

INTRODUCTION 引言

The bigger the mission, the stronger the foundation is required. Millennium Tower is the tallest residential building in San Francisco. It has 60 stories, although the 13th and 44th floors are missing due to superstition. Its tenants must be very proud to live there. However, the developers announced in 2016 that the structure has been descending. By 2018, the building has sunk 18 inches and tilted 14 inches. It is because the tower is not anchored on a bedrock, but on sand. The base is not strong enough to support the weight of the building. Property value drops and lawsuits are filed. A remedy was proposed after a few years of study. It will cost \$100 million. A person's life is like a building. Appearance can fool others. Problems on the inside will eventually show up on the outside. In the Bible, the people of Judah enjoyed 66 years of peace and prosperity under the reigns of Asa and Jehoshaphat. Both of them were good kings in the eyes of God. They obeyed God and followed His instructions. Now Jehoram became the next king. Unfortunately, he ignored the godly examples of his father and grandfather. 2 Chronicles chapter 21 is a record of his life. We will review a few episodes like a court proceeding. Imagine Jehoram was brought before God for a hearing. God was both the prosecutor and a righteous judge. Evidences were presented to prove that Jehoram was guilty of the sins he committed. Like this king, we have no control of how we began our life. We cannot choose our family or nationality. But our destination is a result of all the decisions we make.

EXPLANATION 解釋

Exhibit A: Death Certificates 證據 A: 死亡證明書

Exhibit A is shown. It is a series of death certificates for Jehoram's brothers and some "princes." The word can be understood as officials. Let us first read **verse 4 to 7**. The names of Jehoram's six brothers are found in verses 2 and 3. King Jehoshaphat gave them some treasures and cities before he passed away. But he made Jehoram the next king because he was the oldest son. Why would Jehoram killed those people? A possible reason was that he saw them as potential threats to his throne. Those leaders who were killed were perhaps close friends of his brothers. Bloodshed like that had never happened in the royal family since David. King Solomon had a thousand wives according to the Bible. But his son, king Rehoboam, did not see his many brothers and half-brothers as competitors. Where did Jehoram get the idea that he had to get rid of his brothers to protect his crown? Let us do some detective work here. Jehoram's father and grandfather were faithful to God. They would never advise Jehoram to commit murder. The next source of influence to him would be his own family.

Exhibit B: Marriage Certificate 證據 B: 結婚證明書

That takes us to Exhibit B. It was Jehoram's marriage certificate. Instead of imitating after the godly example of his ancestors, verse 6 says Jehoram copied the wicked ways of his in-laws. More than likely, this marriage between the northern and southern kingdoms was a diplomatic move. From then on, the two nations became allies instead of enemies. We mentioned before that

all the northern kings were evil because they worshipped idols. Ahab was a notorious champion in that regard. He married a Gentile princess named Jezebel. She brought in the false gods she bowed down to. Now Jehoram married the daughter of this couple. What positive outcome can we expect? Very likely, she told Jehoram that her grandfather Omri seized power from the previous king. Ahab himself also killed many prophets of Jehovah at the persuasion of Jezebel. Therefore, Jehoram got a wrong impression that he must eliminate his rivals before they rose up against him. This queen is by the name Athaliah. Like-mother-like-daughter. Athaliah imported false gods from the north to Judah. **Verse 11** reads: He had also built high places on the hills of Judah and had caused the people of Jerusalem to prostitute themselves and had led Judah astray. Jehoram dragged the whole nation to the mud. High places were shrines or altars built on mountains where people offered sacrifices to idols. The author uses a despicable word “prostitute” to describe their religious practice. In the ancient world, pagan worship often involved immoral activities. Besides, in the Old Testament, the relationship between God and Israel is described as the love between two spouses. Over and over again, this wife (Israel) was unfaithful to her husband (Jehovah) and chased after false gods. Spiritual depravity leads to moral depravity. People set up their own standard when they reject God’s standard. Dear parents: do I need to emphasize again the importance of bringing your children to Christ? Also, it is never too early to pray that they will marry a Christian. My wife did that when she was pregnant. God wants to bless your future generations through you. You try your best to bring up godly kids. Eventually, they will make their own choice about marriage. Do not lose hope even if they marry a non-believer. Keep praying for them that God will bring them back to the right path.

