1-4).

He expands the account in Kings with a statement on Amaziah's building up a military force (see 2Chronicles 25:5-10, page 189).

He considerably expands the account of the military campaign in Edom (verse 7; see 2Chronicles 25:11-16, page 191).

He copies verses 8-10 (see 2Chronicles 25:17-19).

Amaziah's military preparations (2Chronicles 25:5-10)

⁵Amaziah assembled the people of Judah, and set them by ancestral houses under commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds for all Judah and Benjamin. He mustered those twenty years old and upward, and found that they were three hundred thousand picked troops fit for war, able to handle spear and shield. ⁶He also hired one hundred thousand mighty warriors from Israel for one hundred talents of silver. ⁷But a man of God came to him and said, "O king, do not let the army of Israel go with you, for YHWH is not with Israel—all these Ephraimites. ⁸Rather, go by yourself and act; be strong in battle, or God will fling you down before the enemy; for God has power to help or to overthrow." ⁹Amaziah said to the man of God, "But what shall we do about the hundred talents that I have given to the army of Israel?" The man of God answered, "YHWH is able to give you much more than this." ¹⁰Then Amaziah discharged the army that had come to him from Ephraim, letting them go home again. But they became very angry with Judah, and returned home in fierce anger.

The prophet tells Amaziah not to use the mercenaries from the northern kingdom because 'YHWH is not with Israel' (verse 7), and because it is YHWH who gives victory, not the size of the army (verse 9).

Amaziah's campaign in Edom (2Chronicles 25:11-16)

¹¹Amaziah took courage, and led out his people; he went to the Valley of Salt, and struck down ten thousand men of Seir. ¹²The people of Judah captured another ten thousand alive, took them to the top of Sela, and threw them down from the top of Sela, so that all of them were dashed to pieces.

¹³But the men of the army whom Amaziah sent back, not letting them go with him to battle, fell on the cities of Judah from Samaria to Beth-horon; they killed three thousand people in them, and took much booty.

'Samaria' is not the royal city of Israel. It must refer to a town in Judah. 'Beth-horon' is in the valley of Ajalon on the northern border of Benjamin, some 18ks northwest of Jerusalem.

¹⁴Now after Amaziah came from the slaughter of the Edomites, he brought the gods of the people of Seir, set them up as his gods, and worshiped them, making offerings to them. ¹⁵YHWH was angry with Amaziah and sent to him a prophet, who said to him, "Why have you resorted to a people's gods who could not deliver their own people from your hand?" ¹⁶But as he was speaking the king said to him, "Have we made you a royal counselor? Stop! Why should you be put to death?" So the prophet stopped, but said, "I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this and have not listened to my advice."

The Chronicler is preparing the reader for Judah's defeat. It is YHWH's punishment for worshipping gods of Edom and ignoring the prophet.

¹¹But Amaziah would not listen. So King Jehoash of Israel went up; he and King Amaziah of Judah faced one another in battle at Beth-shemesh, which belongs to Judah. ¹²Judah was defeated by Israel; everyone fled home. ¹³King Jehoash of Israel captured King Amaziah of Judah son of Jehoash, son of Ahaziah, at Beth-shemesh; he came to Jerusalem, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate, a distance of four hundred cubits. ¹⁴He seized all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of YHWH and in the treasuries of the king's house, as well as hostages; then he returned to Samaria. ¹⁵Now the rest of the acts that Jehoash did, his might, and how he fought with King Amaziah of Judah, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? ¹⁶Jehoash slept with his ancestors, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel; then his son Jeroboam succeeded him. ¹⁷King Amaziah son of Joash of Judah lived fifteen years after the death of King Jehoash son of Jehoahaz of Israel. ¹⁸Now the rest of the deeds of Amaziah, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ¹⁹They made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish. But they sent after him to Lachish, and killed him there. ²⁰They brought him on horses; he was buried in Jerusalem with his ancestors in the city of David. ²¹All the people of Judah took Azariah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king to succeed his father Amaziah. ²²He rebuilt Elath and restored it to Judah, after King Amaziah slept with his ancestors.

Beth-shemesh is located in the northeast corner of Judah at the head of the valley of Sorek. Judah is defeated, and King Amaziah is captured. Israel advances on Jerusalem, destroys part of its wall, and takes the treasures from the temple and the king's palace as well as hostages.

As is their custom, the Deuteronomists refer the reader to the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel for more information on King Jehoash of Israel (verse 15), and to the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah for more information on King Amaziah of Judah (verse 18). Amaziah flees south to Lachish to escape a conspiracy, but is murdered there (verse 19). According to our calculations that would have been c. 770.

The Deuteronomists conclude by introducing Amaziah's son, Azariah, whose reign began when he was sixteen years old. It seems that this was in 785 when his father was taken captive (verse 13). A lot lies behind the reference to the rebuilding of Elath (verse 22). This gave Judah access to the southern trade routes via the Red Sea.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler follows Kings closely (see 2Chronicles 25:17-28. he adds an explanation of why Amaziah would not listen.

Amaziah would not listen—it was God's doing, in order to hand them over, because they had sought the gods of Edom.

– 2Chronicles 25:20

The Chronicler omits verses 15-16.

He introduces Amaziah's son in 2Chronicles 26:1-2, calling him 'Uzziah' (see 2Kings 13:30).

Jeroboam II of Israel began his reign 'in the fifteenth year of King Amaziah'; that is, in 784. It appears that he was co-regent with his father from c. 788. He reigned 'fifty-one years', c. 788-748. He receives the standard judgment for a king of Israel (verse 24).

Behind the brief account in verses 25-27 is a story of amazing expansion. 'Lebo-Hamath' (verse 25; see 1Kings 8:65) is 70ks north of Damascus, near the sources of the Orontes River. The 'Sea of the Arabah' is the Dead Sea. This was the most extensive area ruled from Samaria during the time of the northern kingdom. Israel is clearly more powerful than Aram at this time (see also verse 28).

In the light of recent archeological exploration, the population of Israel at the time of Jeroboam is estimated at c. 350,000. Israel was the most densely populated state in the area.

Jeroboam's expansion was made possible by the troubles that occupied Assyria during his reign.

Concerning the recovery of Damascus and Hamath see 2Samuel 8:6, 9.

The Deuteronomists must look for a reason for this success, and, as we would expect, it is the will of YHWH, spoken through the prophet Jonah. YHWH can choose any instrument he wishes – in this case Jeroboam. It is this Jonah who is the main character in the Book of Jonah, a short story composed in the fifth century, some 300 years later.

Jehu was promised that his dynasty would be secure for four generations (see 2Kings 10:30). Verse 29 introduces us to a fifth. We expect that trouble is brewing.

²³In the fifteenth year of King Amaziah son of Joash of Judah, King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel began to reign in Samaria; he reigned forty-one years. ²⁴He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin.

²⁵He restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of YHWH, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher. ²⁶For YHWH saw that the distress of Israel was very bitter; there was no one left, bond or free, and no one to help Israel. ²⁷But YHWH had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Joash.

²⁸Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he fought, and how he recovered for Israel Damascus and Hamath, which had belonged to Judah, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

²⁹Jeroboam slept with his ancestors, the kings of Israel; his son Zechariah succeeded him.

A note on Amos and Hosea¹

The Books of Kings draw on historical data from the royal archives only in order to focus attention on their understanding of what YHWH is doing in Judah and Israel. The Books of Kings are intended, not as a historical record, but as a theological commentary. They are included among the prophetic books. In light of the interest of the Deuteronomists in prophecy, it is strange that there is no mention of the role played by two prophets, whose words are recorded in scrolls that carry their name. I am referring to the prophets Amos and Hosea.

The expansion of Israel under Jeroboam II (788-748) noted in 2Kings 14:25 (see page 193) led to increased trade and commerce. Samaria, built by Omri a century before Jeroboam II, had always been the most powerful city in Israel. It far outshone Jerusalem. During Jeroboam's reign the wealthy upper class became even more wealthy. The cult, too, was lavish. The gap between the rich and the poor grew. Bribery, extortion, the corruption of the judiciary and the exploitation of the poor undermined the moral foundations of the state. The Book of Kings limits itself to the usual formula: 'Jeroboam did what was evil in the sight of YHWH; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin' (2Kings 14:24). To get a fuller picture we need to turn to the prophet Amos, whose ministry was in Israel c. 762-750 (see Amos 1:1), and to the prophet Hosea, whose ministry began during the last years of Jeroboam's reign and continued to c. 724 (see Hosea 1:1).

Amos goes to the heart of Yahwism in his denouncing of injustice (see Amos 2:6-8; 3:15; 5:10-15, 21-24; 6:4-7; 8:4-6). He insists that a genuine response to God must include working for justice for all. He challenges any smug assurance that we might entertain that all will be well for us, since God is loving and has chosen us as his own. Religious practice is no substitute for true obedience, and true obedience requires justice.

Hosea, too, castigates those living in luxury (see Hosea 2:8-13). Like Amos he speaks out against religious practice that ignores obedience to God's will (see Hosea 2:13; 4:12-13). He is especially critical of priests who live off the cult, but fail in their duty to teach the Torah (see Hosea 4:6-11). Religious cult is no substitute for a genuine seeking of YHWH (see Hosea 2:11; 6:6; 8:11; 9:4; 10:1-2, 12; 12:6)

However, the bulk of his ministry took place in the troubled years after the death of Jeroboam II, when Israel was devastated because of the western expansion of Assyria. Hosea saw most of his country occupied by Assyria, and the capital, Samaria, under siege. He died just before the destruction of Samaria (722). Like the Deuteronomists, he interpreted this devastation as YHWH's punishment for Israel's infidelity (see Hosea 1:2-6; 4:1-4; 8:1; 13:16). However the suffering he witnessed and his own personal suffering gave him an insight into YHWH's pain at having to destroy Israel (see Hosea 6:1-6; 11:1-9) and he is convinced that Israel would, once again, enjoy the intimacy of divine communion (see Hosea 1:10-11; 2:14-23; 3:5, 14).

