

# BaptistWay Bible Series for April 27: Drifting toward disaster

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## Drifting toward disaster

- 2 Kings 14:23-29; 15:8-10, 13-14, 17-30

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The air was crisp and clear. Crowds had gathered (a little larger than usual) to watch a modern marvel of engineering. The launch of the Space Shuttle had become routine. NASA was shortening the time between missions. Part of the excitement of this particular mission was the presence of a member of the “Teacher In Space” program.

From the eye of the casual observer, things were progressing normally. The launch had been delayed to allow things to warm up a bit. The countdown resumed—and the Shuttle Challenger lifted off at 11:38 a.m. from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

Seventy-three seconds into the flight, the Challenger and the external fuel tank disappeared in a plume of smoke while the solid rocket boosters continued in their now uncontrolled flight. The shuttle had been destroyed.



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When the presidential commission began to investigate this sudden disaster, what they found was that it was not sudden at all. A long string of mishaps and bad decisions came together in the necessary sequence to ensure disaster. The loss of the Challenger and her crew continue to be used as a case study for what can go wrong when warning signs are ignored.

The same could be said for the passage in this week's lesson. For the Jews in exile asking, "How did we get here?" the answer was as close as a good dose of history—if they were willing to remember. The separation of the nation of Israel into the southern and northern kingdoms marked the beginning of the end—as it were.

The prophets had proclaimed a coming judgment. The warning signs of that impending judgment became increasingly frequent. The Northern Kingdom had long struggled with leadership issues. But there was the strong presence of the prophet (namely Elijah and Elisha) to keep the king and therefore the nation on track. As we get to the passages in this week's lesson, we see the nation taking a turn for the worse.

The first major turn is the passing of Elisha from the scene. His death is recorded in 2 Kings 13:20 without much fanfare. There is no chariot of fire. There is no whirlwind. Perhaps most significant for the northern Kingdom of Israel is that there is no passing on the prophetic mantle, as was the case when Elijah's time had come to an end.

That is not to say there were no prophets during these later years, but certainly not the central figure to assume the ministry of Elisha. Without a strong voice for God in the king's presence, the apostasy seems to accelerate rapidly.

The second major turn we find in these verses is the shift in leadership succession. The father-to-son leadership exchange is interrupted by assassination at least four times. The reigns of the kings cease to be long-tenured. Zechariah keeps the job only six months before he is relieved of his duties in a manner that would have made Tony Soprano envious.

This instability in leadership was coupled with a consistent theme from the author: These new kings hadn't learned from the mistakes of the old kings. Again and again, we find the phrase, "he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat." At its core was the issue of idolatry. Worshipping false gods while claiming allegiance to the Lord (and seeking his blessing).

Sadly, the Northern Kingdom finally got just what their ancestors had asked for: a king just like the rest of the nations (1 Samuel 8:6). The disaster awaiting the Northern Kingdom would catch them by surprise, but like the fate of the Challenger, could have been predicted if anyone was willing to connect the failures of the kings.

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