

DEAR DIARY

By John West

A Diary of “last words” of the Kings of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah

[Notes: Some reigns overlap where there is a co-regency, stand-alone dates denote the total reign and “solo” indicates where the monarch ruled alone. // indicates the kings reigning in the other kingdom]

KINGS OF THE NORTHERN KINGDOM - ISRAEL

1. **JEROBOAM I** 22yrs 930-909 //REHOBOAM, ABIJAH

Dear Diary, I know those Judeans think that I’ve just been a godless troublemaker trying to destroy the Kingdom established under Saul David and Solomon, but the truth is that the alliance of tribes has always been a bit shaky and the South drove us to it. If only that so-called “wise” Solomon could have been more like his father, we’d have been on the same side now. Solomon ground us down with forced labour for his building programme, and his son, Rehoboam was even worse! There was no reasoning with him! All he did was threaten us! So we broke away. Rehoboam was lucky to get away with his life, but he kept Judah and Benjamin and I took the other ten tribes, just as the prophet Ahijah had told me would happen way back in Solomon’s day, when I was his building supervisor. The first jobs then were to secure Shechem for me to live in and make sure our northern tribes were united and didn’t go slinking off down to Jerusalem to the Temple. So I set up a golden calf to worship at Bethel and Dan and made those our own religious centres for sacrifice, along with some shrines on the hills and our own priesthood and religious festivals. I well remember sacrificing at one of the altars when some prophet from Judah showed up. He said something about a future leader called Josiah killing my priests and sacrificing their bones on the altar. In a rage I shouted “seize him!” but as I tried to point to him my arm shrivelled and the altar split apart as the guy had said. I was afraid. I can admit it now. I calmed down very quickly and asked the man of God to pray for me. And when he did, my arm healed. In all my years though I haven’t come across this Josiah he mentioned. I know that in all this the Judeans blame me for “causing Israel to sin” but the prophet Ahijah made it quite clear that this whole division business was a result of Solomon allowing the worship of Ashtoreth, Chemosh and Molek. They were well down that track before I did anything! (Solomon must have found out about *that* conversation and I had to beat it to Egypt ‘til his death). So now its 22 years since we made the break with his son and set up a rival religious order. Ahijah prophesied to my wife that my whole family would be destroyed as a judgement of Yahweh. He was right about my son dying of his illness, just as my wife stepped back through the door. He said he was the only good one in our family. I don’t know about that but that blind old man obviously knew a lot. I’ve been struck down with some illness and I know I haven’t much time left to me so what he said must be going to happen after my death. Maybe it will happen under Abijah’ son, Asa of Judah? Just four years ago I took an army against Abijah. We outnumbered them two to one, and even had them surrounded, but somehow they defeated us and took some of our towns, which we haven’t got back. Anyway, that’s Nadab’s problem now. *Jeroboam*

2. **NADAB 2yrs 909-908** //ASA .

Dear Diary, It's been two years now since I followed my father Jeroboam to the throne of Israel. I haven't really changed much that my father did. We northerners are still avoiding Jerusalem and their king, Asa. Anyway, I'm just off to besiege the Philistine town of Gibbethon. More in a little while... *Nadab*

3. **BAASHA 24yrs 908-886** //ASA

Dear Diary, It's been about twenty four years since I struck down Nadab at the siege of Gibbethon and took his throne. I also made sure I killed off all his family and any relatives of his father Jeroboam. Not that I've changed Jeroboam's policies. In fact I even started on building a fortification at Ramah, to stop anyone going into Judah. Unfortunately their king, Asa paid off Ben-Hadad of Aram to turn against me, I had to give up the project, and Asa used my stones to build his own towns! Then I've had this prophet Jehu telling me that my family will be wiped out because I'm supposed to have done evil towards the LORD! I don't know what all the fuss is about. But I'm feeling old and getting weary of it all. I don't think I've much time left now! *Baasha*

4. **ELAH 2yrs 886-885** //ASA

Dear Diary, It's just two years since my father Baasha died and I have to say that I'm feeling a bit insecure what with that prophet Jehu and now one of my commanders, Zimri, who looks after half our chariots seems to have taken a dislike to me. I'm going to have to watch him carefully. But today I'm going to drown my sorrows with Arza, the Palace Administrator, at Tirzah. He puts on a good drinking party. I'll think about Zimri later... *Elah*

5. **ZIMRI 1week 885** //ASA

Dear Diary, Last week I got rid of Elah while he was dead drunk at Arza's place. I've also made short work of wiping out all the menfolk of Baasha's and Elah's families. Even some of their friends, just to make sure! I was only carrying out what Yahweh said would happen, through Jehu. However I realise it's been a bad move on my part. The rest of the army of Israel didn't exactly approve and has me surrounded here at Tirzah. I'm not going to let myself be captured. These are my last words. I'm going into the palace citadel, where I will set fire to the place and go down with it. *Zimri*

6. **OMRI 12yrs 885-880 v TIBNI, 885-874, 880-874 solo** //ASA

Dear Diary, It's twelve years since we surrounded Tirzah and took it from that murderer Zimri, who committed suicide before we got to him. I then had to deal with Tibni who wanted to challenge me for the throne, but my followers have proved stronger. I made Tirzah home for six years til I found a nice hill and built a new town, Samaria as our capital city. I've maintained the gods and shrines introduced by Jeroboam and added a few. My health is failing now. I hope my son Ahab can toughen up a bit. He'll need to be strong when he takes over. The gods know, no-one else will be able to do it for him.