¹See my commentary in *Israel's Eighth Century Prophets* (Chevalier Press, 2011).

A note on Isaiah and Micah¹

In 2Kings 15:1-7 (see page 196) the Deuteronomists give a brief account of the reign of King Azariah (also called Uzziah) of Judah. Like Jeroboam II, his counterpart in Israel, he had a long reign (co-regent c. 785-770; king c. 770-734). We have already been told that he rebuilt Elath on the Gulf of Aqabah, which gave Judah access to the southern trade routes via the Red Sea (see 2Kings 14:22). He also constructed copper and iron mines in the area. During his reign Judah's army was modernised and the conquering of the Philistine plain established control over the trade route along the Mediterranean coast. Developments were experienced also in agriculture. Judah had never been as prosperous. However, we have the same anomaly here as we noted on the previous page in regard to the Deuteronomists' account of the reign of Jeroboam. They make no mention of the prophet Isaiah, though he does get a brief mention in 2Chronicles 16:22 (see page 197). For it is likely that the prophetic ministry of Isaiah began in the period just before King Uzziah's death (see Isaiah chapters 1-6), and continued through to the end of the century. Micah, Isaiah's contemporary, ministered c.740-725.

While Hosea was carrying out his prophetic ministry in Israel, Isaiah was challenging Judah. He kept insisting that Judah's identity as a nation is defined by its covenant with God. Before all else, they must honour this covenant and place their trust in God. This is perhaps Isaiah's greatest contribution (see 7:9; 8:13; 9:13; 10:20; 12; 17:7-8; 25:1-10; 30:16; 31:1-3; 32:17; 33:22; 38:20). Faithful to the tradition, Isaiah understands punishment as a way of getting people to change their mind, heart and behaviour (see 35:1-10). He is constantly bemoaning the failure of the people to repent (see 9:13). He is amazed at the folly of human pride (2:5-17; 3:16-17; 10:33-34). Like Amos and Hosea, Isaiah speaks out against injustice, especially injustice that hides behind compliance with law (see 1:15-18; 3:13-15; 4:15; 5:1-23; 10:1-2; 29:17-21). Like Amos and Hosea he also castigates religious practice that pays no attention to obedience to the will of God as expressed in the covenant (see 1:10-14; 5:24; 28:7ff; 29:13). It is this love-covenant with YHWH that is the reason for Israel's existence. Isaiah joins Amos and Hosea in underlining the folly of worshipping 'gods' of our own making (see 2:8). Isaiah speaks of God's love for his people (see 5:1-2; 30:18). His conviction that YHWH is faithful encouraged him to trust that all would, one day, be restored (see 1:18-19, 26; 2:1-4; 4:2-6; 5:4; 10:24-27; 11:1-13; 28:5-6; 30:18-26; 35).

Like the other prophets of the eighth century, Micah speaks out against injustice (see 2:1-2; 3:1-3, 9-12; 6:10-12; 7:3). He is particularly concerned with those whom the people look to as prophets, but who 'lead my people astray' (3:5). They proclaim 'peace', but not the obedience to God's will which alone can produce it. Micah is critical of those who assume that because they are God's chosen people they are guaranteed divine protection and blessing (see 3:11). Religious cult is no substitute for justice (6:6-8).

As a true prophet, his focus is primarily on God and he speaks beautifully of God's faithful love (see 6:3-5; 7:18-20). This gives him hope that ultimately all will be restored (see 2:12; 4:1-8; 7:9). We must trust YHWH (7:7).

¹See my commentary in *Israel's Eighth Century Prophets* (Chevalier Press, 2011).

¹In the twenty-seventh year of King Jeroboam of Israel King Azariah son of Amaziah of Judah began to reign. ²He was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem.

³He did what was right in the sight of YHWH, just as his father Amaziah had done. ⁴Nevertheless the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places.

⁵YHWH struck the king, so that he was leprous to the day of his death, and lived in a separate house.

Jotham the king's son was in charge of the palace, governing the people of the land.

⁶Now the rest of the acts of Azariah, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah?

⁷Azariah slept with his ancestors; they buried him with his ancestors in the city of David; his son Jotham succeeded him.

The attempt in verse 1 to link the beginning of the reign of King Azariah (also called Uzziah) in Judah to the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel cannot be correct. The twenty-seventh year' of Jeroboam's reign would be c. 762. We know from 2Kings 14:17 that Azariah's father died fifteen years after the death of Jeroboam's father (and so in the fifteenth year of Jeroboam's reign). Azariah would have begun his reign in 770 (not 762).

Furthermore, it appears that he took over the reins of government as co-regent as early as 785 when he was 'sixteen years old'(verse 2). This was because his father was captured during the war with Israel. The fifty-two years of his reign (verse 2) is calculated from 785. He reigned c. 785-734.

These dates are consistent with the statements in 2Kings 14:2 and 14:23 that Amaziah reigned for twenty-nine years and that Jeroboam began his reign in Amaziah's fifteenth year.

The Deuteronomists record the fact that he was afflicted with the scaly skin disease that, because it gave him the appearance of death, rendered him 'impure', and unable to hold public office (see the case of the Syrian general, Naaman, in 2Kings 5). Because of this, his son Jotham was co-regent during the final years of Azariah's reign c.749-734.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler copies verses 1-3 (in combination with 2Kings 14:22-23), and omits verse 4. He gives a much longer account of this important king of Judah (see opposite page).

⁵He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah [see 2Chronicles 24:20], who instructed him in the fear of God; and as long as he sought YHWH, God made him prosper. ⁶He went out and made war against the Philistines, and broke down the wall of Gath and the wall of Jabneh and the wall of Ashdod; he built cities in the territory of Ashdod and elsewhere among the Philistines. ⁷God helped him against the Philistines, against the Arabs who lived in Gur-baal, and against the Meunites. ⁸The Ammonites paid tribute to Uzziah, and his fame spread even to the border of Egypt, for he became very strong. ⁹Moreover Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate, at the Valley Gate, and at the Angle, and fortified them. ¹⁰He built towers in the wilderness and hewed out many cisterns, for he had large herds, both in the Shephelah and in the plain, and he had farmers and vinedressers in the hills and in the fertile lands, for he loved the soil. ¹¹Furthermore, Uzziah had an army of soldiers, fit for war, in divisions according to the numbers in the muster made by the secretary Jeiel and the officer Maaseiah, under the direction of Hananiah, one of the king's commanders. ¹²The whole number of the heads of ancestral houses of mighty warriors was two thousand six hundred. ¹³Under their command was an army of three hundred seven thousand five hundred, who could make war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy. ¹⁴Uzziah provided for all the army the shields, spears, helmets, coats of mail, bows, and stones for slinging. ¹⁵In Jerusalem he set up machines, invented by skilled workers, on the towers and the corners for shooting arrows and large stones. And his fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped until he became strong.

¹⁶But when he had become strong he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was false to YHWH his God, and entered the temple of YHWH to make offering on the altar of incense. ¹⁷But the priest Azariah went in after him, with eighty priests of YHWH who were men of valour; ¹⁸they withstood King Uzziah, and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to make offering to YHWH, but for the priests the descendants of Aaron, who are consecrated to make offering. Go out of the sanctuary; for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from YHWH God." ¹⁹Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to make offering, and when he became angry with the priests a leprous disease broke out on his forehead, in the presence of the priests in the house of YHWH, by the altar of incense. ²⁰When the chief priest Azariah, and all the priests, looked at him, he was leprous in his forehead. They hurried him out, and he himself hurried to get out, because YHWH had struck him. ²¹King Uzziah was leprous to the day of his death, and being leprous lived in a separate house, for he was excluded from the house of the LORD. His son Jotham was in charge of the palace of the king, governing the people of the land. ²²Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, from first to last, the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz wrote. ²³Uzziah slept with his ancestors; they buried him near his ancestors in the burial field that belonged to the kings, for they said, "He is leprous." His son Jotham succeeded him.

⁸In the thirty-eighth year of King Azariah of Judah, Zechariah son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in Samaria six months. ⁹He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH, as his ancestors had done. He did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin. ¹⁰Shallum son of Jabesh conspired against him, and struck him down at Ibleam and killed him, and reigned in place of him.

¹¹Now the rest of the deeds of Zechariah are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel.

¹²This was the promise of YHWH that he gave to Jehu, "Your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation." And so it happened.

¹³Shallum son of Jabesh began to reign in the thirty-ninth year of King Uzziah of Judah; he reigned one month in Samaria. ¹⁴Then Menahem son of Gadi came up from Tirzah and came to Samaria; he struck down Shallum son of Jabesh in Samaria and killed him; he reigned in place of him.

¹⁵Now the rest of the deeds of Shallum, including the conspiracy that he made, are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel.

Zechariah became king in the 'thirty-eighth year of King Azariah'; that is, in c. 748.

Zechariah's assassination was the first in a series of assassinations. The end of the Jehu dynasty is in accordance with YHWH's will declared through the prophet in 10:30.

Shallum was king for one month in 747, 'the thirty-ninth year of King Uzziah' (Azariah is here given what was possibly his personal name, as distinct from his throne name).

The Chronicler

The Chronicler omits any reference to the northern kings, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah and Pekah.

Verse 16 gives a terrible introduction to the next king, Menahem.

Menahem's reign began c. 747 (see 15:14) and he reigned ten years (747-737)

'Pul' (from 'pileser') is the Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser III who ruled from Nineveh (745-727). His interest in Syria and Israel was primarily to gain access to Egypt. The Assyrian archives mention thirty-eight military manoeuvres in the area. We know from Assyrian documents that in 740 Menahem paid tribute to the Assyrian king, and in 738 Tiglath-pileser III devastated the northern regions of Israel and exiled a quarter of the population. Though this is the first mention of Assyria in Kings, Assyrian records show that there was interaction between Assyria and Israel more than a century before Menahem. On Menahem see ANET 283.

