

1&2 **KINGS**

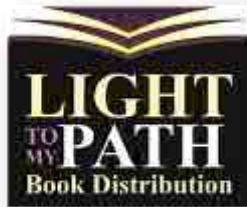


**A DEVOTIONAL LOOK AT THE KINGS OF
ISRAEL AND JUDAH**

F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

1 & 2 Kings

A Devotional Look at the Kings of Israel and Judah



F. Wayne Mac Leod

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Diane MacLeod, Pat Schmidt

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INTRODUCTION

TO 1 & 2 KINGS

Author.

There is no clear evidence in the books of 1 & 2 Kings as to their authorship. There have been a number of suggestions offered as to possible authors.

A comparison of 2 Kings 24:18-25:7 and Jeremiah 52:1-11 shows that the two passages are almost identical in wording. This, and the fact that the books of 1 & 2 Kings seem to show how the events that took place were in direct fulfilment of the prophecies of the day, cause some to suggest that maybe Jeremiah the prophet was the author of the books. He was alive at this time.

Another suggestion is that the books were composed by Ezra after the return of the people of God from exile in Babylon. He may have compiled various written texts and put them together into a single book to remind people of their past and what had led them into exile.

While there is no clear Biblical evidence as to the human authorship of the books, they have been inspired of God, who alone is the true author.

Background:

Originally 1 & 2 Kings formed one book in the Hebrew Scriptures. They were later divided into two books and became known as 3 and 4 Kings with 1 & 2 Samuel being 1 & 2 Kings.

The books of 1 & 2 Kings cover the history of God's people for a period of just over 450 years (from the reign of Solomon to the exile into Babylon). The focus of the books, as the title suggests, is to trace the leadership of the nation under the kings of Israel and Judah.

It should be noted that the books are, in reality, a spiritual history of Israel and Judah. While they focus on the kings of this period, the intention of the author is to show his readers the impact of both godly and ungodly leadership in the nations of Israel and Judah. There is a strong prophetic element in these two books. Their intention is to show how obedience to God and His purposes brought rich blessing to the nations of Israel and Judah. Disobedience, alone brought its downfall.

Importance of the Books for Today:

The books of 1 & 2 Kings are important in our day for many different reasons. Historically they give us a perspective on what took place in the four hundred and fifty years between Solomon and the return from exile in Babylon. Beyond this, however, they are a history of the spiritual climate of the nations of Israel and Judah at that time.

1 & 2 Kings show us how easy it is for God's people to wander and fall into sin. They are tempted by the world

and struggle with many of the issues the unbeliever struggled with in the day. You can't read this book without seeing the intense spiritual battle that takes place for the glory of God on the earth. The natural inclination of the hearts of God's people was toward evil. We don't have to look too far into ourselves to see this same inclination.

The key to success in the books of 1 & 2 Kings was not to be found in military power or human strength and wisdom. The blessing of God was showered on those who chose to serve Him with an undivided and loving heart. Victory and blessing came as a result of obedience from the heart. The principle is the same today. Blessing for our churches and nations comes from loving obedience and devotion to God in all things. We have yet to see what God can do through those who choose to honour Him in all they do.

Finally, these books are about the leadership of Israel and Judah. They reveal how the leadership of the nation impacted the nation as a whole. There are warnings and challenges contained in these books for those who are in authority in the church and in our nations. 1 & 2 Kings reveal the importance of godly leadership for the health of our churches and nations.

PREFACE

1 & 2 Kings is the four hundred and fifty year history of the nations of Israel and Judah from the time of Solomon to their return from exile in Babylon. It is the story of how a single nation, under God, was divided and fell in this short period of time. It would have been hard for the people of Solomon's day to imagine the incredible wealth and prosperity they knew being stripped from them. From wonderful prosperity and peace in the days of Solomon, the spiritual health of God's people steadily declined until everything they knew was burned, broken down or stripped from them. 1 & 2 Kings is a tragic story of what disobedience and loss of love and devotion to God can do to a nation, a church or an individual. It is, in reality, the story of the spiritual battle that continues to rage in our day for the glory of God in our churches, nations and personal lives.