Omri

Dear Diary, As I review my 21 years I have to be grateful for my wife Jezebel. She's been a tower of strength to me and there's nothing I wouldn't do for her. I've had a temple built in Samaria for her god, Baal, the storm god, and we've set up a whole priesthood to offer sacrifices. However, I've been plagued by that troublemaker Elijah – a fly in the ointment, who turns up at the most inopportune times. He blamed me for introducing Baalism to the land. Why, he even had the audacity to declare a drought. I have to admit that it was disturbing when it didn't rain for seven years. At the end he showed up again to challenge our priests to a contest on Mt Carmel, Baal versus Yahweh, and whichever could bring down fire to burn the sacrifice was the winner. It drew quite a crowd in addition to our 450 prophets, and it went on all day. Our side weren't very convincing, even though it was so dry you could have almost started a fire by blowing on the wood. Then Elijah stepped up and used litres of precious water to soak everything, called down fire from heaven, and suddenly everything seemed to be ablaze! I don't know how he did it! Unfortunately the people were all taken in and started shouting, "Yahweh he is God! Yahweh he is God!" They were so convinced and so terrified that they listened to Elijah and put all our prophets to death. Within hours the rain came and I almost got bogged with the chariot on the way home. Jezebel was ropeable! I couldn't talk to her, and no-one else dared to! She sent out a message that if she got her hands on that Elijah he'd look like one of the priest he had slaughtered. Don't know what happened to him. He probably went to ground. She even frightens me. Not long after Ben-Hadad laid siege to Samaria demanding my wives and children and gold, all of which I was willing to give him until he started threatening to take more. My advisers and I decided that was enough and we refused him. He continued threatening. I sent a message to him, "One who puts on his armour should not boast like one who takes it off." I didn't deter him though. It was looking desperate until another prophet turned up, promising victory so that I would know that Yahweh is God! Encouraged I led an army out and we defeated them comprehensively. Ben-Hadad escaped on horseback but returned the next Spring. Again the prophet encouraged us with a word from Yahweh, and again, with just an army that looked like a couple of flocks of goats, we routed the huge Aramean army. I spared Ben-Hadad's life though – which earned me another rebuke from the prophet! It was just after this that I decided to reward myself by buying a vineyard but when I wanted Naboth's vineyard, he refused to sell, and my good wife arranged to have a trumped up charge brought against him and he was stoned to death. Blow me down, then if Elijah doesn't turn up again blaming me for Naboth's death! He told me that Yahweh would destroy my whole family and that the dogs would eat Jezebel. I had seen enough by now to know that these messages from Yahweh always came true. I was frightened and tore my robes, put on sackcloth and fasted, hoping that Yahweh might have mercy on me. Well word came back that, because I had acted in humility, Yahweh wouldn't act against us in my lifetime. Three years after defeating Ben-Hadad, we still hadn't retaken our town Ramoth Gilead so when Jehoshaphat of Judah visited I suggested we could take it together. He agreed but wanted some divine guidance. All my prophets gave the go ahead but Jehoshaphat wanted to hear from a prophet of Yahweh. So I reluctantly summoned Micaiah, who never tells me anything I want to hear. Surprisingly he said, "Yes go ahead!". He nearly had me! I told him to tell the truth, so instead he said I was

going to die in the battle. Now I don't know what to believe! Anyway, Jehoshaphat is on for it so we set off tomorrow. Ramoth Gilead here we come! *Ahab*

8. AHAZIAH 2yrs 853-852 //JEHOSHAPHAT

Dear Diary, It's two years since my father Ahab died, propped up in a chariot with his blood covering its floor, at the battle of Ramoth Gilead. And now here am I, lying injured from a fall through the lattice work (you can't get good solid builders these days!). The bad news is that the prophet Elijah intercepted the messengers I sent to enquire of Baal regarding my survival. I sent two platoons of fifty men to bring him to me and reports say they were consumed by fire. The third captain I sent pleaded for his life and Elijah came. He's blamed me for following in my father's footsteps and consulting Baal instead of Yahweh. For that, he says, I will die. He's just left. I've heard enough about him to fear the worst! *Ahaziah*