The only way Menahem could survive was to pay a heavy tribute to Assyria (verse 20). It is not difficult to imagine the growing dissatisfaction of the landowners in Israel. Menahem was effectively a puppet who ruled at Assyria's whim.

His son, Pekahiah, became king in the 'fiftieth year of King Azariah' (verse 23); that is c. 736, and he reigned from c. 736-735. He is also mentioned in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III.

It is likely that Pekah had the backing of the disgruntled landowners.

¹⁶At that time Menahem sacked Tiphsah, all who were in it and its territory from Tirzah on; because they did not open it to him, he sacked it. He ripped open all the pregnant women in it.

¹⁷In the thirty-ninth year of King Azariah of Judah, Menahem son of Gadi began to reign over Israel; he reigned ten years in Samaria. ¹⁸He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH; he did not depart all his days from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin.

¹⁹King Pul of Assyria came against the land; Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, so that he might help him confirm his hold on the royal power. ²⁰Menahem exacted the money from Israel, that is, from all the wealthy, fifty shekels of silver from each one, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and did not stay there in the land.

²¹Now the rest of the deeds of Menahem, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? ²²Menahem slept with his ancestors, and his son Pekahiah succeeded him.

²³In the fiftieth year of King Azariah of Judah, Pekahiah son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria; he reigned two years. ²⁴He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH; he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin.

²⁵Pekah son of Remaliah, his captain, conspired against him with fifty of the Gileadites, and attacked him in Samaria, in the citadel of the palace along with Argob and Arieah; he killed him, and reigned in place of him. ²⁶Now the rest of the deeds of Pekahiah, and all that he did, are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel.

²⁷In the fifty-second year of King Azariah of Judah, Pekah son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria; he reigned twenty years.

²⁸He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin.

²⁹In the days of King Pekah of Israel, King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried the people captive to Assyria.

³⁰Then Hoshea son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah son of Remaliah, attacked him, and killed him; he reigned in place of him, in the twentieth year of Jotham son of Uzziah.

³¹Now the rest of the acts of Pekah, and all that he did, are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel.

Pekah became king in the fifty-second year of Azariah's reign; that is, in 734 (the final year of Azariah's reign; see 2Kings 15:2, page 196). His reign was at the most five years, from c. 734-730, not 'twenty years' as stated in verse 27. This error throws out a number of subsequent calculations (see 16:1, page 202).

From Assyrian sources we know that Tiglath-pileser's campaign was another incursion into northern Israel (see the comment on the previous page). This campaign was in 733-732.

Pekah's assassination by Shallum is stated as having taken place 'in the twentieth year of Jotham son of Uzziah' (verse 30). Yet verse 33 states that Jotham reigned in Jerusalem 'sixteen years' (not twenty years).

Perhaps the difficulty experienced by the Deuteronomists in their attempt to link the reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah, especially at this period, was due to the faulty archives in Samaria during these troubled years.

Both Pekah and Shallum are mentioned in the Annals of Tiglath-pileser.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler omits any reference to the northern kings, Pekah and Hoshea.

Jotham began ruling in his own right in ‘the second year of King Pekah’, probably in late 734. His reign of sixteen years is dated from when he began his co-regency c. 749 because his father, Azariah, had to withdraw from public life due to ‘leprosy’ (see 15:5). It would appear that he scarcely outlived his father, and that his independent reign lasted a matter of a few months.

Verse 37 refers to the Syro-Ephraimite war which broke out at this time (see page 204). Note that the Deuteronomists regard it as determined by YHWH.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler copies verses 32-34, he adds to verse 34 and enlarges on verse 35.

²He did what was right in the sight of YHWH just as his father Uzziah had done—only he did not invade the temple of YHWH. But the people still followed corrupt practices. ³He built the upper gate of the house of YHWH, and did extensive building on the wall of Ophel. ⁴Moreover he built cities in the hill country of Judah, and forts and towers on the wooded hills.

⁵He fought with the king of the Ammonites and prevailed against them. The Ammonites gave him that year one hundred talents of silver, ten thousand cors of wheat and ten thousand of barley. The Ammonites paid him the same amount in the second and the third years. ⁶So Jotham became strong because he ordered his ways before YHWH his God.

– 2Chronicles 27:2-6

The Chronicler omits verse 37, and concludes his treatment of Jotham by copying verse 38.

³²In the second year of King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel, King Jotham son of Uzziah of Judah began to reign. ³³He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Jerusha daughter of Zadok. ³⁴He did what was right in the sight of YHWH, just as his father Uzziah had done.

³⁵Nevertheless the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and made offerings on the high places. He built the upper gate of the house of YHWH.

³⁶Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah?

³⁷In those days YHWH began to send King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah against Judah.

³⁸Jotham slept with his ancestors, and was buried with his ancestors in the city of David, his ancestor; his son Ahaz succeeded him.

¹In the seventeenth year of Pekah son of Remaliah, King Ahaz son of Jotham of Judah began to reign.

²Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign; he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. He did not do what was right in the sight of YHWH his God, as his ancestor David had done, ³but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even made his son pass through fire, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom YHWH drove out before the people of Israel. ⁴He sacrificed and made offerings on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.

⁵Then King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel came up to wage war on Jerusalem; they besieged Ahaz but could not conquer him.

The miscalculation of the reign of Pekah of Israel (see 15:27, page 200) has influenced verse 1. It is likely that Ahaz began his reign in 734, the year of Pekah's accession to the throne, and the year of the death of Ahaz's grandfather, Azariah, and of his father Jotham, who had been co-regent for the last sixteen years of Azariah's life. Scholars have suggested different ways of trying to make sense of the data given for the reigns from Azariah to Hezekiah. It seems to me that the simplest solution is to suggest that the mistake lies in giving 'sixteen years' (verse 2) for the reign of Ahaz. If we take it as eight years we have him reign from 734 to 727.

In the Assyrian Annals there is a record of Ahaz paying tribute to Tiglath-pileser III (ANET 282).

Ahaz is given a resoundingly negative judgment. He is as bad as any of the kings of Israel. Moses' words in Deuteronomy 8:9-12 expand on verses 3-4.

⁹When you come into the land that YHWH your God is giving you, you must not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations. ¹⁰No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, ¹¹or one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead. ¹²For whoever does these things is abhorrent to YHWH; it is because of such abhorrent practices that YHWH your God is driving them out before you.

Verse 5 picks up 15:37. This refers to the so-called Syro-Ephraimite war (733-732). Syria and Israel wanted to force Judah into an alliance against Assyria. The accession of a new king, Ahaz, provided the opportunity (see page 204).

Judah was under pressure also from the south where the Edomites had ousted Judah from Elat, and so from trade coming through the Red Sea (verse 6; see 14:7).

Ahaz decides to appeal to Assyria, asking to be a vassal and offering an attractive tribute. Assyria accepts and Judah is delivered when Assyria, once again, attacks Syria and Israel.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler copies verses 1-4 and expands on verse 5

⁵Therefore YHWH his God gave him into the hand of the king of Aram, who defeated him and took captive a great number of his people and brought them to Damascus. He was also given into the hand of the king of Israel, who defeated him with great slaughter. ⁶Pekah son of Remaliah killed one hundred twenty thousand in Judah in one day, all of them valiant warriors, because they had abandoned YHWH, the God of their ancestors. ⁷And Zichri, a mighty warrior of Ephraim, killed the king's son Maaseiah, Azrikam the commander of the palace, and Elkanah the next in authority to the king. ⁸The people of Israel took captive two hundred thousand of their kin, women, sons, and daughters; they also took much booty from them and brought the booty to Samaria.

⁹But a prophet of YHWH was there, whose name was Oded; he went out to meet the army that came to Samaria, and said to them, "Because YHWH, the God of your ancestors, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand, but you have killed them in a rage that has reached up to heaven. ¹⁰Now you intend to subjugate the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, as your slaves. But what have you except sins against YHWH your God? ¹¹Now hear me, and send back the captives whom you have taken from your kindred, for the fierce wrath of YHWH is upon you."

¹²Moreover, certain chiefs of the Ephraimites, Azariah son of Johanan, Berechiah son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah son of Shallum, and Amasa son of Hadlai, stood up against those who were coming from the war, ¹³and said to them, "You shall not bring the captives in here, for you propose to bring on us guilt against YHWH in addition to our present sins and guilt. For our guilt is already great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel."

¹⁴So the warriors left the captives and the booty before the officials and all the assembly. ¹⁵Then those who were mentioned by name got up and took the captives, and with the booty they clothed all that were naked among them; they clothed them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them; and carrying all the feeble among them on donkeys, they brought them to their kindred at Jericho, the city of palm trees. Then they returned to Samaria. ¹⁶At that time King Ahaz sent to the king of Assyria for help. ¹⁷For the Edomites had again invaded and defeated Judah, and carried away captives. ¹⁸And the Philistines had made raids on the cities in the Shephelah and the Negeb of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco with its villages, Timnah with its villages, and Gimzo with its villages; and they settled there. ¹⁹For YHWH brought Judah low because of King Ahaz of Israel (!), for he had behaved without restraint in Judah and had been faithless to YHWH.

[verse 5 is repeated from page 202]

⁵Then King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel came up to wage war on Jerusalem; they besieged Ahaz but could not conquer him.

⁶At that time the king of Edom recovered Elath for Edom, and drove the Judahites from Elath; and the Edomites came to Elath, where they live to this day.

⁷Ahaz sent messengers to King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son. Come up, and rescue me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me."⁸Ahaz also took the silver and gold found in the house of YHWH and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent a bribe to the king of Assyria. ⁹The king of Assyria listened to him; the king of Assyria marched up against Damascus, and took it, carrying its people captive to Kir; then he killed Rezin.