As you read these books take the time to consider the nature of the spiritual battle in Israel and Judah. Watch what happens when they begin to compromise in their faith and lean on their own understanding rather than the leading of the Lord. If you are a leader, consider the impact of the kings of Israel and Judah on their nations. Be warned and challenged in your spiritual obligations toward those whose care God has given you. These books remind us that the key to prosperity and blessing is not found in human wisdom and strength but in simple obedience to God and His ways. Let the lessons of these books challenge

you to greater devotion toward God and His purpose for this earth and your personal life.

Take your time reading this book. Allow the Holy Spirit to give you insight into the application of each section. Allow Him to show you anything that might stand in the way of deeper intimacy with Him. Be ready for Him to reveal any sins. Take the time to confess them and seek His victory. My prayer is that the Lord would stir each reader to step out in greater obedience and faithfulness. May you know His blessing as you read and may the Lord be pleased to use this simple study to bless and encourage you in your personal walk with Him.

F. Wayne MacLeod

1

SOLOMON DECLARED KING

Read 1 Kings 1:1-53

King David was an old man. His health was failing. David's servants decided to find a young virgin to nurse him. This young virgin was to lie beside David to keep him warm at night. A beautiful girl by the name of Abishag was found (verse 3) and brought to the king to care for him. Verse 4 makes it clear that David did not have sexual relations with her.

The passage is significant in what it tells us about David. David, who had once been a mighty soldier, was now an old and frail man. He who had commanded the entire nation now needs a young woman to care for his own needs. His body was frail. His health was failing. He is coming to the end of his life. It was time for him to pass his kingdom on to one of his sons.

In verse 5 we see that Adonijah, David's son through his wife Haggith, wanted to become king in his father's place. Adonijah mounted a chariot and chose fifty men to run ahead of him. This is exactly what Absalom did when he wanted to become king in David's place (see 2 Samuel 15:1). Verse 6 tells us that Adonijah was born next after Absalom. Like his brother, he was very handsome. He may

have been inspired by Absalom's efforts to take the throne. David did not interfere with Adonijah.

Over time, Adonijah gained the support of Joab the commander of the army, and Abiathar the priest (verse 7). These faithful supporters of David likely realized that it was time for David to hand over his reign. Adonijah, however, was not able to gain the support of Zadok the priest, Benaiah the military commander, Nathan the prophet, Shimei or David's special guard (verse 8).

Adonijah believed, however, he had sufficient support to take the next step toward becoming king. He invited his brothers, supporters and royal officials to a great sacrifice of sheep, cattle and fatted calves at the Stone of Zohelth near the region of En Rogel. He did not invite David's supporters to this sacrifice (verse 10).

When Nathan the prophet heard that Adonijah had called for this sacrifice and was threatening to take over David's throne, he went to David's wife, Bathsheba, and told her about Adonijah's plan (verse 11). Nathan was concerned about this and felt that Bathsheba's life and the life of her child Solomon were at stake (verse 12). He advised her to go to David and question him about his promise to make her son, Solomon, king in his place. She was to ask him why Adonijah was being crowned king instead of her son Solomon (verse 13).

Nathan told Bathsheba that while she was talking to David, he would come in and confirm what Bathsheba was telling him about Adonijah. Bathsheba took Nathan's advice and went to David. Abishag was caring for his needs at the time (verse 15). Bathsheba bowed before David. When David asked her what she wanted, Bathsheba reminded him of his promise to make her son Solomon king (verse 17). She

informed him that Adonijah had sacrificed a great number of cattle, fatted calves and sheep, and that Abiathar the priest and Joab his military commander were supporting him as the new king (verse 19). Bathsheba told David that Solomon had not been invited to this celebration. She also told David that the eyes of the nation were on him to tell them who would become king in his place.