Hope: God’s Unfailing Covenant 盼望：神不捨棄的盟約

Thus far the picture is all gloomy. The author interjects a glimpse of hope here, even when Judah was on a path of self-destruction. God’s covenant made with David would never fail. God told David in **2 Samuel 7:16** – “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.” When we began our studies on the kings, we mentioned that God’s promises can either be conditional or unconditional. David’s descendants would continue to be kings if they followed God. Unfortunately, they went astray and David’s dynasty eventually came to an end. However, one of David’s descendants succeeded the throne and became the most important King. He is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. His earthly father, Joseph, came from the line of David. God’s promise was thus fulfilled. Today, we become citizens of God’s spiritual Kingdom when we accepted Jesus as our Savior and Lord. We are the beneficiaries of God’s covenant. Our relationship with God is forever, just like God’s Kingdom is eternal. Jesus gives us an assurance in **John 10:27-28** – 27 “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.” Once you entered into God’s family, there is no sin big enough to undo your salvation. Sometimes we see people being very zealous for a season, but they denounced their faith and left the church later. Were they truly saved? No one knows except God. Jesus actually gave us some signs of genuine believers in the passage. First, Jesus knows who they are just like a shepherd will never mix up his sheep with others’. Second, true followers of Christ go after their Shepherd. We need to do a self-examination. Am I a true sheep of Jesus? Do I follow His guidance? There will be prodigal children who run away for some time. By God’s grace and patience, they come to repentance and return home. But in the meantime, God will discipline His rebellious children. In the Bible, God gave Israel many

opportunities to turn back. God had to use more severe measures when His people ignored His warnings.

Verdict: Guilty as Charged 判決：罪名成立

Jehoram insisted on his wrong choice. He was guilty as charged. The verdict was announced through prophet Elijah. Look at **verses 12 to 13**: 12 Jehoram received a letter from Elijah the prophet, which said: “This is what the Lord, the God of your father David, says: ‘You have not walked in the ways of your father Jehoshaphat or of Asa king of Judah. 13 But you have walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and you have led Judah and the people of Jerusalem to prostitute themselves, just as the house of Ahab did. You have also murdered your own brothers, members of your father’s house, men who were better than you.’” Elijah should have been gone by this time. God received the prophet to heaven in a chariot and horses of fire. Perhaps God gave Elijah insight to write this letter before he left. Basically, Jehoram was guilty of two sins: idolatry and murder. He abandoned God and worshipped false gods. He also led his people to follow his wicked ways. Moreover, he killed his brothers and some officials.

Sentence 1: Judgment of Defeats 刑罰 1：敵人犯境

God’s judgment on Jehoram would be two-fold. First, there would be a judgment of defeats. We will read **verse 8 to 10**. Judah was attacked by three enemies. The first opponent was Edom. In both verses 8 and 10, the author says the Edomites rebelled against Judah. Back then when David was king, he subdued Edom under him. Now the country revolted against Judah. In fact, the Edomites were so dominant that Jehoram’s soldiers had to run for their lives. Besides Edom, verse 10 says Libnah also turned its back to Judah about the same time. Libnah was only a town, not even a country. The book of Joshua records that Libnah was given to some priests when the Israelites divided Canaan. Now the inhabitants of Libnah, possibly some indigenous Canaanites, rose up against Judah. The author tells us the reason was that “Jehoram had forsaken the Lord.” On the surface, it was a political insurgency. But God used a troop as a means to discipline His children for their sins. Then there was a third group of enemies. We will continue to read **verses 16 and 17**. Similar to Libnah, God dispatched this ally from some Philistines nearby and some Arabs from Africa to wage a war against Judah. They caused much damage to the king. All the treasures in the palace were plundered and the royal family was captured. Only Jehoram’s youngest son Ahaziah was spared. He would become the next king. The three groups of adversaries had one thing in common. They were not superpower like Egypt or Aram. God enabled even some guerillas to defeat Judah. It is like a smaller college is able to rout a championship team. It is not only a bad loss. It is an utter embarrassment. God can use a tornado to sweep a house away. But He can also cause water to seep through the roof. He can use various means to draw our attention.

Sentence 2: Judgment of Disease 刑罰 2：惡疾纏身

Not only did God judge Jehoram by multiple defeats, He also judged him using a disease. Please read **verse 18 to 20**. We do not know exactly what sickness it was other than the fact that it was a digestive problem. The king struggled with great pain for two years before he passed away. Another matter we do not know is the practice of making a fire. A direction translation of the

Hebrew text is “people made no burning.” The rendering in the Chinese Union Version of “burning things for him” reminds us of the superstitious Chinese custom. Some people burn paper money and other paper-made items like mansions, cars and even cellphones for a dead person. They believe that their loved ones living in the under-world will receive them. Such practice has no Biblical foundation. The only other record of making a fire for a deceased person in the Bible is in **2 Chronicles 16:14** – ... and they made a huge fire in his honor. The person was king Asa, Jehoram’s grandfather. Asa was a good king who followed God. People made a fire to remember Asa because of the great things he did. Whereas, people paid no tribute to Jehoram because of his wicked deeds. In fact, the last verse of chapter 21 says no one thought of Jehoram after he left the scene. He was buried in his own grave instead of the tombs for the kings. It was a tragic ending to his life.