As already noted the reign of King Tiglath-pileser III (744-727) was a period of Assyrian expansion. At first King Rezin of Syria had no choice but to submit to Assyria as a vassal state. However, he took the opportunity of Assyria's concentration on its eastern borders with Urartu and Media to break away and to organise an anti-Assyrian alliance, which King Pekah of Israel joined. In 734 the Assyrian army made a victorious sweep all along the Mediterranean coastline, conquering the Philistine cities and reaching to the borders of Egypt. Syria and Israel were now vulnerable from east and west, and King Rezin of Syria and King Pekah of Israel brought pressure to bear on Jotham, king of Judah, to join the alliance (see 15:37-38). When Jotham died in 734, and was succeeded by his young son, Ahaz, Syria and Israel decided to invade Judah in order to depose Ahaz and set up a puppet regime. They besieged Jerusalem.

This was the situation that provoked Isaiah's intervention (see page 206). Isaiah's message was twofold. Firstly, it was YHWH's will that Judah not join the anti-Assyrian alliance. This was excellent advice in every way. The alliance was crushed when Assyria attacked and conquered Syria, and took Galilee and Gilead from Israel. It would have been suicidal for Judah to align itself with the ill-fated alliance.

Secondly, Isaiah told Ahaz to put his trust in YHWH, not in Assyria. This advice Ahaz chose to ignore. He decided to put his trust in Assyria, to submit to the overlordship of Assyria, and to pay a hefty tribute. This opened Judah to Assyrian imperialist influence.

The Chronicler

Instead of having Assyria as Judah's ally against Syria and Israel, the Chronicler has Assyria attacking Judah. He sees this as punishment for Ahaz's stripping of the temple.

²⁰So King Tilgath-pilneser of Assyria came against him, and oppressed him instead of strengthening him. ²¹For Ahaz plundered the house of YHWH and the houses of the king and of the officials, and gave tribute to the king of Assyria; but it did not help him.

– 2Chronicles 28:20-21

Ahaz expresses his submission to Assyria in a cultic act. He has a copy of the Assyrian altar made, and puts it in pride of place in the temple in Jerusalem, placing YHWH's altar to the side. It is still used to inquire as to YHWH's will (see verse 15).

Ahaz also strips the temple of its adornments to meet the Assyrian demands (verses 17-18).

The Chronicler

²²In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to YHWH—this same King Ahaz. ²³For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus, which had defeated him, and said, “Because the gods of the kings of Aram helped them, I will sacrifice to them so that they may help me.” But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel. ²⁴Ahaz gathered together the utensils of the house of God, and cut in pieces the utensils of the house of God. He shut up the doors of the house of YHWH and made himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem. ²⁵In every city of Judah he made high places to make offerings to other gods, provoking to anger YHWH, the God of his ancestors.

– 2Chronicles 28:22-25

The Chronicler says that Ahaz was not buried with the other kings (verse 27).

¹⁰When King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, he saw the altar that was at Damascus. King Ahaz sent to the priest Uriah a model of the altar, and its pattern, exact in all its details. ¹¹The priest Uriah built the altar; in accordance with all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus, just so did the priest Uriah build it, before King Ahaz arrived from Damascus. ¹²When the king came from Damascus, the king viewed the altar. Then the king drew near to the altar, went up on it, ¹³and offered his burnt offering and his grain offering, poured his drink offering, and dashed the blood of his communion offerings against the altar. ¹⁴The bronze altar that was before YHWH he removed from the front of the house, from the place between his altar and the house of YHWH, and put it on the north side of his altar. ¹⁵King Ahaz commanded the priest Uriah, saying, “Upon the great altar offer the morning burnt offering, and the evening grain offering, and the king's burnt offering, and his grain offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, their grain offering, and their drink offering; then dash against it all the blood of the burnt offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice; but the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire by.” ¹⁶The priest Uriah did everything that King Ahaz commanded.

¹⁷Then King Ahaz cut off the frames of the stands, and removed the laver from them; he removed the sea from the bronze oxen that were under it, and put it on a pediment of stone.

¹⁸The covered portal for use on the sabbath that had been built inside the palace, and the outer entrance for the king he removed from the house of YHWH. He did this because of the king of Assyria.

¹⁹Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ²⁰Ahaz slept with his ancestors, and was buried with his ancestors in the city of David; his son Hezekiah succeeded him.

Note. The Syro-Ephraimite war in Isaiah (Isaiah 7:1-19)

¹In the days of Ahaz son of Jotham son of Uzziah, king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and King Pekah son of Remaliah of Israel went up to attack Jerusalem, but could not mount an attack against it. ²When the house of David heard that Aram had allied itself with Ephraim, the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind. ³Then YHWH said to Isaiah, Go out to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller's Field, ⁴and say to him, Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah. ⁵Because Aram – with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah – has plotted evil against you, saying, ⁶Let us go up against Judah and cut off Jerusalem and conquer it for ourselves and make the son of Tabeel king in it.

⁷Therefore thus says the Lord YHWH: It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass.

⁸For the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin . . .

⁹The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all.

¹⁰Again YHWH spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹Ask a sign of YHWH your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. ¹²But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put YHWH to the test. ¹³Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also?" ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. ¹⁵He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted. ¹⁷YHWH will bring on you and on your people and on your ancestral house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria." ¹⁸On that day YHWH will whistle for the fly that is at the sources of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. ¹⁹And they will all come and settle in the steep ravines, and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all the thornbushes, and on all the pastures.

It is not clear why Ahaz's declining to ask for a sign (verse 12) merits this response. Are we to understand that Ahaz is uttering a pious phrase in an attempt to mask his lack of interest in listening to God's word? The alliance Ahaz fears will soon collapse. Young mothers now expecting will be so confident that they will name their children 'Immanuel' ('God is with us'), and within a few years Syria and Israel will be deserted. 'almâ means 'a young woman' (see Genesis 24:43, referring to Rebekah; Exodus 2:8, referring to Moses' sister, and also Proverbs 30:19). The Greek Version translates 'almâ in verse 14 as 'parthenos' ('virgin'). The Hebrew word for 'virgin' is betûlâ.

The Syro-Ephraimite War in Hosea (Hosea 5:8-10)

Hosea looks at this war from the perspective of the northern kingdom. He is commenting on Judah's counter-attack.

⁸Blow the horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah.

Sound the alarm at Beth-aven; look behind you, Benjamin!

⁹Ephraim shall become a desolation in the day of punishment;
among the tribes of Israel I declare what is sure.

¹⁰The princes of Judah have become like those who remove the landmark;
on them I will pour out my wrath like water.

The danger to Israel ('Ephraim') is from the south. Gibeah is 5ks north of Jerusalem; Ramah a further 3ks, and Bethel ('Beth-aven') a further 8ks. All three towns are in Benjamin. In 734 Tiglath-Pileser III had conquered Philistia and the Mediterranean coastline of Israel. Israel entered into an alliance with Syria (Aram) and tried to force Judah to join. In 733 the Assyrians invaded and conquered Gilead, Galilee, and the Valley of Jezreel. Israel, reduced to the highlands of Ephraim and Manasseh, had to withdraw from Judah. What we witness in verse 8 appears to be Judah's counter-attack. Hosea is angry at Judah for taking advantage of Ephraim's weakness to attack across the southern border (verse 10). On the inviolability of 'landmarks' see Deuteronomy 19:14.

¹In the twelfth year of King Ahaz of Judah, Hoshea son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel; he reigned nine years. ²He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH, yet not like the kings of Israel who were before him.

³King Shalmaneser of Assyria came up against him; Hoshea became his vassal, and paid him tribute. ⁴But the king of Assyria found treachery in Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to Sais, to the king of Egypt, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year; therefore the king of Assyria confined him and imprisoned him.

⁵Then the king of Assyria invaded all the land and came to Samaria; for three years he besieged it. ⁶In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria captured Samaria; he carried the Israelites away to Assyria. He placed them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

Verse 1 is a clear example of the difficulty experienced by the Deuteronomists in calculating the years of the reign of the kings of Israel in the final twenty or so years of the kingdom. We have already noted the error in calculating the reign of Pekah as ‘twenty years’(15:27). A few verses later they stated that Hoshea, who assassinated Pekah, began his reign ‘in the twentieth year of Jotham, son of Uzziah’(15:30). Here we are told that it was ‘the twelfth year of King Ahaz’. The date that fits best is the fourth year of Ahaz; that is, 730. This is confirmed by verse 6 which tells us that the king of Assyria captured Samaria ‘in the ninth year of Hoshea’. From the Assyrian records we know that Samaria fell in 722/721. Verse 5 mentions the three year siege. Later in 18:10 this is calculated as ‘the seventh year of King Hoshea’; that is 724. The ‘nine years’ of Hoshea’s reign were 730-722.

Back in 734, those opposed to paying tribute to Assyria assassinated King Pekahiah and replaced him with Pekah. He cancelled the tribute, looked to Egypt and, with Rezin of Syria, tried to force King Ahaz of Judah to join an anti-Assyrian alliance. In response Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria conquered Gilead on the east of the Jordan, as well as Galilee, including the Valley of Jezreel. Pekah was assassinated in 730 by Hoshea who reverted to paying tribute to Assyria (ANET 284). However, in 724 Hoshea decided to turn to Egypt and stop paying the tribute. Shalmaneser V, the successor of Tiglath-pileser III, invaded Ephraim. Hoshea was taken prisoner, and the Assyrian forces besieged the capital, Samaria. Samaria valiantly resisted for three years, but was finally forced to surrender by Shalmaneser’s successor, Sargon II in 721. In the Assyrian royal Annals (ANET 284-285), Sargon boasts of conquering Samaria and deporting 27,290 of its inhabitants. The leading citizens were scattered across the Fertile Crescent as far east as Media. This marked the end of the northern kingdom.

The Chronicler

As expected, the Chronicler is silent about the fall of Samaria. He also omits the reflection on this fall which takes up the rest of chapter 17.

The rest of chapter 17 consists in a reflection by the Deuteronomists on the significance of the fall of the northern kingdom.

Again and again throughout this reflection we find phrases from the Book of Deuteronomy.