Bathsheba told David that with Adonijah as king, she feared for her life. She believed that both she and her son Solomon would be treated like criminals when David was gone (verse 21). They would be seen as a threat to Adonijah's reign.

While Bathsheba was speaking to David, Nathan the prophet arrived as he had said (verse 22). He bowed before David and asked David if he had declared Adonijah to be king in his place (verse 24). Nathan told David that Adonijah had offered a great number of cattle, fatted calves and sheep (verse 25). He had invited the king's sons, the commanders of the army and Abiathar the priest. At that very moment these individuals were eating, drinking and saying, "Long live King Adonijah." Nathan informed David that Adonijah had not invited Zadok the priest, Benaiah or Solomon (verse 26). He asked David if he had given his approval for these celebrations (verse 27).

When David heard this news, he called for Bathsheba (verse 28). When she had come, David took an oath and said to her:

As surely as the LORD lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, I will surely carry out today what I swore to you by the LORD, the God of Israel:

Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place (verses 29-30).

When Bathsheba heard this promise, she bowed before David with her face to the ground declaring, "May my lord King David live forever (verse 31). This was an expression of her gratitude to David and was a common expression used to thank royalty.

David called for Zadok the priest, Nathan and Benaiah, his military commander. When they had come to David, the king told them to set Solomon on his mule and take him down to Gihon. There Zadok the priest was to anoint him king over Israel. They were to blow the trumpet and shout, "Long live King Solomon" (verse 34). When they had done this, they were to take Solomon and put him on David's throne. In doing this, David publically declared his intentions for Solomon to be king in his place (verse 35). Benaiah, the military commander, blessed David for his decision, praying that God would make Solomon's throne even greater than David's (verse 37).

In obedience to the command of the king, Zadok, Nathan and Benaiah put Solomon on the king's mule and went down to Gihon (verse 38). Zadok the priest took a horn of oil and anointed Solomon as king. They sounded the trumpet and cried out, "Long live King Solomon!" (verse 39). The people gathered around Solomon in support with the noise of their celebration filling the air and shaking the ground.

Adonijah heard the noise and wondered what was happening (verse 41). As they were wondering what was going on, Jonathan, the son of Abiathar the priest arrived. He informed them that David had just made Solomon king in his place (verse 43). Jonathan told them that the whole city

was cheering for their new king (verse 45). Solomon had already taken his seat on the royal throne and the royal officials had come to congratulate him. He told them that even King David had bowed to him in his bed (verse 47).

When Adonijah and his guests heard this news they were afraid. The group was quickly dispersed (verse 49). Adonijah was personally afraid of Solomon and went to the temple to take hold of the horns of the altar pleading for Solomon to spare his life (verse 51). The horns of the altar were a place of safety. People would often grasp on to these horns believing that no one would dare to kill them before the sacred altar of the Lord.

When Solomon heard that Adonijah had run for safety and was pleading for mercy, he declared, "If he shows himself to be a worthy man, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground; but if evil is found in him, he will die" (verse 52). Solomon had his men remove Adonijah from the altar. Adonijah, recognizing his defeat, bowed in submission to Solomon, who sent him home unharmed.

For Consideration:

- What evidence do we have here that it was time for David to hand his reign over to his son?
- How does God use Adonijah's decision to make himself king show David that it was time to hand over his kingdom to his son Solomon? Does God use circumstances today to show us His timing and purposes? Do you have an example of this in your personal life?

- Adonijah wanted to become king, but this was not the plan of God for his life. Have you ever wanted something that was not God's plan for you? Can these projects or plans ultimately succeed?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to know His timing in your life. Ask Him to help you to be open to His clear leading and direction as David was here.
- Thank the Lord that He desires to lead you. Ask God to make you sensitive to what He is telling you through the circumstances of your life.
- Do you have plans and desires that are not in agreement with God's plan for your life? Take a moment now and surrender those plans to the Lord. Ask Him to take away any desires you might have that do not bring Him honour and glory.