9. JEHORAM (JORAM) 11yrs 852-841 //JEHOSHAPHAT, JEHORAM, AHAZIAH

Dear Diary, When I took over from my father Ahaziah, the king of Moab stopped sending me his tribute, So I enlisted the support of Jehoshaphat of Judah and the King of Edom to teach them a lesson. We almost didn't get there as we ran out of water, but at Jehoshaphat's suggestion we found a prophet of Yahweh, Elisha to give us guidance. For Jehoshaphat's sake he informed us that water would appear in the valley and that we would succeed against Moab. And it happened! We defeated their army and when we came to besiege the Moabite king, he even sacrificed his son on the wall, after which we finished up retreating as the battle became too intense. Elisha was disparaging about me at that time, but since then he has constantly warned me about the movements of the raiding parties from Aram, so much so that they decided they would come and capture him. The bizarre thing was that in Samaria we suddenly found the Aramean army, blind, standing in the middle of the city. They had been blinded when they tried to take Elisha and he had then led them to Samaria. At Elisha's suggestion we fed them and sent them on their way instead of killing them. Later though the King of Aram marched on Samaria and besieged us. The famine was so bad that a couple of women even killed and ate one of their children! I snuck out of the city to see Elisha intending to behead him for all that had befallen us, but he told us that by the next day there would be no shortages at all. All the food would be dirt cheap. I didn't believe it, until we got a report from some lepers who had gone to surrender to the Arameans, that the camp was there, but no one was home! At first I thought it was a trap but sure enough we were able to plunder the camp, and food prices went through the floor! Amazing! But now I am wounded after going to war with Ahaziah of Judah against Hazael of Aram. Ahaziah has come to visit me. We get on well as his mother, Athalia is the granddaughter of Omri. I'll have to finish this later. The lookout tells me there's someone approaching at a breakneck pace and from the crazy way he's driving it looks like Jehu. Ahaziah and I will go out to meet him. I suspect it's bad news. *Jehoram (Joram)*

10. JEHU 28yrs 841-814

//AHAZIAH, ATHALIA, JOASH

Dear Diary, Twenty eight years ago one of Elisha's prophets came to me and told me I would be king of Israel, and to slaughter all of Ahab's family. I rode to Jezreel as fast as I could before word got around and was met by the kings Jehoram and Ahaziah. I killed Jehoram as he fled with an arrow through the heart. Ahaziah escaped but died later from his wounds. I then went on and meted out Yahweh's judgement on Ahab's house for the sins they had committed and the rank idolatry. Jezebel I had thrown down in the street, where the dogs ate her. Ahab's 70 sons I ordered executed, and anyone living in Jezreel and Samaria associated with Ahab's family along with all the priests of Baal, who I gathered under the deception of holding a large celebration. I short time I destroyed Baalism from Israel. I even killed 42 of Ahaziah's family that I met out on the road. I know that at that time everyone feared me. No one dared refuse my orders and no-one escaped the retribution. I haven't removed Jeroboam's golden calves, but I have done everything else that Yahweh required of me. I can rest in peace. *Jehu*

11. JEHOAHAZ 17yrs 814-798

//JOASH

Dear Diary, We only have a small army left, but we live in relative peace after our persistent enemy, Aram under Hazael and Ben-Hadad, destroyed most of our forces. When I turned to Yahweh to help us he provided a deliverer. Though I haven't done anything about the shrines or the Asherah Pole standing here in Samaria. *Jehoahaz*

12. JEHOASH (JOASH) 16yrs 798-782 //JOASH, AMAZIAH

Dear Diary, I tried to maintain a peaceful reign but that fool, Amaziah had to come and pick a fight just because he'd managed to defeat Edom. I tried to talk him out of it but in the end we thrashed them, returned Amaziah to Jerusalem, broke down a large section of the wall and took the gold and silver from the Temple. It put an end to the trouble. We've continued to worship our own way in the traditions of Israel. *Jehoash (Joash)*

13. JEROBOAM II 40yrs 793-782 w Joash, 793-753, 782-753 solo

//AMAZIAH, AZARIAH (UZZIAH)

Dear Diary, I've not changed anything as far as religion goes but I've steadily worked on restoring Israel's boundaries including Damascus and Hamath, which had belonged to Judah and helping many of our people who had been suffering. *Jeroboam 2nd*

14. ZECHARIAH 6months 753

//AZARIAH (UZZIAH)

Dear Diary, It's been just six months since my father, Jeroboam II died. Not a lot has changed. My dad just continued in the ways of the first Jeroboam, and I'm following them. I must admit that I keep thinking about this prophecy by a guy called Jehu, who said that our family would have someone on the throne to the fourth generation. Well that would be me! I have to go out now and meet the people, so I'll reflect on this more later...