Basically the northern kingdom fell because it was unfaithful to the covenant. The people worshipped other gods, and, though YHWH continually sent them prophets to warn them they refused to listen, they refused to turn from their evil ways (verse 13), they 'did not believe in YHWH their God'(verse 14), and so brought upon themselves God's anger. They 'went after false idols, and became false themselves' (verse 15; compare Hosea 9:10; Jeremiah 2:5; Psalm 115:8).

Finally God rejected them, had them driven from the land and absorbed into the Assyrian Empire. He 'removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah alone'(verse 18).

⁷This occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against YHWH their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They had worshipped other gods ⁸and walked in the customs of the nations whom YHWH drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had introduced. ⁹The people of Israel secretly did things that were not right against YHWH their God. They built for themselves high places at all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city; ¹⁰they set up for themselves pillars and sacred poles on every high hill and under every green tree; ¹¹there they made offerings on all the high places, as the nations did whom YHWH carried away before them. They did wicked things, provoking YHWH to anger; ¹²they served idols, of which YHWH had said to them, "You shall not do this."

¹³Yet YHWH warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the law that I commanded your ancestors and that I sent to you by my servants the prophets." ¹⁴They would not listen but were stubborn, as their ancestors had been, who did not believe in YHWH their God. ¹⁵They despised his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their ancestors, and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols and became false; they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom YHWH had commanded them that they should not do as they did. ¹⁶They rejected all the commandments of YHWH their God and made for themselves cast images of two calves; they made a sacred pole, worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. ¹⁷They made their sons and their daughters pass through fire; they used divination and augury; and they sold themselves to do evil in the sight of YHWH, provoking him to anger. ¹⁸Therefore YHWH was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah alone.

¹⁹Judah also did not keep the commandments of YHWH their God but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced.

²⁰YHWH rejected all the descendants of Israel; he punished them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until he had banished them from his presence.

²¹When he had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam son of Nebat king. Jeroboam drove Israel from following YHWH and made them commit great sin. ²²The people of Israel continued in all the sins that Jeroboam committed; they did not depart from them ²³until YHWH removed Israel out of his sight, as he had foretold through all his servants the prophets. So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day.

²⁴The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria in place of the people of Israel; they took possession of Samaria, and settled in its cities. ²⁵When they first settled there, they did not worship YHWH; therefore YHWH sent lions among them, which killed some of them. ²⁶So the king of Assyria was told, "The nations that you have carried away and placed in the cities of Samaria do not know the law of the god of the land; therefore he has sent lions among them; they are killing them, because they do not know the law of the god of the land." ²⁷Then the king of Assyria commanded, "Send there one of the priests whom you carried away from there; let him go and live there, and teach them the law of the god of the land." ²⁸So one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and lived in Bethel; he taught them how they should worship YHWH.

Verses 19-20 appear to belong to the final editing, made in Exile after the fall of Jerusalem.

Verse 21 takes us back to the beginnings of the northern kingdom and summarises the judgment made throughout against all the northern kings: they carried on the apostasy initiated by Jeroboam.

Once again the Deuteronomists refer to the prophets (verse 23; see verse 13; see, for example Amos 3:11; 4:2-34; 6:7). And they conclude: 'So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day'(verse 23).

Verse 24 looks at the other side of exile. Not only were the people of Israel taken east into exile, other subject peoples were moved west into Israel. Mixing populations was an Assyrian strategy to discourage revolution. Naturally these nations brought with them their own religious cults.

The Deuteronomists do not approve of any cult other than Yahwism, so they portray YHWH as displeased (verse 25). In an era where gods were closely associated with land, the king of Assyria was also concerned that the immigrant peoples were not respecting the god of Israel, and arranges for them to be instructed (verses 26-28).

The new inhabitants included YHWH in their cult, but continued their ancient practices (verses 29-34), right up to the time of writing (verse 34). In verse 29 the inhabitants are called ‘people of Samaria’ (‘Samaritans’). This is the only time in the Hebrew Bible that they are described in this way.

In verses 35-39 we hear YHWH continuing to offer a covenant, including those who are newcomers to the land of Israel. However, this covenant has no room for worshipping gods other than YHWH, and, as verses 34 and 40 make clear, the people did not accept God’s offer. YHWH was included, but the cult included their customary gods. ‘To this day’, write the Deuteronomists, ‘their children and their children’s children continue to do as their ancestors did.’

²⁹But every nation still made gods of its own and put them in the shrines of the high places that the people of Samaria had made, every nation in the cities in which they lived; ³⁰the people of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, the people of Cuth made Nergal, the people of Hamath made Ashima; ³¹the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak; the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. ³²They also worshipped YHWH and appointed from among themselves all sorts of people as priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. ³³So they worshipped YHWH but also served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away. ³⁴To this day they continue to practise their former customs.

They do not worship YHWH and they do not follow the statutes or the ordinances or the law or the commandment that YHWH commanded the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel.

³⁵YHWH had made a covenant with them and commanded them, “You shall not worship other gods or bow yourselves to them or serve them or sacrifice to them, ³⁶but you shall worship YHWH, who brought you out of the land of Egypt with great power and with an outstretched arm; you shall bow yourselves to him, and to him you shall sacrifice. ³⁷The statutes and the ordinances and the law and the commandment that he wrote for you, you shall always be careful to observe. You shall not worship other gods; ³⁸you shall not forget the covenant that I have made with you. You shall not worship other gods, ³⁹but you shall worship YHWH your God; he will deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies.”

⁴⁰They would not listen, however, but they continued to practise their former custom. ⁴¹So these nations worshipped YHWH, but also served their carved images; to this day their children and their children’s children continue to do as their ancestors did.

¹In the third year of King Hoshea son of Elah of Israel, Hezekiah son of King Ahaz of Judah began to reign. ²He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abi daughter of Zechariah. ³He did what was right in the sight of YHWH just as his ancestor David had done. ⁴He removed the high places, broke down the pillars, and cut down the Asherah pole. He broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it; it was called Nehushtan.

⁵He trusted in YHWH the God of Israel; so that there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah after him, or among those who were before him. ⁶For he held fast to YHWH; he did not depart from following him but kept the commandments that YHWH commanded Moses. ⁷YHWH was with him; wherever he went, he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him.

⁸He attacked the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city.

⁹In the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of King Hoshea son of Elah of Israel, King Shalmaneser of Assyria came up against Samaria, besieged it, ¹⁰and at the end of three years, took it. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of King Hoshea of Israel, Samaria was taken.

In verse 1 we are informed that Hezekiah's reign began in the 'third year of King Hoshea'; that is, c. 727. This fits with verses 9-10, since the siege of Samaria began in 724 ('the fourth year of Hezekiah') and Samaria fell in 722 ('the sixth year of Hezekiah'). A reign of 29 years would be 727-699.

However, verse 13 calculates King Sennacherib of Assyria's invasion of Judah as 'the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah' (see in agreement Isaiah 36:1). We know from the Assyrian records that this invasion took place in 701 (ANET 287-288) – which would put Hezekiah's accession to the throne as 715.

Perhaps the way to synchronize these dates is to have Hezekiah becoming king in his teens on the death of his father, Ahaz, in 727. Perhaps because of the turmoil of the times, he remained under a guardian till 715, when he was officially made king of Judah at age twenty-five (verse 2).

He was only eighteen when Samaria fell in 722, and Jerusalem received an influx of refugees from the north. Jerusalem grew from ten to twelve acres, and from a population of about one thousand to about fifteen thousand. The population of Judah at this time is estimated as one hundred twenty thousand.

The judgment on Hezekiah is entirely positive, zealous in his reform and totally faithful to the covenant. He even dispensed with the bronze serpent associated with Moses (see Numbers 21:8-9). His obedience brought prosperity (verse 7; see Deuteronomy 30:15-20). He recovered territory on the Mediterranean coast (verse 8). However, his rebellion (verse 7) will have dire consequences (see 18:13).

A dramatic contrast is made in verses 9-10, where we are reminded of the destruction of the northern kingdom (see 17:5-6, page 208).

Verses 1-2 copy from 2Kings 18:1-3, omitting reference to Hoshea.

¹Hezekiah began to reign when he was twenty-five years old; he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. ²He did what was right in the sight of YHWH, just as his ancestor David had done.

Cleansing of the Temple

The Chronicler takes the occasion to highlight his interest in the Temple, the Levites and the cult.

³In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of YHWH and repaired them. ⁴He brought in the priests and the Levites and assembled them in the square on the east. ⁵He said to them, "Listen to me, Levites! Sanctify yourselves, and sanctify the house of YHWH, the God of your ancestors, and carry out the filth from the holy place.

⁶For our ancestors have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of YHWH our God; they have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the dwelling of YHWH, and turned their backs. ⁷They also shut the doors of the vestibule and put out the lamps, and have not offered incense or made burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel.

⁸Therefore the wrath of YHWH came upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he has made them an object of horror, of astonishment, and of hissing, as you see with your own eyes. ⁹Our fathers have fallen by the sword and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this.

¹⁰Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with YHWH, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger may turn away from us. ¹¹My sons, do not now be negligent, for YHWH has chosen you to stand in his presence to minister to him, and to be his ministers and make offerings to him."

¹²Then the Levites arose, Mahath son of Amasai, and Joel son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites; and of the sons of Merari, Kish son of Abdi, and Azariah son of Jehallelel; and of the Gershonites, Joah son of Zimmah, and Eden son of Joah; ¹³and of the sons of Elizaphan, Shimri and Jeuel; and of the sons of Asaph, Zechariah and Mattaniah; ¹⁴and of the sons of Heman, Jehuel and Shimei; and of the sons of Jeduthun, Shemaiah and Uzziel. ¹⁵They gathered their brothers, sanctified themselves, and went in as the king had commanded, by the words of YHWH, to cleanse the house of YHWH.