2

SOLOMON ESTABLISHES HIS REIGN

Read 1 Kings 2:1-46

David was nearing his death. Before he died, however, he called for his son Solomon to give him some final instructions. In verse 2 David challenged his son to be strong and prove his worth as a man. David also challenged him to walk in the ways of the Lord. This would bring prosperity in all he did (verse 3). This shows us something about David's philosophy of leadership. For David, the key to successful leadership was in relationship with God. Ignore your relationship with God and your leadership will suffer. David told Solomon that if he wanted to prosper in his reign he needed to put the Lord God first and walk in His ways. This principle applies to our own lives and ministry as well. We cannot expect our ministries to prosper if we do not first learn to walk with the Lord in absolute obedience. The Lord delights to pour out His blessing on those who live faithfully for Him. For David, the key ingredient for a successful reign was a right relationship with God.

David based his view of leadership on the promise he had received from the Lord God. In verse 4 David told Solomon

that the Lord promised him that if his descendants walked faithfully and wholeheartedly before Him with all their heart and soul, then he would never fail to have a man on the throne. This prophecy was dependent on the obedience of David's family to the plan of God. There are many blessings that are conditional on our obedience. We can sacrifice much blessing through disobedience. David challenged his son Solomon to live faithfully for God so that the promise of God would be fulfilled through him.

Having challenged Solomon to live for the Lord, David then expressed his concern for those who could possibly oppose his reign. David had many enemies. Likely David is concerned that these enemies would turn against his son Solomon. David encouraged Solomon to deal with each of these enemies so that his reign would be established and without threat.

The first person David encouraged Solomon to deal with was Joab, his military commander. Joab did not hesitate to kill those he saw as enemies. In particular, David mentioned Abner (2 Samuel 3:25-32) and Amasa (2 Samuel 20:10). David told Solomon how Joab killed these two men in peacetime. It should also be mentioned, here, that Joab had also killed Absalom, David's son, when he helplessly hung from a tree by his hair (2 Samuel 18:14). David did not believe Joab could be trusted and suggested that Solomon deal with him according to his own wisdom. He suggested Solomon kill him (verse 6).

David commanded Solomon to show kindness, however, to Barzillai of Gilead (verse 7). He had stood with him and supported David when he fled from Absalom (see 2 Samuel 17:27-28). In return for his support, David asked Solomon to treat him like one who ate at his own table (one of

the family). He was to bless him and provide for his every need.

Next, David mentions Shimei, the Benjamite. In 2 Samuel 16:5-13 Shimei cursed and hurled insults at David when he was fleeing from Absalom. David spared his life but did not trust him. David would not be unfaithful to his promise to spare Shimei's life but now that he was about to die, he commanded his son to deal with him according to his crime (verse 9).

David died and was buried in Jerusalem (verse 10). He had reigned for forty years over Israel (seven years in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem). Solomon replaced David as king (verse 12).

At the death of David, Adonijah went to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother with a request. Bathsheba was concerned about Adonijah coming to see her (verse 13). He had already tried to take David's throne. Assured, however, that he came in peace, she agreed to see him and asked him what he wanted.

Adonijah told Bathsheba that he felt the kingdom really belonged to him but it had gone to Solomon. He recognized that this was the Lord's will (verse 15) but obviously it was not an easy decision for him to accept. Adonijah had a request to make of Bathsheba. In verse 17 he asked Bathsheba to ask Solomon to give him Abishag the Shunnimite as his wife. Abishag had been David's nursemaid in his old age (see 1 Kings 1:1-4).

While Abishag had never slept with David and was still a virgin, this request was very bold and disrespectful. For a person to take a king's concubine was to state that they were the rightful owners of what belonged to the king. By

marrying Abishag, Adonijah wanted to show Israel that he believed he was the rightful king and successor of David.