Zechariah

15. SHALLUM 1month 752 //AZARIAH (UZZIAH)

Dear Diary, No one lifted a finger against me when I assassinated Zecharia out in front of all the people a month ago. But now I hear that Menahem from Tirzah is on his way here to Samaria about some matter. Hope he's not going to start complaining. I'll report back tomorrow...
Shallum

16. MENAHEM 10yrs 752-742 //AZARIAH (UZZIAH), JOTHAM

Dear Diary, The years go by so quickly. I can hardly believe that it's ten years since I killed that assassin, Shallum, and took over the throne. I remember well the slaughter I carried out afterwards at Tiphseh when they refused me entry to the town. It's important to have everyone toeing the line, but I'm finding it's not so good when the boot's on the other foot. I have to pay that tyrant, King Pul of Assyria, to leave us alone. I've had to tax every person in Israel just to get enough gold and silver together. It's quite worn me down. I'm not well. I think this will be my last diary entry. *Menahem*

17. PEKAHIAH 2yrs 742-740 //AZARIAH (UZZIAH), JOTHAM

Dear Diary, Just 2 years since my father, Menahem died, and now I hear that Pekah, the son of Remaliah is almost here at the palace in Samaria with fifty men. I must try to escape and get help. *Pekahiah*

18. PEKAH 20yrs 752-740 overlap, 752-732, 740-732 solo
//AZARIAH (UZZIAH), JOTHAM

Dear Diary, I've been looking back over the reigns of some of our kings of Israel. A lot of them lasted only a short time before being assassinated, so I've done well to have survived these twenty years after removing Pekahiah. The time has not been without its problems though. Tiglath-Pileser, king of those troublemakers Assyria has taken over a handful of towns and great areas of land in Galilee and Naphtali and carried off many of our people. We've certainly taught Judah a lesson though. They look down their noses at us, but their latest king, Ahaz worships Baal just like we have. Well we slaughtered 120,000 of them in a day. Our warrior Zichri from Ephraim even killed the king's son and a couple of his dignitaries. It was a very profitable raid. We took 200,000 of their people captive along with other spoils of war. Later we finished up sending them back though, because a prophet, Oded told us that Yahweh was angry with us. Best be on the safe side. *Pekah*

19. HOSHEA 9yrs 732-722 (722 Exile to Assyria) //JOTHAM, AHAZ

Dear Diary, It's nine years since I rid our northern kingdom of Pekah. The trouble with Assyria has persisted though. Their King, Shalmaneser has attacked us and besieged Samaria for three years, just because we've stopped paying him tributes and made overtures towards So, King of Egypt. I'm now writing from an Assyrian prison and most of our people have been deported here too. I hear that The Assyrians have settled other nations in Samaria. So it's all over. It's all gone. We have nothing. I wonder now whether we should have listened to some of those prophets?.... *Hoshea*

DEAR DIARY (continued)
KINGS OF JUDAH – The Line of David

1. REHOBOAM 17yrs 930-913 //JEROBOAM I

Dear Diary, It's been 17yrs now since my father, the great King Solomon died. He's been a hard act to follow and I've tried to copy his style even down to keeping the pressure on the workers to keep building. I only wanted to be strong, but it backfired. That rebel, Jeroboam revolted and got himself crowned king of the ten northern tribes of Israel. He then set up golden calves to worship, so that those northerners wouldn't come here to Jerusalem. I mustered a 180,000 strong army from Benjamin and Judah to try to retake the tribes but the prophet Shemaiah warned us that God would be against us if we did – so we didn't, and I concentrated on fortifying our cities in Benjamin and Judah instead. We did gain the Levites, who Jeroboam threw out for his own priests, and there were a number of Israel who followed them since they wanted to continue worshipping Yahweh. Then I've dispersed my 60 sons around the area and made Abijah crown Prince so there will be no arguments over my successor. So we were looking fairly strong. And then, just five years into my reign, Shishak of Egypt invaded us and carried off most of the wealth from the palace and the temple that my father had accumulated. The prophet Shemaiah had made it clear that it was because we had wandered away from Yahweh, so after we prayed we didn't quite lose everything, even though we remained subject to Egypt. That's twelve years ago now. So much trouble with ongoing strife from the North. I often wonder what would have happened if I'd listened to my elders and eased up on them. *Rehoboam*

2. ABIJAM aka ABIJAH 3yrs 913-910 //JEROBOAM I

Dear Diary, It's three years since my father, Rehoboam, died. He left us in civil war with the North. I realise now that I haven't followed Yahweh wholeheartedly but my finest moment was going to battle with 400,000 men against 800,000 of Jeroboam's. I reminded them that they had turned away from Yahweh, that the golden calves they brought with them were worthless and that Yahweh had promised David's line an eternal inheritance. They were fighting on the wrong side!! While I was making my greatest speech, Jeroboam sent part of his army around and behind us. When we realised we called on Yahweh for help and destroyed half a million of them, taking three of their towns, including Bethel (one of their two main worship centres) which are still in our possession. Just three years, but it has taken its toll on me. *Abijam (Abijah)*