CONCLUSION 結論

Our destination is a result of all the decisions we make. Jehoram made one bad decision after another. At the end, it was a path of no return. We can always learn some positive lessons even from a sad story. God is the Lord of second chance. There is always a new beginning in Him. That reminds me of the life story of senator Tim Scott of South Carolina. He caught national spotlight a few weeks ago because of a speech he made. I am not going to talk about politics here. Rather, I want to highlight a few things about his upbringing. He grew up in a poor neighborhood. His parents were divorced when he was seven years old. Mom then took the boys and moved in with the grandparents. Scott’s mom had to work a double-shift of 16 hours a day as a nursing aide to support the family. She and both grandparents are dedicated believers. Scott accepted Christ when he was eleven. Unfortunately, he flunked out from high school as a freshman because he failed a few subjects. Scott has all the ingredients that could lead to failure: a poor and broken family, and not doing well in school. People told Scott that there are only three ways for a kid like him to succeed in life – plays sports, sells drugs or becomes an entertainer. But God had a different plan for him. Scott met a mature Christian named John when working on a summer job. He instilled Biblical principles to Scott. Scott then grew stronger in his relationship with God. He managed to get back to school and graduated from college. God opened the door for Scott to get involved in public service. God has a unique plan for each of us. No matter what it is, everything begins with your foundation in Jesus Christ. Receive Him, trust in Him, obey and follow Him. He will lead you in the right path.

INTRODUCTION 引言

使命越大，就越需要更堅固的根基。千禧大樓是舊金山最高的住宅建築。它有 60 層，雖然 13 樓和 44 樓由於迷信並不存在。它的住戶肯定感到很自豪。但是，發展商在 2016 年宣布大樓的結構一直在下降。到 2018 年，該建築物已下沉 18 英寸，傾斜了 14 英寸。這是因為大樓的地基是安在沙土，而不是在岩石上。地基根本無法承受建築物的重量。很自然，房價大跌，居民也提出訴訟。經過幾年的研究，發展商提出了一個補救措施，需要花費 1 億美元。一個人的生命就像一座建築物。外表也許能欺騙別人。但裡面的問題終於會浮現出來。在聖經中，在亞撒和約沙法的統治下，猶大人民享有 66 年的安定與繁榮。他們兩人在神眼中都是好的王。他們順服神，並聽從祂的指示。現在，約蘭成為下一任的王。不幸的是，他沒有跟隨父親和祖父的敬虔榜樣。歷代志下第 21 章記錄了他的一生。我們會以法院審訊的方式看他生平的幾個片段。想像一下，約蘭被帶到神面前接受審判。神既是檢察官又是公義的法官。祂提出證據來證明約蘭是有罪的。像這位王一樣，我們無法控制自己的生命是怎樣開始的。我們不能選擇我們的家庭或國籍。但是我們的目的地是我們一生所有決定的結果。

EXPLANATION 解釋

Exhibit A: Death Certificates 證據 A：死亡證明書

證據 A 被提出來。那是約蘭的弟弟和一些首領的死亡證明書。讓我們首先讀第 4 至 7 節。我們在第 2 和第 3 節中可以找到約蘭的六個弟弟的名字。約沙法在臨終前給了他們一些財寶和城市。但他任命約蘭為下一任的王，因為約蘭是長子。為何約蘭殺死那些人？一個可能的原因是他視他們為潛在的威脅。那些被殺的領袖也許是他弟弟的好友。自大衛以來，王室中從未發生過那樣的流血事件。根據聖經，所羅門王有一千個妻子。但是他的兒子羅波安王沒有視他的許多兄弟和同母異父的兄弟為競敵。約蘭為何認為他必須鏟除自己的弟弟來保護王位？讓我們學偵探那樣做一些調查工作。約蘭的父親和祖父都忠於神。他們絕對不會建議約蘭去殺人。影響約蘭的下一個可能來源便是他自己的家庭。