¹⁶The priests went into the inner part of the house of YHWH to cleanse it, and they brought out all the unclean things that they found in the temple of YHWH into the court of the house of YHWH; and the Levites took them and carried them out to the Wadi Kidron. ¹⁷They began to sanctify on the first day of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of YHWH; then for eight days they sanctified the house of YHWH, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished. ¹⁸Then they went inside to King Hezekiah and said, "We have cleansed all the house of YHWH, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the table for the rows of bread and all its utensils.

¹⁹All the utensils that King Ahaz repudiated during his reign when he was faithless, we have made ready and sanctified; see, they are in front of the altar of YHWH.” ²⁰Then King Hezekiah rose early, assembled the officials of the city, and went up to the house of YHWH. ²¹They brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven male goats for a sin offering for the kingdom and for the sanctuary and for Judah. He commanded the priests the descendants of Aaron to offer them on the altar of YHWH. ²²So they slaughtered the bulls, and the priests received the blood and dashed it against the altar; they slaughtered the rams and their blood was dashed against the altar; they also slaughtered the lambs and their blood was dashed against the altar. ²³Then the male goats for the reparation offering were brought to the king and the assembly; they laid their hands on them, ²⁴and the priests slaughtered them and made a reparation offering with their blood at the altar, to make atonement for all Israel. For the king commanded that the burnt offering and the reparation offering should be made for all Israel. ²⁵He stationed the Levites in the house of YHWH with cymbals, harps, and lyres, according to the commandment of David and of Gad the king’s seer and of the prophet Nathan, for the commandment was from YHWH through his prophets. ²⁶The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. ²⁷Then Hezekiah commanded that the burnt offering be offered on the altar. When the burnt offering began, the song to YHWH began also, and the trumpets, accompanied by the instruments of King David of Israel. ²⁸The whole assembly worshipped, the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all this continued until the burnt offering was finished. ²⁹When the offering was finished, the king and all who were present with him bowed down and worshiped. ³⁰King Hezekiah and the officials commanded the Levites to sing praises to YHWH with the words of David and of the seer Asaph. They sang praises with gladness, and they bowed down and worshipped. ³¹Then Hezekiah said, “You have now consecrated yourselves to YHWH; come near, bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the house of YHWH.” The assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings; and all who were of a willing heart brought burnt offerings. ³²The number of the burnt offerings that the assembly brought was seventy bulls, one hundred rams, and two hundred lambs; all these were for a burnt offering to YHWH. ³³The consecrated offerings were six hundred bulls and three thousand sheep. ³⁴But the priests were too few and could not skin all the burnt offerings, so, until other priests had sanctified themselves, their kindred, the Levites, helped them until the work was finished – for the Levites were more conscientious than the priests in sanctifying themselves. ³⁵Besides the great number of burnt offerings there was the fat of the offerings of well-being, and there were the drink offerings for the burnt offerings. Thus the service of the house of YHWH was restored. ³⁶And Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced because of what God had done for the people; for the thing had come about suddenly.

The Passover

¹Hezekiah sent word to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of YHWH at Jerusalem, to keep the passover to YHWH the God of Israel. ²For the king and his officials and all the assembly in Jerusalem had taken counsel to keep the passover in the second month ³(for they could not keep it at its proper time because the priests had not sanctified themselves in sufficient number, nor had the people assembled in Jerusalem). ⁴The plan seemed right to the king and all the assembly. ⁵So they decreed to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba to Dan, that the people should come and keep the passover to YHWH the God of Israel, at Jerusalem; for they had not kept it in great numbers as prescribed.

⁶So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his officials, as the king had commanded, saying, “O people of Israel, return to YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, so that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. ⁷Do not be like your ancestors and your kindred, who were faithless to YHWH God of their ancestors, so that he made them a desolation, as you see. ⁸Do not now be stiff-necked as your ancestors were, but yield yourselves to YHWH and come to his sanctuary, which he has sanctified forever, and serve YHWH your God, so that his fierce anger may turn away from you. ⁹For as you return to YHWH, your kindred and your children will find compassion with their captors, and return to this land. For YHWH your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him.”

¹⁰So the couriers went from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun; but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. ¹¹Only a few from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem.

¹²The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the officials commanded by the word of YHWH. ¹³Many people came together in Jerusalem to keep the festival of unleavened bread in the second month, a very large assembly. ¹⁴They set to work and removed the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for offering incense they took away and threw into the Wadi Kidron.

¹⁵They slaughtered the passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month. The priests and the Levites were ashamed, and they sanctified themselves and brought burnt offerings into the house of YHWH. ¹⁶They took their accustomed posts according to the law of Moses the man of God; the priests dashed the blood that they received from the hands of the Levites. ¹⁷For there were many in the assembly who had not sanctified themselves; therefore the Levites had to slaughter the passover lamb for everyone who was not clean, to make it holy to YHWH.

¹⁸For a multitude of the people, many of them from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the passover otherwise than as prescribed.

But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, “The good YHWH pardon all ¹⁹who set their hearts to seek God, YHWH the God of their ancestors, even though not in accordance with the sanctuary’s rules of cleanness.” ²⁰YHWH heard Hezekiah, and healed the people.

The festival of Unleavened Bread

²¹The people of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the festival of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised YHWH day by day, accompanied by loud instruments for YHWH. ²²Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good skill in the service of YHWH. So the people ate the food of the festival for seven days, sacrificing communion offerings and giving thanks to YHWH the God of their ancestors. ²³Then the whole assembly agreed together to keep the festival for another seven days; so they kept it for another seven days with gladness. ²⁴For King Hezekiah of Judah gave the assembly a thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep for offerings, and the officials gave the assembly a thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep. The priests sanctified themselves in great numbers.

²⁵The whole assembly of Judah, the priests and the Levites, and the whole assembly that came out of Israel, and the resident aliens who came out of the land of Israel, and the resident aliens who lived in Judah, rejoiced. ²⁶There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon son of King David of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. ²⁷Then the priests and the Levites stood up and blessed the people, and their voice was heard; their prayer came to his holy dwelling in heaven.

Destroying shrines to pagan gods

^{31:1}Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah and broke down the pillars, hewed down the sacred poles, and pulled down the high places and the altars throughout all Judah and Benjamin, and in Ephraim and Manasseh, until they had destroyed them all. Then all the people of Israel returned to their cities, all to their individual properties.

Contributions

²Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and of the Levites, division by division, everyone according to his service, the priests and the Levites, for burnt offerings and communion offerings, to minister in the gates of the camp of YHWH and to give thanks and praise. ³The contribution of the king from his own possessions was for the burnt offerings: the burnt offerings of morning and evening, and the burnt offerings for the sabbaths, the new moons, and the appointed festivals, as it is written in the law of YHWH.

⁴He commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion due to the priests and the Levites, so that they might devote themselves to the law of YHWH. ⁵As soon as the word spread, the people of Israel gave in abundance the first fruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything. ⁶The people of Israel and Judah who lived in the cities of Judah also brought in the tithe of cattle and sheep, and the tithe of the dedicated things that had been consecrated to YHWH their God, and laid them in heaps. ⁷In the third month they began to pile up the heaps, and finished them in the seventh month. ⁸When Hezekiah and the officials came and saw the heaps, they blessed YHWH and his people Israel. ⁹Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites about the heaps.

¹⁰The chief priest Azariah, who was of the house of Zadok, answered him, "Since they began to bring the contributions into the house of YHWH, we have had enough to eat and have plenty to spare; for YHWH has blessed his people, so that we have this great supply left over." ¹¹Then Hezekiah commanded them to prepare store-chambers in the house of YHWH; and they prepared them. ¹²Faithfully they brought in the contributions, the tithes and the dedicated things. The chief officer in charge of them was Conaniah the Levite, with his brother Shimei as second; ¹³while Jehiel, Azariah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismachiah, Mahath, and Benaiah were overseers assisting Conaniah and his brother Shimei, by the appointment of King Hezekiah and of Azariah the chief officer of the house of God. ¹⁴Kore son of Imnah the Levite, keeper of the east gate, was in charge of the freewill offerings to God, to apportion the contribution reserved for YHWH and the most holy offerings. ¹⁵Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shecaniah were faithfully assisting him in the cities of the priests, to distribute the portions to their kindred, old and young alike, by divisions, ¹⁶except those enrolled by genealogy, males from three years old and upwards, all who entered the house of YHWH as the duty of each day required, for their service according to their offices, by their divisions.

¹⁷The enrollment of the priests was according to their ancestral houses; that of the Levites from twenty years old and upwards was according to their offices, by their divisions. ¹⁸The priests were enrolled with all their little children, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, the whole multitude; for they were faithful in keeping themselves holy. ¹⁹And for the descendants of Aaron, the priests, who were in the fields of common land belonging to their towns, town by town, the people designated by name were to distribute portions to every male among the priests and to everyone among the Levites who was enrolled.

²⁰Hezekiah did this throughout all Judah; he did what was good and right and faithful before YHWH his God. ²¹And every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God, and in accordance with the law and the commandments, to seek his God, he did with all his heart; and he prospered.

⁹In the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of King Hoshea son of Elah of Israel, King Shalmaneser of Assyria came up against Samaria, besieged it, ¹⁰and at the end of three years, took it. In the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of King Hoshea of Israel, Samaria was taken. ¹¹The king of Assyria carried the Israelites away to Assyria, settled them in Halah, on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes, ¹²because they did not obey the voice of YHWH their God but transgressed his covenant—all that Moses the servant of YHWH had commanded; they neither listened nor obeyed.

¹³In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, King Sennacherib of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. ¹⁴King Hezekiah of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, "I have done wrong; withdraw from me; whatever you impose on me I will bear." The king of Assyria demanded of King Hezekiah of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. ¹⁵Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of YHWH and in the treasuries of the king's house. ¹⁶At that time Hezekiah stripped the gold from the doors of the temple of YHWH, and from the doorposts that King Hezekiah of Judah had overlaid and gave it to the king of Assyria. ¹⁷The king of Assyria sent the Tartan, the Rab-saris, and the Rabshakeh with a great army from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. They went up and came to Jerusalem. When they arrived, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is on the highway to the Fuller's Field. ¹⁸When they called for the king, there came out to them Eliakim son of Hilkiyah, who was in charge of the palace, and Sheb-nah the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder.