3. ASA 41yrs 910-869 //JEROBOAM I, NADAB, BAASHA, ELAH, ZIMRI, OMRI

Dear Diary, The pain in my feet is killing me! No, I mean it! I have a tomb cut ready for me. I know now that I should have sought Yahweh's help rather than the doctors. After all Yahweh has given me a good life, when I relied on him. I started well but have become a cranky old man. After I took over from my father, Abijam we had the Cushites attack us with a huge army, but when we called on Yahweh we had a huge victory with plenty

of the spoils of war. It enabled us to build up and fortify our towns again, so that we were not only strong, but also prosperous. I was greatly encouraged by the prophet, Azariah, who told me that God would give us peace if we followed Yahweh wholeheartedly. I did so! I pulled down the Asherah poles and idols and repaired the altar at the Temple. I commanded the people to worship Yahweh on pain of death and even deposed my grandmother, Maakah, and destroyed the awful image she'd set up. And sure enough we had peace. People were even coming over from Israel because they could see that Yahweh was blessing us! That is until about five or six years ago, when Baasha tried to stop them by fortifying Ramah. To stop the North hassling us I made a treaty with Ben-Hadad of Syria and paid him to hassle Baasha, which he did. It looked like a good move until the prophet, Hanani, turned up reminding me that I should have relied on Yahweh rather than Syria, and that now I'd continue to have trouble. I was so angry at him trying to rain on my parade that I had him flung in prison. I think I've been angry with everyone since, but in my dying moments I know he was right. *Asa*

4. JEHOSHAPHAT 25yrs 872-869 with Asa, 872-848 official, 869-853 solo.

//AHAB, AHAZIAH, JEHORAM (JORAM)

Dear Diary, At sixty years of age I think I can say that I followed the good example from my father Asa's reign. I continued his task of destroying the high places and removing the male prostitutes. I even sent teachers out into our towns so that our people would learn God's law. We were strong in every way, religiously and with a large army, respected by the surrounding nations. It's been 25years now and I'm glad to say that after all the turmoil we had with Israel, we've enjoyed a much more peaceful coexistence there as well. Part of that came about by alliances through marriages and it would have gone further. King Ahab wanted us to join forces against Ramoth-Gilead. I agreed, and Ahab lined up 400 prophets, who all said it would be fine. I was uneasy though as they weren't prophets of Yahweh, so Ahab reluctantly produced Micaiah who apparently never told him anything he wanted to hear. Sure enough Micaiah warned against the venture, saying that the King of Israel would die. But he'd already made up his mind to ignore the warning and we went into battle together. --- Well, Ahab died and I was almost killed myself. I am sure it was only Yahweh who saved me! Then Jehu the prophet (son of Hanani who had had words with my father) came and had words with me for allying myself with idolaters like Ahab. Yahweh was angry with me but would stay judgement because I had been seeking him and trying to turn the people to him. The warning spurred me on to do more. I continued the religious reforms and reorganised governance with godly judges and priests. And God has been merciful to us. When a huge army consisting of the Moabites, Ammonites and Meunites started to march against us from beyond the Dead Sea I gathered the people and led them in prayer to Yahweh to uphold his promise of the provision of the Land to us. A prophet then spoke up to the effect that Yahweh would fight the battle for us. Encouraged and praising Yahweh, we went out to meet the enemy, who virtually destroyed themselves! It took us three days to collect the plunder! I have to admit though that I have had lapses where I do rush out without consulting Yahweh. I made an alliance with Ahaziah, King of Israel, over a joint venture with a fleet of trading ships. Another prophet spoke up about the folly of making alliances with Israel and inevitably the ships were wrecked. Through it all Yahweh has been faithful. When we rushed ahead without him things failed spectacularly, but when we waited on him the results were glorious. My life and testament has been the proof of it,

Jehoshaphat

5. **JEHORAM (JORAM) 8yrs 853-848 w Jehoshaphat, 848-841 solo**

//JEHORAM (JORAM)

Dear Diary, I'm in agony. This disease is turning me inside out and I can hardly write with pain. A curse on that prophet Elijah, for bringing this on me. He was a constant worry to my father-in-law Ahab in Israel, and now he's come after me. Just because I put my brothers to the sword and set up a few high places. I was only trying to please my wife, Athalia. Just 8yrs since my father Jehoshaphat died. Can't write any more...

JEHORAM (JORAM)

6. **AHAZIAH 1yr 841**

//JEHORAM (JORAM)

Dear Diary, I'm in great danger. I've only been on the throne a year, as youngest of my brothers, who were all killed. No fanfare when my father Jehoram died of some disgusting disease. Still I have my mother Athalia, daughter of Queen Jezebel, to guide me. But here I was on a friendly visit to King Joram of Israel after he was wounded in the battle we fought together, and that maniac Jehu comes racing in and kills him and some of my officials. I've just escaped by the skin of my teeth and I'm hiding out in Samaria.