Exhibit B: Marriage Certificate 證據 B：結婚證明書

現在我們來看證據 B。那是約蘭的結婚證明書。第六節說約蘭沒有效法他祖先的敬虔榜樣，而是照他岳父岳母邪惡的榜樣。北國和南國之間的婚姻很有可能是一種外交行動。從那時起，兩國成為盟友，而不是敵人。我們之前提過，所有北國的王都是邪惡的，因為他們敬拜偶像。亞哈在這方面是個冠軍。他與外邦公主耶洗別結婚。她把自己敬拜的假神都帶進來。現在，約蘭娶了這對夫婦的女兒。我們能期望什麼正面的結果嗎？她很可能告訴約蘭她的祖父暗利奪取了前王的權力。亞哈本人也在耶洗別的影響下殺死了許多耶和華的先知。因此，約蘭得到一個錯誤的印象，以為必須先下手消滅可能的對手。這個皇后名叫亞她利雅。有其母必有其女。亞她利雅把偶像從北國引入猶大。11 節說：他又在猶大諸山建築邱壇，使耶路撒冷的居民行邪淫，誘惑猶大人。約蘭將整個國家拉下來。邱壇是在高山上建造的神壇，供人獻祭給偶像之用。作者「行邪淫」那麼低下的用詞來形容他們的宗教習俗。在古代世界，異教的敬拜經常涉及不道德的活動。另外，在舊約中，神與以色列之間的關係被描述為配偶之間的愛。一次又一次，這個妻子（以色列）對她的丈夫（神）不忠，追隨了假神。屬靈的墮落會導致道德的墮落。當人拒絕神的標準時，他們便會建立自己的標準。親愛的父母：請不要嫌我嘮叨。我必須再次強調帶領你的孩子信主的重要性。除此之外，要為他們禱告，期望他們和基督徒結婚。這樣做永遠不會嫌太早。我的太太在懷孕時就已經那樣做。神希望通過你來祝福你的子孫後代。你盡力養育敬虔的孩子。最終，他們會決定自己的婚姻。即使他們與非信徒結婚，你也不要失望。繼續為他們禱告，求神把他們帶回正途。

Hope: God's Unfailing Covenant 盼望：神不捨棄的盟約

到目前為止，看起來像是灰色一片。但作者在這裡帶來一線希望，縱使猶大正在朝向自我毀滅，神與大衛立的約永遠不會改變。神在撒母耳記下 7:16 對大衛說：「你的家和你的國必在我面前永遠堅立。你的國位也必堅定，直到永遠。」當我們開始研讀列王的生平時，我們提到神的一些應許是有條件的，其他卻是無條件的。如果大衛的後代跟隨神，他們將繼續成為王。可惜的是，因他們的背逆，大衛的王朝最終告一段落。然而，大衛的一位後裔繼位，成為最重要的王。祂就是我們的主耶穌基督。祂地上的父親約瑟來自大衛一族。於是神的應許就實現了。今天，當我們接受耶穌為我們的救主和生命的主時，我們便成為神屬靈國度的公民。我們成為神盟約的受益人。我們與神的關係是永遠的，就像神的國度是永恆的一樣。耶穌在約翰福音 10:27-28 說：27「我的羊聽我的聲音，我也認識他們，他們也跟著我。28 我又賜給他們永生；他們永不滅亡，誰也不能從我手裡把他們奪去。」如果你已經進入了神的家庭，沒有任何的罪會嚴重到足以使你失去救恩。有時我們會看到一些人曾經對神非常熱心，但是他們後來忽然宣佈不信並離開教會。他們到底有否得救？除了神，沒有人

知道。耶穌實際上在這段經文中給了我們一些真正信徒的特徵。首先，耶穌認識他們就像牧羊人認識他們的羊，不會把自己的羊與其他人的羊弄混。第二，基督的門徒跟隨他們的牧人。我們需要檢視一下自己。我真是耶穌的羊嗎？我聽從祂的指引嗎？浪子也許會離家出走一段時間。然而，靠著神的恩典和耐心，他們終於會悔改並回家。但是，神也會管教不聽話的兒女。在聖經中，神給了以色列許多回頭的機會。當神的子民不理會祂的警告時，神便會採取更嚴厲的措施。

Verdict: Guilty as Charged 判決：罪名成立

約蘭一意孤行。於是他被裁定罪名成立。那個判決是先知以利亞宣布的。請看第 12 至 13 節：**12 先知以利亞達信與約蘭說：「耶和華你祖大衛的神如此說：『因為你不行你父約沙法和猶大王亞撒的道，13 乃行以色列諸王的道，使猶大人和耶路撒冷的居民行邪淫，像亞哈家一樣，又殺了你父家比你好的諸兄弟。』」**以利亞在那個時候應該早已離開世間。神用火車和火馬將先知接回天堂。也許神給以利亞信息，要他在離開之前寫一封信。約蘭犯了兩條罪：敬拜偶像和謀殺。他離棄耶和華並敬拜假神。他還帶領他的子民跟隨他的惡行。第二，他殺死了他的弟弟和一些官員。

