

June 25-July 1

Week 26

This week we will continue to read about the kings of Judah and Israel, most of whom were evil and came to violent ends. This section of Scripture emphasizes God's faithfulness to his covenant and the inevitable consequences of sin.

We will also read some of the greatest stories in the Old Testament. We will begin with several powerful stories about the prophet Elisha and will end the week with the beautifully crafted story of the prophet Jonah as we move into scene 7, "Kings and Prophets: The Southern Kingdom as God's People." As you read, notice the patterns and details in these stories that underscore various aspects of God's character.

Day 1**Read 2 Kings 5:1-8:15****Act 2 - Scene 6 - Reading 11**

This section contains powerful stories in the ministry of Elisha, like the healing of Naaman and the opening of the eyes of Elisha's servant to see the horses and chariots of God surrounding the Aramean army. Jesus, of course, also cured lepers (see Matthew 8:1-4), and he pointed to Naaman's healing as a precedent for outreach to the Gentiles (see Luke 4:27).

Second Kings 5:1 refers to Naaman as "highly regarded." Notice that in his pride Naaman had preconceived ideas about how Elisha would treat him and heal him (see 5:8-12).

Do you ever have preconceived ideas about how God should act on your behalf?

Day 2**Read 2 Kings 8:16-29; 2 Chronicles 21:1-22:9****Act 2 - Scene 6 - Reading 12**

Jehoshaphat was succeeded as king by a series of evil rulers in Judah. His son Jehoram led Judah astray, following the evil example of the kings of Israel (Ahab's daughter, Athaliah, was his wife). God's judgment on him, through the prophet Elijah, was severe. Jehoram's son Ahaziah was also influenced by his mother, Athaliah. Thus Ahaziah also followed the example of Israel's evil kings.

The evil influence of Athaliah on two generations of Judah's kings stems from Jehoshaphat's foolish alliance with Ahab. Although Jehoshaphat was a godly king, his bad relationship with Israel's evil king was costly to the generations that followed. Alliances with evil people have consequences.

Cite a modern-day example of that principle.

Day 3

Read 2 Kings 9-11; 2 Chronicles 22:10-23:21

Act 2 - Scene 6 - Reading 13

God used Jehu to bring about judgment on Joram, the king of Israel, and on Ahaziah, the king of Judah. Jehu also killed Jezebel, those left in the house of Ahab, and the worshipers of Baal. So Jehu became the king of Israel. Because he carried out God's judgment, he was considered better than most of the kings of Israel, but his commitment to the Lord was still mixed with idol worship.

Following the death of Ahaziah of Judah, the evil Athaliah then took the throne herself, thinking she had killed all of the heirs. However, the child Joash was rescued and hidden for six years. Under the leadership of the good priest Jehoiada, Athaliah was overthrown, Joash was put on the throne, and Judah experienced reform. Whereas an evil person like Athaliah caused much harm to God's people, one godly person, Jehoiada, was able to bring about reform.

Pray that God will raise up many Jehoiadas in our day.

Day 4**Read 2 Kings 12-13; 2 Chronicles 24****Act 2 - Scene 6 - Reading 14**

King Joash of Judah did well as long as the work on the temple was done with integrity and the godly counselor Jehoiada was living. But King Joash turned from the Lord when this good man died. The Arameans invaded Judah, and Joash was assassinated.

Today we encounter Israel's evil kings Jehoahaz and Jehoash. Elements of this story remind us of the time of Judges, when God brought judgment on his people but then sent a deliverer for them because of his covenant with them. Recognize the main principles that continue to be underlined: God is faithful to his people, but rebellion brings about consequences.

Thank God today for his faithfulness to his people.

Day 5**Read 2 Kings 14-15; 2 Chronicles 25-27****Act 2 - Scene 6 - Reading 15**

King Amaziah of Judah was in some ways a good king, as seen by his commitment to the law of God in 2 Kings 14:5-6, but he ended up turning from the Lord to worship idols. Consequently, he made tactical errors in relating to Israel, which led to defeat and his death.

After King Jehoash of Israel died, Jeroboam II became the king and followed in the footsteps of his namesake. The Lord used this evil king, however, to accomplish good for his people. Recognize that God sometimes “hits straight licks with crooked sticks.”

King Azariah was also called Uzziah. A good king of Judah who followed God’s ways, Uzziah became arrogant as his kingdom prospered, thinking he was above God’s instructions for worship in the temple. Ironically, God’s blessings can lead to arrogance and a rejection of God’s ways. When God struck Uzziah with a serious skin disease, he was quarantined and could visit the temple no longer. His son, Jotham, was also a good king, further strengthening the kingdom of Judah.

This period in Israel, though prosperous materially, demonstrated political weakness. Notice the succession of five kings in Israel during Uzziah’s reign over the southern kingdom.

Thank God for his blessings to you, but also pray for humility.

Day 6**Read Jonah****Act 2 - Scene 6 - Reading 16**

Jonah is one of the greatest, most beautifully crafted stories in the Old Testament. God is the main character of the story, and it divides nicely into two main movements: chapters 1–2 and 3–4, each section beginning with God’s call of Jonah. Each of these main movements also divides into two subdivisions.

- Chapter 1 presents God’s call, Jonah’s rebellion, and the crisis brought about by his rebellion.
- Chapter 2 gives us Jonah’s response, a hymn about God’s salvation.
- Chapter 3 presents the reissuing of God’s call, Jonah’s ministry to Nineveh, and God’s compassion on the great city.
- Chapter 4 gives us Jonah’s angry response.

The story is beautifully written, so go slowly and enjoy it. Watch for the crises and resolutions in the story. Notice that the non-Jews responded to God appropriately, while God’s Jewish prophet responded selfishly. Also notice the emphasis on compassion. God cares about people.

To whom might you show compassion today?

Day 7

Reading Summary for Week 26

Athaliah's rule of terror in the southern kingdom almost ended the dynasty of Davidic kings. Yet as we've read, God intervened and the boy king Joash rose to power, repaired the temple, and brought about genuine religious reform. In the northern kingdom, Elisha succeeded Elijah as God's spokesman. In world affairs, the terrible Assyrian Empire began extending its influence. But God in mercy sent the reluctant prophet Jonah as his spokesman to the Assyrian capital city of Nineveh.

Prayer/Meditation

O God of Jonah, thank you for the lessons of Jonah, that you are sovereign over the storms and fish of the sea as well as the plants and worms of the land. You are merciful and you send your witnesses to speak your word to people who are hostile to you. Thank you for caring about the citizens of Nineveh, showing the wideness of your mercy. Help me never to value my creature comforts more than I value people who are dying without knowing you. Amen.