Ahaziah

7. **ATHALIA 7yrs 841-835**

//JEHU

Diary, It's six years now since that butcher, Jehu killed my mother, the great Queen Jezebel and my son, Ahaziah of Judah. WELL I SHOWED THEM BUTCHERY!!! I had the whole of the royal family of Judah destroyed! Now let's see how strong the line of David is!! So much for the god of Judah and his promises! I hear a noise, people cheering, something about a king. King!! Treachery!! I'll show them!... Athalia

8. **JOASH 40yrs 835-796**

//JEHU, JEHOAHAZ, JEHOASH (JOASH)

Dear Diary: I was only a child when the princess Jehosheba saved my life by hiding me away, when Athalia tried to wipe out the family line by slaughtering my brothers. It was a fearful time hiding in the Temple, though I suppose it was a safe bet that Athalia would never go there! Six years passed until the priest Jehoiada arranged a coup and declared me king. There was a lot of shouting and when Athalia came to see what it was about they removed her from the Temple and executed her. I don't think anyone was sorry to see her go. That's 40yrs ago now and I was just 7 years old and all that was left of David' line. But I had a good mentor and guide in Jehoiada and I set about making some restoration after the disastrous influence on Judah of the family of Ahab and Jezebel of Israel. I started with the Temple and reinstated taxes for its upkeep. Jehoiada, an amazing man, ensured all through his life that everything was done properly for Yahweh. We all mourned him when he died at the ripe old age of 130! I look back and see that it was after that that things went off the rails. Jehoiada had been my strength and without him we started turning back to worship at the Asherah poles. To my shame now, I had Zechariah, Jehoiada's son, put to death because he spoke out against what was happening. His dying words are etched into my memory, "*May the LORD see this and*

call you to account.” By the beginning of the next year the Arameans attacked us and defeated our much larger army. I’m wounded and am writing from my sickbed. The people who are supposed to be looking after me have dark looks in their faces. I feel as though the darkness is closing in on me... *Joash*

9. AMAZIAH 29yrs 796-767, 792-767 w Azariah

//JEHOASH (JOASH), JEROBOAM II

Dear Diary, I was a young man of 25 when I followed my father Joash to the throne, murdered on his sickbed, because he’d had Zechariah the prophet, son of Jehoiada, put to death. I made them pay for their treason, though I spared their sons. It’s been a tumultuous time. I organised a sizeable army from Judah and paid mercenaries from Israel to join us, but the prophet said we would have no success if we worked with Israel as Yahweh wasn’t with them. I’d already paid out for them but they were still so angry at being sent home that they attacked our Judean towns while we were away slaughtering the Edomites. I brought some of the Edomite gods back and set them up, which brought on more prophetic rantings. I warned the guy, so he shut up but left with the parting shot that Yahweh would destroy me for not listening! I was feeling confident though. With the defeat of Edom under our belts I decided to have a face-off with Jehoash of Israel. He tried to play it all down, but I went to war anyway. It was a bad move. Jehoash routed our armies. I was captured and he brought me to Jerusalem, broke down a large section of the wall and stole the valuables from the Temple. It’s been 15 years since Jehoash died and not much has happened since then. I suppose I should be glad to have survived this long, but I’m now on the run. Conspirators are after me.

Amaziah at Lachish

10. AZARIAH (UZZIAH) 52yrs 792-767 w Amaziah, 792-740, 767-750 solo

//JEROBOAM II, ZECHARIAH, SHALLUM, MENAHEM, PEKAHIAH

Dear Diary, Fifty Two years! I was just 16 years old then, when I followed my father Amaziah as king after conspirators caught up with him and executed him at Lachish. It’s been a long and eventful time but I’ve had a good guide by my side in Zechariah and together we have been able to encourage the people in the ways of Yahweh. We’ve had our battles against the Philistines, the Arabs, the Meunites and Yahweh has given us good success. Even the Ammonites bring us tributes. Our powerful position has allowed me now to build up a strong army and repair and reinforce our towns with war machines, and with towers out in the wilderness areas. I love farming and my fields and vineyards have developed and prospered. I have been blessed to live in such times, though I finish my days isolated from everyone! It came about when, in my pride, I went beyond myself and wanted to offer incense at the Temple. The Levites, 80 of them led by Azariah tried to tell me I didn’t have the right. Me! The King! I was furious but as I was ranting on at them, leprosy broke out on my forehead. The Levites hurried me out of there and I have to tell you, I was ready to go! It was a stupid outburst. I’ve never recovered. I can’t be with people, so my son Jotham carries out my duties. With power comes responsibility and accountability. Yahweh has held me accountable, but he is good and I am well cared for.

Azariah (Uzziah)

11. JOTHAM 16yrs 750-740 w Azariah, 750-735 //MENAHEM, PEKAHIAH, PEKAH

Dear Diary, I count myself fortunate to have followed such a strong and dedicated man as my father, Amaziah. It's 16 years now since I came to the throne, though I had plenty of responsibility before that, while my father was quarantined with leprosy. I've followed his example (except for going into the Temple). We subdued the Ammonites again, and they brought a substantial tribute over three years. This position of power in the region has enabled me to extend our fortifications and building program. The time has not been without its troubles. It's been hard trying to lead the people back to the worship of Yahweh, and lately we've seen the beginnings of trouble with Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel, but by and large I am content that Yahweh has strengthened us greatly.