Bathsheba agreed to ask Solomon. She did not seem to attach much importance to the request of Adonijah and saw no symbolism in his request.

Solomon's response to Adonijah's request, however, reveals that he understood what Adonijah was doing. When Bathsheba asked him to give Abishag to Adonijah as his wife, Solomon responded in verse 23:

You might as well request the kingdom for him—after all, he is my older brother—yes, for him and for Abiathar the priest and Joab son of Zeruiah!"

Solomon was angry with his mother for making this request. He felt that by granting this request he would be telling the nation that he believed Adonijah was the rightful king and successor to the throne. This is how the nation would have interpreted Solomon's actions. He understood now where Adonijah stood, that he would be a thorn in his side. He saw in this request a great disrespect for David, his father. In 1 Kings 1:52 Solomon had told Adonijah that if any evil was found in him he would die. Solomon saw this as rebellion against his father. He swore before the Lord that Adonijah would pay for this request with his life (verse 23-24). That very day, Solomon gave orders to Benaiah, his commander, to kill Adonijah (verse 25).

Next Solomon called for Abiathar the priest. Abiathar had supported Adonijah in his plot to become king in David's place (see 1 Kings 1: 25). Solomon told the priest that he deserved to die for his rebellion. While Solomon would not kill Abiathar, likely out of respect for his position as priest, he did banish him and strip him of his priestly function. He

sent him back to his fields in Anathoth (verses 26-27). This act of Solomon was in fulfillment of a word of prophecy from Samuel regarding the family of Eli. In 1 Samuel 2:30-35 Samuel prophesied that the Lord's curse would be on the family line of Eli so that those who were not physically disabled would be stripped of their priestly function. Abiathar was a descendant of Eli. Solomon's act fulfilled Samuel's prophetic word.

The next person on the list was Joab, David's former military commander. When news reached Joab that Solomon was looking for him, he fled to the tent of the Lord and took hold of the horns of the altar (verse 28). This was considered a place of refuge. Who would want to kill someone before the presence of God at the altar in the tabernacle? When Benaiah commanded Joab to come out of the tent of the Lord, he refused, telling him that he preferred to die in the tabernacle by the altar (verse 30). When Benaiah reported this to the king, Solomon gave permission to kill him there. Solomon believed that the death of Joab was necessary to cleanse the nation of evil and sin. Joab was guilty of shedding innocent blood (verse 31-32). Benaiah, obeyed the command of Solomon, killed Joab and buried him in the desert, cleansing the land of his evil (verse 34). Solomon then gave Benaiah Joab's position and replaced Abiathar with Zadok the priest (verse 35).

The final person Solomon had to deal with was Shimei, who had insulted and cursed his father when he was fleeing from Absalom. In verse 36, Solomon told Shimei that he was to build a house in Jerusalem and live there. He was not to leave the city. He threatened him with his life if he ever left Jerusalem. "The day you leave and cross the Kidron Valley, you can be sure you will die; your blood will be on your own head," Solomon told him in verse 37.

Shimei agreed with the king's command and stayed in Jerusalem for a long time. Three years later, however, two of Shimei's slaves ran off. Shimei was told that they were in Gath (verse 39). When he heard this news, he saddled his donkey and went to Gath to find his slaves and bring them back (verse 40). When Solomon heard this, he summoned Shimei and reminded him of the agreement they had between them (verse 42). He also reminded Shimei of the wrong he had done to his father David. Solomon then ordered Behaiah to kill Shimei. That day Shimei, the last enemy of David was killed and Solomon's kingdom was firmly established in Israel (verse 46).

