

Sunday Message Notes – Better Bible Reading in 2026

II Kings: The Exile Must Be Explained

I. In Sum – II Kings begins around the end of Elijah/Elisha's era (c. 850 BCE), covers the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria (722 BCE), continues through the fall of Judah and Jerusalem to Babylon (586 BCE). The narrative stretches over about 250–300 years of Israelite history.

A. (Reminder) II Kings and the wider Deuteronomistic History (Joshua–Kings) are not simply neutral history books, but stories written in an attempt to help Israel understand why exile happened. Kings was written after disaster struck, so the main purpose is to make sense of suffering, not to give a modern-style historical report. One key question they raise is: *if King Josiah led major religious reforms and restored proper worship of Yahweh, why did Judah still fall and go into exile?* The text answers this by saying that exile was the result of long-term unfaithfulness, especially the sins of earlier kings like Manasseh, which could not simply be undone. In essence, 2 Kings is best understood as a theological explanation of national tragedy, not a detailed record of political events.

II. Understanding Theology (and how it impacts our study of the Deuteronomistic History)

A. Henotheism - worshipping one “supreme” deity without denying the existence of others (e.g., **Exodus 15:11** “*Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?*”/ **Psalm 95:3** “*For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.*”/ **Psalm 97:9** — “*For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods*” / **Psalm 82:1** “*God stands in the divine assembly; he administers judgment among the gods*”).

B. Monolatry – (soft Monotheism or Henotheism without the hierarchy) worshipping one god exclusively while accepting that other gods exist (e.g., **Exodus 20:3** / **Deuteronomy 5:7** “*You shall have no other gods before me*”). It's often used when discussing early phases of religions like ancient Israelite religion before it became strictly monotheistic. (cf. **Judges 11:24** – Jephthah says, in effect: “*Will you not possess what **Chemosh** your god gives you? So we will possess what **Yahweh** our God has given us*”).

C. Kathenotheism - A more fluid version of monolatry, where different gods are depicted as supreme at different times (e.g., **II Kings 3:26–27** – after the king of Moab sacrifices his son (assumed to the god Chemosh), “*great wrath*” comes against Israel and they withdraw. Some readers take this as the narrative treating Moab's god as more power and effective in that moment than Yahweh. In essence, the sacrifice, not the specific god, becomes the determining factor.

D. Inclusive Monotheism - One Ultimate Divine Reality, but “It” can manifest in many forms or deities. **Deuteronomy 32:8–9** (LXX reading) – the nations are apportioned “*according to the number of the sons of God,*” but Yahweh's portion is Israel. This can read as a worldview with multiple heavenly beings under one supreme God (**I Kings 22:19–23** the “*certain spirit*” says it will become a “*lying spirit*” in the mouths of Ahab's prophets – is this spirit operating outside of the One God? Is it an expression of God, although “lesser,” in a different form?)

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E. Dualism (e.g., Christian constructs of God and Devil) - dualistic systems like Zoroastrianism focus on one supreme good deity (Ahura Mazda) while acknowledging the existence of a powerful opposing force (Angra Mainyu or often called Ahriman). **1 John 5:19** *“We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies under the power of the evil one”* / **Ephesians 6:12** *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers...authorities...powers of this dark world...spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*

III. Major Themes

A. II Kings, covers the remaining 16 kings of Judah (southern kingdom) and 11 kings of Israel (northern kingdom).

B. Elisha emerges as the primary prophetic successor. His ministry includes miracles of healing, provision, and judgment (e.g., healing Naaman in **5:1–14**, multiplying oil **4:1–7**, and purifying water **2:19–22**). Elisha’s actions reinforce the DtH that Israel’s fate is tied to its fidelity to Yahweh.

1. Elisha is portrayed with strong **echoes of both Moses and, later, Jesus**, and a hermeneutic of suspicion asks whether the Gospel writers are deliberately using these scriptural patterns to construct Jesus’ identity rather than simply reporting events. Elisha and Moses share motifs of water miracles, feeding in the wilderness, and authoritative mediation of divine power (cf. **II Kings 2:14; 4:42–44; Exodus 14**), while Elisha’s healing / raising of the dead (e.g., **II Kings 5:1–14; 4:32–37**) closely parallel Gospel miracle traditions (cf. Luke 7:11–17; John 6). From this perspective, the Gospel narratives may be **intentionally “scripturalizing” Jesus** by weaving him into established prophetic typologies—especially Moses and Elisha— to present him as the climactic continuation of Israel’s story (ref. to *supersessionism* in Glossary).