Jotham

12. AHAZ 16yrs 735-732 w Jotham, 735-715 //PEKAH, HOSHEA 722 Exile of Israel

Dear Diary, I've been here sixteen years as king after I took over the throne at the age of twenty from my father, Jotham. I've had no time for the worship that he and my grandfather practised. I see far more value in the Israelite Baal worship, even though I can't stand the Israelites! I've closed down the Temple and set up shrines under the trees and on the hilltops. Got a very nice design for an altar from Damascus while I was there and had it copied in Jerusalem. The gods of Damascus seemed successful against *us* and there isn't much I wouldn't do to achieve success. Why, I've even sacrificed my children to the cause! Sometimes I think someone must have put a curse on me though. After Rezin, the Aramean king in Damascus, invaded us and carried off prisoners, Pekah of Israel killed 120,000 of my troops and plundered us. The intervention of Oded, one of their prophets, brought a change of heart though, and they returned the men, women and children and the plunder. Then there were the Edomites, who took more prisoners and the Philistines who have been raiding our towns in the south. (I seem to have had enemies on every side!). An alliance with Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria helped at first. I paid him with the Temple valuables that we're not using any more and he put Rezin to the sword (now that I think about it the Aramean gods didn't do much for Rezin against Assyria). The trouble is that now I have Tiglath-Pileser breathing down my neck, and paying him in gold and silver doesn't seem to satisfy him. So what I've done is to cut up all that's left of the Temple furniture to make shrines on all the street corners around Jerusalem. I reckon that the more people we can get worshipping the gods, the more chance we'll have. After all that Yahweh doesn't seem to have helped us much!

Ahaz

13. HEZEKIAH 29yrs 729-715 w Ahaz, 729-686, //HOSHEA 722 Exile of Israel

Dear Diary, Having looked over the records of my father, grandfather and great grandfather, I realise that my father, Ahaz truly backed the wrong horse turning to Israel's and Aram's gods. The reason they were victorious over us was not any strength in their gods but that Yahweh had withdrawn his protection from us because of our idolatry. I made it my life's work therefore to wholly follow Yahweh and to make amends for the way this nation of Judah has turned from him. To that end I had the Temple purified, with an impressive time of worship, sacrifice and praise to follow. We re-established the

Passover Feast. I removed the high places and had the sacred stones smashed. The repairs and reforms were rapid and extensive. I even had to cut up the serpent that Moses had made in the wilderness because people were worshipping it! My faith has been tested at times though. After four years on the throne Assyria carried off King Hoshea of Israel and all their people and then started beating on our doors. I was determined that we would not give in to or serve them but when Assyria took our Judean towns I bought them off with the gold and silver that was left in the Temple. However, when their King, Sennacherib came to Jerusalem, my delegation came back with his speech demeaning the living God and seriously undermining our confidence. They were a formidable foe, wreaking destruction wherever they chose. No-one or their gods had been able to withstand them! We tore our robes and pleaded with Yahweh. I sent messengers to the prophet Isaiah for guidance and he sent back a rousing message which told us to stand firm and that Yahweh would indeed deliver us. That night 180,000 of the Assyrian army simply died and the proud Sennacherib broke camp, went back to Ninevah and never returned! Much later we got news that he died at the hands of his sons while worshipping in the temple of his god, Nisrok. So much for the Assyrian gods! It was just around this time (about 15 years ago) that I became ill and thought I was going to die. I wept because I had tried to be faithful to Yahweh and here was my life nearly over. The upshot was that Isaiah said that Yahweh would give me another fifteen years of life. A sequel to that event was that an envoy came from distant Babylon came with gifts because they had heard I had been ill. I was so pleased that I gave them the grand tour and showed them everything we had. Isaiah brought me down to earth afterwards though and predicted that one day we would lose everything to Babylon – the envoy had been a spy party! But now my extra 15years is just about up. It won't happen in my lifetime. I have lived well and become prosperous, Yahweh has been with me.

Hezekiah

14. MANASSEH 55yrs 697-686 w Hezekiah, 697-642

// Israel in Exile

Dear Diary, I have been King of Judah for 55years and I hang my head in shame. I was only twelve when I came to power and I undid all the good that my father Hezekiah had done. I rebuilt the shrines, desecrated the Temple, worshipped the starry hosts, practised sorcery and witchcraft and even sacrificed my children to the gods as my great grandfather Ahaz had done. I've lost count of the people I have murdered from end to end of Jerusalem. Yes, I heard the prophets' warnings but I chose to ignore them and finished up with a hook through my nose, led off by the Assysrians to Babylon. It is there that I can say that I genuinely repented. Those gods had done nothing for me! But Yahweh heard my prayer and I was able to return to Jerusalem, where I set out to make amends. I refortified Jerusalem and the towns of Judah and got rid of the foreign gods, especially the Asherah Pole I'd set up in the Temple. Although the people still use the high places at least they are worshipping Yahweh there. It has been a humbling experience but I believe that despite the fact that I have probably behaved worse than any of the nations Yahweh drove out of this land, he has nevertheless heard me.