For Consideration:

- How important is our relationship with God to our ministry? What does David's advice to Solomon tell us about the connection between obedience and blessing?
- David felt it was important for Solomon to remove any obstacle to the accomplishment of God's purpose for his life. What obstacles keep you from fully accomplishing God's purposes in your life and ministry? What do you need to do about these obstacles?
- How does Abiathar's removal from the priesthood fulfil the prophecy of Samuel in 1 Samuel 2:30-35?
- How does Adonijah's request for Abishag show that he had not accepted the will of God for his life? Have you ever had plans for your life that were not in God's plan? How did you deal with this?

For Prayer:

- What obstacles stand in the way of you accomplishing God's purposes for your ministry and life? Ask God to give you wisdom in knowing how to deal with those obstacles.
- Have you ever struggled with God's will for your life? Take a moment now and surrender to the Lord's ways. Ask Him to help you to accept His plan.

3

A GIFT OF WISDOM

Read 1 Kings 3:1-28

As we begin this chapter we catch a glimpse of the problems that would have arisen for Solomon in his reign as king. From verse 1 we learn that Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, by marrying his daughter. There are several things we need to see from this.

The fact that there was an alliance with the nation of Egypt shows that Egypt saw Israel as a significant force. Egypt saw benefit in allying with Israel. This shows us that the blessing of God was on Israel and she had the respect of the nations. The problem, however, was that God wanted His people to be separate from the nations. He did not want them to be forming alliances with the ungodly lest they be tempted to follow their ways (see Exodus 34:16, Deuteronomy 7:3-4). Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh and many other foreign women would eventually become a stumbling block for him in his reign. Solomon's wife, the daughter of Pharaoh, would live in the City of David (Jerusalem) until Solomon had finished building his palace and the temple of the Lord (verse 1).

We are told in verse 3 that Solomon loved the Lord God. He demonstrated that love for God by walking according

to the statutes of his father David, offering sacrifices and burning incense in the high places. Verse 2 tells us that, because there was no temple, the people had to offer their sacrifices to the Lord in the high places that were set apart for this purpose.

Solomon demonstrated his love for the Lord by obedience to His commands. If we say we love the Lord and do not do what He says, we need to consider what we really mean by our expressions of love for Him. Obedience is not always easy and can be costly. Sometimes it requires a sacrifice of time and energy. Often it will demand dying to our own interests and desires. Love for the Lord will be expressed in obedience to God and His Word. Those who love the Lord will walk with Him and willingly sacrifice all to be obedient to Him.

In verse 4 we see that on one particular occasion Solomon went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices to the Lord. A very important high place was located in Gibeon. Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. The Lord was pleased with Solomon's offerings and appeared to him in a dream. In that dream, the Lord invited Solomon to ask Him for whatever he wanted (verse 5).

Solomon recognized the Lord's great favour on him in giving him the throne of his father David (verse 6). Solomon's concern, however, was that he was young and inexperienced (verse 7). The responsibilities of caring for and leading such a great people weighed heavily on him. He felt overwhelmed by the responsibility (verse 8). He asked God to give him a discerning heart to govern His people well and to distinguish right from wrong (verse 9).

God was pleased with Solomon's request and told him that because his concern was for the name of the Lord and not

for himself, he would receive what he had asked for and much more. God promised to give Solomon discernment and wisdom like no one else had ever seen. God also promised him riches and honour so that there would not be a king like him during his lifetime (verse 13). God told Solomon in verse 14 that as long as he obeyed His commands and walked in His ways like his father David, he would also have a long life.

When we concern ourselves with serving the Lord and honouring His name, the Lord will take care of us and our needs. When we set our hearts to honour Him, God will honour us. All too often we focus on our own comfort and prosperity. We must learn to leave these matters with the Lord and concern ourselves with doing His will. God will care for us as we live in obedience and faithfulness.

In verse 15 we read that when Solomon awoke he realized he had been dreaming. This dream was very real for Solomon. He did not doubt what the Lord had told him in that dream. When he returned to Jerusalem he stood before the Ark of the Covenant and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the Lord. He then gave a feast for all his court. This was likely in response to the blessings the Lord had promised him. His response is one of thankfulness and gratitude to God for His promise.