Verses 9-12 reiterate the account of the fall of Samaria (see 17:3-6), thus creating a sharp contrast with the obedience shown YHWH by Hezekiah in verses 3-8 (see page 212)

It was during the reign of King Hezekiah that the Assyrian army put down a revolt by the Philistine city-state of Ashdod (713-711). Sennacherib succeeded Sargon II in 705. The death of Sargon led to revolts in every section of the Assyrian Empire. Hezekiah seems to have played a significant role in organising rebellion in Palestine. As we read in verse 7, 'he rebelled against the king of Assyria and would not serve him'. The prophet Isaiah was active in attempting to deter him from a policy which he saw as a failure to trust in YHWH (see Isaiah 20:1-6). Hezekiah went ahead and Judah was devastated by the Assyrian army in 701 (see page 212; also Micah 1:10-13), the fourteenth year since Hezekiah's official coronation (verse 13).

When Lachish was conquered, Hezekiah, realising that Jerusalem was now isolated, surrendered and paid a huge tribute (verses 14-16). This was not enough for Sennacherib who sends three high ranking officers to Jerusalem to demand more (verse 17). Hezekiah sends three of his high-ranking officials to negotiate with them (verse 18). The power is all on the side of Assyria.

The Isaiah Scroll

A briefer account of verses 13-18 is found in Isaiah 36:1-3.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler's account is very different from the account in the Book of Kings. He omits 2Kings 18: 9-12, concerned as they are with the northern kingdom, and omits any reference to Hezekiah submitting to Assyria or stripping the temple (2Kings 8:14-16).

He focusses on the ever faithful Hezekiah securing the city's water (verses 3-4), and the city walls (verse 5).

He also organises the defence and encourages the people to put their trust in YHWH, who would fight for them (verses 6-8).

His account of the Assyrian delegation is much simpler (compare 2Kings 18:17-18 and 2Chronicles 32:9).

¹After these things and these acts of faithfulness, King Sennacherib of Assyria came and invaded Judah and encamped against the fortified cities, thinking to win them for himself. ²When Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and intended to fight against Jerusalem, ³he planned with his officers and his warriors to stop the flow of the springs that were outside the city; and they helped him. ⁴A great many people were gathered, and they stopped all the springs and the wadi that flowed through the land, saying, "Why should the Assyrian kings come and find water in abundance?"

⁵Hezekiah set to work resolutely and built up the entire wall that was broken down, and raised towers on it, and outside it he built another wall; he also strengthened the Millo in the city of David, and made weapons and shields in abundance.

⁶He appointed combat commanders over the people, and gathered them together to him in the square at the gate of the city and spoke encouragingly to them, saying, ⁷"Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him; for there is one greater with us than with him. ⁸With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is YHWH our God, to help us and to fight our battles." The people were encouraged by the words of King Hezekiah of Judah.

⁹After this, while King Sennacherib of Assyria was at Lachish with all his forces, he sent his servants to Jerusalem to King Hezekiah of Judah and to all the people of Judah that were in Jerusalem.

¹⁹The Rabshakeh said to them, “Say to Hezekiah: Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria: On what do you base this confidence of yours? ²⁰Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? On whom do you now rely, that you have rebelled against me?

²¹See, you are relying now on Egypt, that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of anyone who leans on it. Such is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who rely on him. ²²But if you say to me, ‘We rely on YHWH our God,’ is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, ‘You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem’?

²³Come now, make a wager with my master the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them.

²⁴How then can you repulse a single captain among the least of my master’s servants, when you rely on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? ²⁵Moreover, is it without YHWH that I have come up against this place to destroy it? YHWH said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.”

²⁶Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah, and Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, “Please speak to your servants in the Aramaic language, for we understand it; do not speak to us in the language of Judah within the hearing of the people who are on the wall.” ²⁷But the Rabshakeh said to them, “Has my master sent me to speak these words to your master and to you, and not to the people sitting on the wall, who are doomed with you to eat their own dung and to drink their own urine?”

In verses 19-25 we have a stylized speech from one of Sennacherib’s negotiators. He is speaking on behalf of ‘the great king’ (verse 19). He is making the point that resistance to Assyria is sheer folly. Whoever the king chooses to rely on cannot succeed against the Empire. The Pharaoh of Egypt is a broken reed (verse 21; compare 17:4 and Isaiah 31:1-3).

How can Hezekiah claim to rely on YHWH, when he has just stripped YHWH’s temple (verses 14-16)?

In verses 23-24, he goes on to mock Hezekiah, reminding him that he is completely devoid of military resources.

In verse 25, the Deuteronomists have him claim to be acting on behalf of YHWH, a claim that fits with Isaiah 10:5-6:

Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger—
the club in their hands is my fury!
Against a godless nation I send
him, and against the people of my
wrath I command him, to take spoil
and seize plunder, and to tread them
down like the mire of the streets.

In response Hezekiah’s negotiators make a pitiful plea for the Assyrians not to speak in the language of Judah, but in Aramaic, lest the people, who are listening, realise how hopeless the situation of Jerusalem is (verse 26).

The Assyrian delegation ignores their plea (verse 27).

The Isaiah Scroll

This passage is repeated in Isaiah 36:4-12.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler has a brief version of verses 19-22 (see 2Chronicles 32:10-12). He omits verses 23-27.

The chief Assyrian negotiator speaks directly to the inhabitants of the city, who are listening from the wall. He tells them that Hezekiah cannot save them (verse 29), nor can their god, YHWH (verse 30).

He goes on to offer terms of surrender. The Assyrian force will lift the siege. The people's lives will be saved, but they will be deported (verses 31-32).

In verses 32-35, he reinforces his claim that YHWH cannot save them, by reminding them of what has happened to other nations, whose gods proved helpless in face of the power of the great king, Sennacherib.

There is nothing Hezekiah's negotiators can say. All they can do is go to him and give their report (verses 36-37).

The Isaiah Scroll

This passage is repeated in Isaiah 36:13-22.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler summarises verses 28-32 in 2Chronicles 32:18-19, and expressed the essential message of verses 32-35 in 2Chronicles 32:13-17.

He omits verses 36-37.

28Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out in a loud voice in the language of Judah, "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! 29Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you out of my hand. 30Do not let Hezekiah make you rely on YHWH by saying, YHWH will surely deliver us, and this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.' 31Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria: 'Make your peace with me and come out to me; then every one of you will eat from your own vine and your own fig tree, and drink water from your own cistern, 32until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive oil and honey, that you may live and not die. Do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you by saying, YHWH will deliver us. 33Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered its land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? 34Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? 35Who among all the gods of the countries have delivered their countries out of my hand, that YHWH should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?'"

36But the people were silent and answered him not a word, for the king's command was, "Do not answer him."

37Then Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn and told him the words of the Rabshakeh.

¹When King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of YHWH. ²And he sent Eliakim, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna the secretary, and the senior priests, covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz.

³They said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth. ⁴It may be that YHWH your God heard all the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words that YHWH your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left."

⁵When the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah, ⁶Isaiah said to them, "Say to your master, 'Thus says YHWH: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me. ⁷I myself will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumour and return to his own land; I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.'"

Hezekiah hears the report. It is clear to him that his only hope lies in YHWH – an idea that the Assyrians have already scoffed at (see 18:22, 30-35). He assumes the garb of penitence, and sends for Isaiah, YHWH's prophet (verse 2). This is the first time Isaiah has been mentioned in the Book of Kings, and he is the only one of the prophets of the scrolls to be named by the Deuteronomists.

Hezekiah is hoping that YHWH will be angry at the Assyrian pride that has claimed that YHWH, like the gods of the nations, is too weak to save his people. He asks Isaiah to carry out one of the basic duties of a prophet: to intercede for the people with God (verse 4).

Isaiah's response takes the form of a salvation oracle. YHWH assures them that they are not to be afraid, for he will persuade Sennacherib of the need to return to his own land, where he will meet his death (verses 6-7).

The Isaiah Scroll

This passage is repeated in Isaiah 37:1-7.

The Chronicler

All that the Chronicler says in relation to this passage is:

King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz prayed because of this and cried to heaven.

– 2Chronicles 32:20

The Assyrian delegation persists in its challenge to Jerusalem, unaware of YHWH's words through Isaiah (verses 6-7) The only added factor is that Pharaoh Tirhakah of Egypt, from Sudan (hence 'Ethiopia') is engaging the Assyrian forces to the southwest of Judah.

The problem here is that Tirhakah did not become Pharaoh of Upper and Lower Egypt till 690, eleven years after Sennacherib's invasion of Judah.

This time Hezekiah's response is a prayer to YHWH (verses 14-19), the Lord of creation and of history, master of 'all the kingdoms of the earth'(verse 15). Hezekiah speaks of the mocking words of the Assyrians, and their violence (verses 16-18). He reveals the purity of his Yahwist faith: 'You, YHWH, and only you, are God'(verse 19).

The Isaiah Scroll

This passage is repeated in Isaiah 37:8-20.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler omits this passage (apart from the comment quoted on page 222).

⁸The Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah; for he had heard that the king had left Lachish. ⁹When the king heard concerning King Tirhakah of Ethiopia, "See, he has set out to fight against you," he sent messengers again to Hezekiah, saying, ¹⁰"Thus shall you speak to King Hezekiah of Judah: Do not let your God on whom you rely deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. ¹¹See, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, destroying them utterly. Shall you be delivered? ¹²Have the gods of the nations delivered them, the nations that my predecessors destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who were in Telassar? ¹³Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, the king of Hena, or the king of Ivvah?"