Manasseh

15. AMON 2yrs 642-640

Dear Diary, It's been just two years since my father Manasseh died. I think he went a bit soft at the end. I've taken it on me to return the worship to the earlier part of his reign. I have to take a break here to meet with some of my officials. *Amon*

16. JOSIAH 31yrs 640-609

Dear Diary, I remember 31 years ago when palace officials assassinated my father Amon. The people rose up and executed them and made me king at just eight years of age. Eight years into my reign I started seeking Yahweh in earnest and in doing so came to understand what a mess we were in. It started me on a purge of the idols, Asherah Poles, Incense Poles and any other vestiges of idol worship. I even burned the priests' bones on their altars. And it wasn't just in Judah. Now that there is no king in Israel, we went through that territory too with the remnant that was left there. Next we started repairing the Temple which was in a state of ruin, but when that was going on Hilkiah found a book of the Law which had been given through Moses. Hilkiah gave it Shaphan and he brought it to me. When he read it to me I was horrified! I had not seen this before and I realised just how far we had turned away from Yahweh, our God, over the years! I tore my clothes and wept for the sin of my nation. We then consulted the prophet Huldah and she told us that destruction was indeed coming in keeping with the curses laid out in the law, but that my reign would be spared because we had turned to Yahweh. I gathered the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Temple, read the law to them and had them pledge allegiance to Yahweh and the writings. Then I reinstated the Passover Feast. It was a huge celebration with the Levites organising people by families, so that the 2600 sacrifices could be carried out. I don't think Jerusalem has seen anything like it since the days of Samuel! But now, years later, I lie wounded. A severe error of judgement. Neco of Egypt was on his way to a battle at Carchemish against Nebuchadnezzar, when I tried to intercept him. He told me he had no quarrel with us but I, in disguise, engaged him in battle at Megiddo anyway. That's where I was hit by an arrow. I don't think I will survive. *Josiah*

17. JEHOAHAZ 3months 609

Dear Diary, I've only been in this position for three months and here I am in Egypt. I know I haven't followed my father's example as far as Yahweh is concerned but my father should never have gotten involved with Necho. Even though he was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish he's still imposed taxes on Judah and made me prisoner. *Jehoahaz*

18. JEHOIAKIM 11yrs 609-598

Dear Diary, It's 11 years ago that Jehoahaz died in an Egyptian prison. I've had a tumultuous time of it. I tried reverting to the gods Manasseh worshipped, but it doesn't seem to have worked for us. We were vassals to Babylon and when I tried to rebel against it after three years, we not only had raiders from there, but Aram, Moab and Amon took

advantage of us too! At least Egypt isn't bothering us much. They are dominated by Babylon.

Jehoiakim

19. JEHOIAKIN 3months 598-597 597 First Judean Exile

Dear Diary, I've continued in the traditions of my father since I became king three months ago, but I'm writing now from Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar marched up to Jerusalem and we had no choice but to surrender. I'm not alone here. He's taken our fighting men and all our skilled workers. Only the poorest have been left in Jerusalem with my Uncle Mattaniah in charge there. Nebuchadnezzar's changed his name to Zedekiah. I don't suppose I'll ever see Jerusalem again.

Jehoiakim

20. ZEDEKIAH 11yrs 597-586 597 First Judean Exile. 586 Second Judean Exile.

Dear Diary, After eleven years reigning over the impoverished remains of Jerusalem everything has come to an end. It's over. I tried to rebel against Babylon two years ago and they had us under siege. The famine was intense. Then they broke through the wall and we made a run for it, all to no avail. I'm dictating this in Babylon because I can't see to write. They put out my eyes after killing my sons in front of me. Zedekiah

POSTSCRIPT from JEHOIAKIN in Exile

Dear Diary, I'm still in Babylon. I heard what happened to Uncle Zedekiah. He's here somewhere too. Apparently they appointed Gedaliah to govern the remnant in Jerusalem, but he was murdered along with some men from Judah and some Babylonians. Not surprisingly the assassins made off to Egypt for asylum. It will be a grisly end if the Babylonians ever track them down. Reports say that the walls of Jerusalem are completely destroyed and Solomon's Temple totally ransacked. Any officials left have been killed. There are just a few people on the land looking after vineyards and the like. It's devastation. The only bright light has been that the king here has released me and been surprisingly kind. He treats me better than the other captive kings and even lets me eat at his table each day. I'm seeing out my days relatively comfortably but I can't describe the deep feeling of loss inside. Where is Yahweh now?

Jehoiakim