Sentence 1: Judgment of Defeats 刑罰 1：敵人犯境

神對約蘭的審判有兩方面。首先是敵人犯境。我們將閱讀**第 8 至 10 節**。猶大遭到三個敵人的攻擊。第一個對手是以東。在第 8 節和第 10 節中，作者說以東人背叛猶大。當大衛當政時，他將以東制服了。現在他們反抗猶大。實際上，以東人是如此的一面倒，以至於約蘭的士兵是落荒而逃。除了以東，第 10 節說，立拿也大約在同一時間對抗猶大。立拿只是一個城鎮，甚至不是一個國家。約書亞記記載，以色列人在迦南分地時，立拿被分配給一些祭司。現在，立拿的居民，可能是一些迦南人起義。作者告訴我們是「因為約蘭離棄耶和華他列祖的神」。表面上看來是一場政治叛亂。但是神用外邦的軍隊作為懲罰的工具。然後還有第三批敵人。我們將繼續閱讀**第 16 和 17 節**。與立拿一樣，是神差派一支由非利士人和非洲的阿拉伯人組成的盟軍攻打猶大。他們造成了很大的損失。宮殿中的所有財寶均被掠奪，王家被俘擄，只留下約蘭的小兒子約哈斯。他將成為下一任的王。這三組敵人有一個共同點。他們不是像埃及或亞蘭那樣的超級強國。神甚至只要出動一些游擊隊便能夠擊敗猶大。就像一所較小的大學竟然打敗了冠軍的球隊。不僅是輸掉，而且很丟臉。神可以用龍捲風鏟平一幢房子。但是祂也可以使屋頂漏水。祂可以用任何方法引起我們的注意。

Sentence 2: Judgment of Disease 刑罰 2：惡疾纏身

神不僅讓敵人犯境來審判約蘭，而且還使他惡疾纏身。請閱讀第 18 至 20 節。作者形容那是一種腸胃的疾病，但我們不知道詳情。約蘭在去世前被痛苦折磨了兩年。另一件我們不知道的事情是有關燒東西的意義。中文版的翻譯令我們想到中國的迷信風俗。有些人為過世的人燒紙錢和其他紙製物品，例如豪宅、汽車甚至手機。他們相信生活在另一個世界的親人會收到那些東西。這種做法沒有聖經的根據。聖經中唯一提到為離世的人燒東西的記載是在歷代志下 16:14：…又為他燒了許多的物件。那個人是約蘭的祖父亞撒王。亞撒是跟隨神的好王。我們可以理解那個儀式為人民生一個火以紀念亞撒所作出的偉大貢獻。但是鑑於約蘭的邪惡行為，人民對他毫無表示。實際上，第 21 章的最後一節說，約蘭離開後「無人思慕」他。他被安葬在自己的墳墓中，而不是王家的墓園。這是他一生的悲慘結局。

CONCLUSION 結論

我們的目的地是我們一生所有決定的結果。約蘭接二連三地做出一個又一個錯誤的決定。最後，他無法回頭。但就算是一個悲劇，我們也可以從中學到一些積極的教訓。神永遠是給我們第二次機會的主。在祂裡面總是可以有一個新的開始。這讓我想起了南卡羅來納州參議員蒂姆·斯科特（Tim Scott）的人生經歷。幾週前，他因發表了一篇演講而引起轟動。我不是在這裡談論政治。我只想分享有關他成長的一些事情。他在一個貧窮的社區長大。他七歲時父母離了婚。然後，媽媽帶著幾個男孩，搬到祖父母家。斯科特的母親每天必須兩次輪班，工作 16 個小時做助理護士來養家。她和祖父母都是虔誠的基督徒。斯科特十一歲時信了主。很可惜，他因為有幾門課不及格在高中第一年就被學校開除了。斯科特擁有一些可能導致他失敗的因素：一個貧窮而破碎的家庭，並且在學校成績不好。人們告訴斯科特，像他這樣的孩子只有三條達致成功的路：作運動員、賣毒品或成為明星。但是神對他有一個不同的計劃。斯科特在暑假打工時遇到了一個成熟的基督徒，名叫約翰。他灌輸了斯科特聖經的原則。斯科特逐漸與神的關係變得更加堅強。他後來回到學校，並從大學畢業。神為斯科特開路，讓他投身公共事務。神對我們每個人都有獨特的計劃。無論神安排我們走什麼路，一切都是從建立與耶穌基督的基礎上開始。接受祂、信靠祂、聽從並跟隨祂。祂會帶領你走在正確的道路上。