¹⁴Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it; then Hezekiah went up to the house of YHWH and spread it before YHWH. ¹⁵And Hezekiah prayed before YHWH, and said: "YHWH the God of Israel, who are enthroned above the cherubim, you are God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth. ¹⁶Incline your ear, YHWH, and hear; open your eyes, YHWH, and see; hear the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to mock the living God. ¹⁷Truly, YHWH, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands, ¹⁸and have hurled their gods into the fire, though they were no gods but the work of human hands – wood and stone – and so they were destroyed. ¹⁹So now, YHWH our God, save us, I pray you, from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, YHWH, and only you are God."

²⁰Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, "Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel: I have heard your prayer to me about King Sennacherib of Assyria. ²¹This is the word that YHWH has spoken concerning him:

She despises you, she scorns you – virgin daughter Zion; she tosses her head – behind your back, daughter Jerusalem. ²²Whom have you mocked and reviled? Against whom have you raised your voice and haughtily lifted your eyes? Against the Holy One of Israel! ²³By your messengers you have mocked the Lord, and you have said, 'With my many chariots I have gone up the heights of the mountains, to the far recesses of Lebanon; I felled its tallest cedars, its choicest cypresses; I entered its farthest retreat, its densest forest. ²⁴I dug wells and drank foreign waters, I dried up with the sole of my foot all the streams of Egypt.'

²⁵Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? I planned from days of old what now I bring to pass, that you should make fortified cities crash into heaps of ruins, ²⁶while their inhabitants, shorn of strength, are dismayed and confounded; they have become like plants of the field and like tender grass, like grass on the housetops, blighted before it is grown. ²⁷But I know your rising and your sitting, your going out and coming in, and your raging against me.

²⁸Because you have raged against me and your arrogance has come to my ears, I will put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth; I will turn you back on the way by which you came.

²⁹"And this shall be the sign for you: This year you shall eat what grows of itself, and in the second year what springs from that; then in the third year sow, reap, plant vineyards, and eat their fruit.

This oracle develops the assurance already given (see 19:5-7). YHWH knows that Assyria ('she', verse 21) scorns Jerusalem.

The 'you' of verse 22 is Sennacherib. In mocking Jerusalem, he is mocking YHWH, 'the Holy One of Israel' (verse 23).

Verses 23-24 repeat Assyria's proud boasting.

The Assyrian king Ashurbanipal conquered Egypt in 663.

Sennacherib has utterly failed to realise that he is simply an instrument in YHWH's hands (verses 25-27).

His punishment will be to be dragged like a reluctant animal back to Assyria (verse 28).

YHWH's reassurance is reinforced by a promise that the devastated region of Judah will recover, and yield in time an abundant harvest (verse 29).

The Isaiah Scroll

This passage is repeated in Isaiah 37:21-30.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler omits this passage (apart from the comment quoted on page 222).

The Lord of creation is also the Lord of history. Just as the land will prosper, so will the people. Verse 30 appears to be a later addition, for it speaks of being securely 'rooted down'; that is to say, not exiled. It also speaks of a remnant – language that belongs to the exile period. It is the zealous commitment of YHWH to his people that will bring this about (verse 31).

Verses 32-34 make explicit what has been implied throughout. The king of Assyria will not enter the city. He will go back to Assyria. YHWH will save Jerusalem because of his desire to preserve his own reputation. He does not want foreign nations to think he is no match for Assyria and its gods. He will save Jerusalem also because of the commitment he has given to David.

YHWH's promise is immediately carried out, and by God's messenger ('angel', verse 35). We are surely meant to recall the defeat of the Egyptian forces at the Red Sea (Exodus 14:30):

YHWH saved Israel that day from the Egyptians;
and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the sea-shore.

Sennacherib has lost his army. He returns home defeated and is assassinated by his own sons (verses 36-37; see ANET 289-290, 302).

The Isaiah Scroll

This passage is repeated in Isaiah 37:30-38.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler omits verses 30-34 and concludes:

²¹YHWH sent an angel who cut off all the mighty warriors and commanders and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned in disgrace to his own land. When he came into the house of his god, some of his own sons struck him down there with the sword. ²²So YHWH saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of King Sennacherib of Assyria and from the hand of all his enemies; he gave them rest on every side. ²³Many brought gifts to YHWH in Jerusalem and precious things to King Hezekiah of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations from that time onward.

– 2Chronicles 32:21-23

³⁰The surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward; ³¹for from Jerusalem a remnant shall go out, and from Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of YHWH of hosts will do this.

³²"Therefore thus says YHWH concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come into this city, shoot an arrow there, come before it with a shield, or cast up a siege-ramp against it. ³³By the way that he came, by the same he shall return; he shall not come into this city, says YHWH. ³⁴For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David."

³⁵That very night the angel of YHWH set out and struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians; when morning dawned, they were all dead bodies.

³⁶Then King Sennacherib of Assyria left, went home, and lived at Nineveh. ³⁷As he was worshipping in the house of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword, and they escaped into the land of Ararat. His son Esar-had-don succeeded him.

¹In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, "Thus says YHWH: Set your house in order, for you shall die; you shall not recover."

²Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to YHWH: ³"Remember now, YHWH, I implore you, how I have walked before you in faithfulness with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight." Hezekiah wept bitterly.

⁴Before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of YHWH came to him: ⁵"Turn back, and say to Hezekiah prince of my people, Thus says YHWH, the God of your ancestor David: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; indeed, I will heal you; on the third day you shall go up to the house of YHWH. ⁶I will add fifteen years to your life. I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake."

⁷Then Isaiah said, "Bring a lump of figs. Let them take it and apply it to the boil, so that he may recover." ⁸Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What shall be the sign that YHWH will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of YHWH on the third day?" ⁹Isaiah said, "This is the sign to you from YHWH, that YHWH will do the thing that he has promised: the shadow has now advanced ten intervals; shall it retreat ten intervals?" ¹⁰Hezekiah answered, "It is normal for the shadow to lengthen ten intervals; rather let the shadow retreat ten intervals." ¹¹The prophet Isaiah cried to YHWH; and he brought the shadow back the ten intervals, by which the sun had declined on the dial of Ahaz.

Verse 16 locates this incident close to the time when Hezekiah took over the reins of government in his own right (715). He is ill, and Isaiah declares it to be terminal (verse 1).

Hezekiah turns to YHWH in prayer (verses 2-3; see 19:15-19). He reminds God that he has been faithful 'with a whole heart' (see 18:5-7).

YHWH responds to his prayer with a promise of healing and a further fifteen years of life (verses 5-6), as well as an assurance of the well-being of the city: 'I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David's sake' (echoing 19:34).

In recording Hezekiah's illness here, the Deuteronomists are preparing the reader for the demise of the Davidic dynasty.

The sign requested by Hezekiah (and granted by YHWH (verses 7-11) recalls the story in Joshua 10:12-14, where God is said to have stopped time so that the victory could be completed. We might also think of Gideon and the fleece (Judges 6:36-39). For the Deuteronomists it is YHWH who controls creation and history.

The Isaiah Scroll

This scene is repeated in Isaiah 38, which includes a psalm of praise and thanksgiving (38:10-20).

The Chronicler

The Chronicler sums up this passage in a single verse (2Chronicles 32:24).

²⁴In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. He prayed to YHWH, and he answered him and gave him a sign.

Babylon's entrance onto the stage prepares us for the power that will, a century later, replace Assyria as the dominant power in the region. As the oracle of the prophet states (verses 16-18), it will be Babylon who will take Judah into exile (see 2Kings 24-25).

Verse 20 returns to the topic of water security (see 18:17). In 1880 archeologists found an inscription carved on the wall of Hezekiah's tunnel that took water from the spring of Gihon outside the city walls to the Siloam pool on the inside (ANET 321).

The Isaiah Scroll

Verses 12-19 are repeated in Isaiah 39:1-8.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler touches on the material included in 2Kings 20:12-19, but the Chronicler is not as positive in his judgment of Hezekiah as are the Deuteronomists.

²⁵But Hezekiah did not respond according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud. Therefore wrath came upon him and upon Judah and Jerusalem. ²⁶Then Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of YHWH did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah.

– 2Chronicles 32:25-26

After inserting verses 27-31 (see page 228), the Chronicler concludes:

The rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his good deeds, are written in the vision of the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel.

– 2Chronicles 32:32

¹²At that time King Merodach-baladan son of Baladan of Babylon sent envoys with letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick. ¹³Hezekiah welcomed them; he showed them all his treasure house, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, his armoury, all that was found in his storehouses; there was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them.

¹⁴Then the prophet Isaiah came to King Hezekiah, and said to him, "What did these men say? From where did they come to you?" Hezekiah answered, "They have come from a far country, from Babylon." ¹⁵He said, "What have they seen in your house?" Hezekiah answered, "They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing in my storehouses that I did not show them."

¹⁶Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of YHWH: ¹⁷Days are coming when all that is in your house, and that which your ancestors have stored up until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says YHWH. ¹⁸Some of your own sons who are born to you shall be taken away; they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

¹⁹Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of YHWH that you have spoken is good." For he thought, "Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?"

²⁰The rest of the deeds of Hezekiah, all his power, how he made the pool and the conduit and brought water into the city, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah?

²¹Hezekiah slept with his ancestors; and his son Manasseh succeeded him.

Material inserted by the Chronicler (see page 227)

²⁷Hezekiah had very great riches and honour; and he made for himself treasuries for silver, for gold, for precious stones, for spices, for shields, and for all kinds of costly objects; ²⁸storehouses also for the yield of grain, wine, and oil; and stalls for all kinds of cattle, and sheepfolds. ²⁹He likewise provided cities for himself, and flocks and herds in abundance; for God had given him very great possessions.

³⁰This same Hezekiah closed the upper outlet of the waters of Gihon and directed them down to the west side of the city of David. Hezekiah prospered in all his works. ³¹So also in the matter of the envoys of the officials of Babylon, who had been sent to him to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart.

– 2Chronicles 32:24-31