C. Jehu (“instrument” of Yahweh’s judgment) is portrayed as divinely commissioned through prophetic action - and violently removes Ahab’s dynasty and Baal worship in fulfillment of prophetic judgment (**II Kings 9:1–10:31**). The emphasis is not on Jehu’s inner moral state but on his role in accomplishing divine purposes within the Deuteronomistic framework. However, despite this zeal, Jehu is still criticized for continuing the sins of Jeroboam through idolatrous practices (**II Kings 10:29–31**), showing the book’s tension between political obedience to divine judgment and incomplete covenant faithfulness.

D. Hezekiah (II Kings 18–20) Hezekiah is presented as a faithful reformer who trusts Yahweh against Assyria, yet even his story ends ambiguously with the prophetic announcement that exile will still come after his reign. His narrative reinforces the idea that even “good kings” cannot reverse the covenant trajectory toward judgment.

E. Manasseh (II Kings 21) Manasseh is depicted as the wicked king whose idolatry, violence, and child sacrifice become the explicit cause of Judah’s eventual destruction, even after Josiah’s reforms. This creates a theological **“inherited guilt”** problem: *later generations suffer for sins that appear historically prior and already addressed*.

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F. Josiah (II Kings 22–23) Josiah is portrayed as the ideal reforming king who rediscovered the law and attempted sweeping religious reform, removing idols and centralizing worship. Yet his death in battle and the subsequent rapid collapse of Judah raise the theological tension: *if reform was genuine and divinely approved, why does judgment still fall so decisively?*

1. **Redemptive Moment** – Huldah the female prophet, appears in **II Kings 22:14–20**, delivers a prophetic message of coming judgment on Judah, while also affirming that Josiah’s humility will delay disaster.

IV. Theological Tensions

A. II Kings 2:9–10, Elijah’s condition to Elisha—“if you see me when I am taken from you”—can be critically read as a testing mechanism that ties prophetic authority to endurance and witnessing, potentially reinforcing a hierarchical and controlled transfer of spiritual legitimacy rather than a fully open or mutual calling.

B. 42 boys killed and prophetic violence (II Kings 2:23–25) 42 youths are dismembered by bears for mocking Elisha (e.g., “Baldy”). This raises ethical tension, especially in light of earlier DtH claims such as “touch not mine anointed.” A critical reading highlights how prophetic authority is portrayed as absolute and violently protected, complicating modern assumptions about divine justice and ecclesial hierarchy.

C. Mesha (the Moabite king) and child sacrifice (II Kings 3:26–27) “When the king of Moab saw that the battle was going against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through opposite the king of Edom, but they could not. ²⁷ Then he took his firstborn son who was to succeed him and offered him as a burnt offering on the wall. **And great wrath came upon Israel**, so they withdrew from him and returned to their own land.”

1. This episode raises disturbing theological questions and complicates a strict monotheistic reading (**refer back to Kathenotheism**).

D. Divine jealousy and interpretive causality - Throughout II Kings, Yahweh is portrayed as intensely jealous, punishing persistent covenant violation with exile. A critical reading asks whether the narrative functions more as theological interpretation of catastrophe than as direct divine causation—especially since historical exile can be explained politically (Assyria / Babylon), while the text frames it as moral inevitability.

V. Larger Theological Critique - II Kings functions as a **post-exilic theological explanation for national trauma**, particularly the Babylonian exile (refer to *retrojection* in Glossary). It attempts to resolve the crisis of Judah’s destruction by constructing a coherent moral narrative: Israel and Judah were exiled because of sustained covenant failure, culminating in Manasseh’s extreme wickedness.

- A.** However, this creates tension: *if Josiah represents the ideal reformer who restores Torah obedience, why does exile still occur?* The narrative must then absorb Josiah’s failure into a

B. Something Positive.

1. In Christian theology, this later becomes strongly associated with:

- (for deeper research refer to Walter Brueggemann and Gerhard von Rad).

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