In the concluding section of this chapter we see the beginning of God's answer to Solomon's prayer for wisdom and discernment. Solomon was called on to judge in difficult situations. On one occasion two prostitutes were brought to Solomon. One of them explained that she and her friend lived in the same house. She told Solomon that she had a baby and three days later her friend also had a baby (verse 18). One night, her friend's baby died because she had laid on him while he was sleeping in bed with her (verse 19).

When her friend realized what had happened, she got up in the middle of the night and took her son while she was asleep and put the dead baby beside her in bed so she would think it was her baby that had died. When she woke in the morning to nurse her baby she saw that he was not her son. Her friend, however, claimed the living son was hers (verse 22).

Solomon listened to the two ladies arguing about whose son had died. He then called for his servants to bring his sword and gave the order that the living child should be cut in two and a half of the child given to each of the mothers (verses 25-26). Hearing this command, the mother of the living child was filled with compassion and pleaded with the king not to kill the child but to give him to her friend. As the true mother, she loved her child and would rather give him to another than to see him die such a needless death. Her friend, whose child had died, however, did not have any compassion. Instead she said: "Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!" Because she was not the mother she did not have compassion on the child.

When Solomon saw the response of the two women to his command, he knew which one was the real mother. He commanded that the child be given to the mother who had compassion on him (verse 27). In this decision, Solomon showed real discernment. He knew the nature of a mother to protect her child at all costs. He understood that the real mother would sacrifice everything for her child.

News of what had happened that day spread throughout the nation. The story was likely recounted from home to home. People were impressed by the discernment and wisdom of Solomon in making this decision. God used this event to show the entire nation that He had given Solomon wisdom to administer justice in the land.

Solomon did not promote himself. God lifted him up and gave him favour with the people. Soon many doors of opportunity would open to Solomon to use the gifts God had given him. People from the world over would come to him seeking his wisdom and discernment. God honoured His servant in the eyes of the nation in order to use him.

Public recognition, even when it is a gift from God, is not an easy burden to bear. This God-given fame and recognition carried with it a big responsibility. Solomon would be in demand. He would also have to fight pride in his life. He would be in the spotlight for everyone to see. Not everyone is able to handle such recognition. This would require much grace.

For Consideration:

- Do you feel that Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter and his alliance with Egypt was in the will of the Lord or was it an obstacle to his ministry?
- What obstacles hinder your ministry?
- What is the connection between loving God and obeying His commands? How does obedience express our love for God?
- What do we learn about Solomon's desire to honour the Lord and serve Him faithfully? Do you have this desire?
- What do you need from the Lord to do the work He has called you to do?

- What do we learn about the burden of a public reputation? What are the temptations or challenges for those God has put in the public eye?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you anything that stands in the way of serving Him faithfully.
- Ask the Lord to give you an obedient heart. Do you struggle to obey God in any particular area of your life? Ask Him to give you grace to be obedient.
- Thank the Lord for the gifts he has given you. Ask Him to help you to use them faithfully. Ask him to protect you from pride as you use those gifts.

4

SOLOMON'S REIGN DESCRIBED

Read 1 Kings 4:1-34

In chapter 4 we are given a general description of the reign of Solomon. The chapter begins with a list of Solomon's officials. The following chart lists those who worked closely with Solomon and shows their responsibilities:

Official	Responsibility	Verses
Azariah	Priest	Verse 2
Elihoreph	Secretary	Verse 3
Ahijah	Secretary	Verse 3
Jehoshaphat	Record keeper	Verse 3
Banaiah	Military commander	Verse 4
Zadok	Priest	Verse 4
Abiathar	Priest	Verse 4

Azariah	District officers	Verse 5
Zabud	Solomon's priest	Verse 5
Ahishar	Palace Affairs	Verse 6
Adoniram	Forced Labour	Verse 6

Solomon also had twelve district governors. These governors ruled over particular regions of Israel and were required to supply provisions to the king and his royal household from their districts. Each governor was to provide supplies for the king for one month each year. Below is the list of governors and their districts:

Governor	District	Verse
Ben-Hur	Ephraim	Verse 8
Ben-Deker	Makaz, Shaalbim, Beth Shemesh, Elon Bethhanan	Verse 9
Ben-Hesed	Arubboth, Socoh, Hephher	Verse 10
Ben-Abinadab	Naphoth Dor	Verse 11
Baana	Taanach, Megiddo, Beth Shan	Verse 12
Ben-Geber	Ramoth Gilead, Jair, Argob	Verse 13

Ahinadab	Mahanaim	Verse 13
Ahimaaz	Naphtali	Verse 14
Baana	Asher, Aloth	Verse 16
Jehoshaphat	Issachar	Verse 17
Shimei	Benjamin	Verse 18
Gobar	Gilead, Region of Sihon the Amorite, Region of Og of Bashan	Verse 19

All these men were accountable to Solomon and provided him with supplies from their regions.

In verse 20 we see that the Lord blessed Israel and Judah so that they were "as numerous as the sand of the sea-shore". Notice the description of the people at the time of Solomon's reign. Verse 20 tells us that the people "ate, they drank and they were happy." These were prosperous and secure times in the land. God's blessing was abundantly on the nation and His people were living in peace and security.

Verse 21 tells us that Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River (Euphrates) to the land of the Philistines and as far as the border of Egypt. All the countries in this region brought tribute to Solomon. Wealth was pouring into the city of Jerusalem from the whole region. These were times of tremendous prosperity for Israel. Verses 22-28 give us a sense of the wealth of that day.

For his daily needs, verse 22 tells us that each day Solomon required thirty cors of fine flour (185 bushels or 6.6 kilolitres) and sixty cors of meal (375 bushels or 13.2 kilolitres) ten head of stall-fed cattle, twenty pasture-fed cattle, a hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and choice fowl. This was to provide the needs of his staff, servants and officials.

Those under Solomon's reign lived in safety. Israel had its own land and this land was producing rich crops.

Solomon had four thousand stalls for his chariot horses and twelve thousand horses (verse 26). All the provisions for Solomon, his officers and his horses came each month from his district officers. He never lacked for supplies (verse 27-28). We can only marvel at the richness of God's provision in the life of Solomon. There are times in my life where I wonder where the money is going to come from to pay my bills or to continue the ministry God has given me. What we see here in the life of Solomon ought to encourage us. There is no limit to what God can provide.

Chapter 4 concludes with a statement about the wisdom of Solomon. In answer to his prayer, God gave Solomon great wisdom, insight and understanding (verse 29). Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East and Egypt (verse 30). There were many wise men in Solomon's day. Of particular note are: Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol and Darda. Solomon's wisdom, however, surpassed the wisdom of all these men. He was known for his wisdom throughout the surrounding nations (verse 31).

Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs and wrote one thousand and five songs (verse 32). He described plant life, taught about animals, birds, reptiles and fish (verse

33). Men of all nations came to listen to his wisdom (verse 34).

As we look at this chapter we cannot help but be amazed at the provision of the Lord for Solomon during his reign. The blessing of God was beyond anything Solomon could ever have imagined. His kingdom lived in peace and harmony. He did not seem to be plagued with the problems of division his father had experienced.

There are those who believe that this ought to be the experience of every believer. They teach that it is the purpose of God to give us the prosperity and blessing of Solomon. While it is true that God delights to bless His people, we should not assume that this blessing will be granted in the same way for everyone. God works with us all in different ways. Because God blessed Solomon with great riches and peace does not mean that this is His purpose for us all. David was a man after God's heart but he spent much of his life running from his enemies. His own children turned against him. The Lord Jesus is described as a man who did not have a place to lay his head (Matthew 8:20). Jesus was not a rich man, nor were His apostles, who lived from day to day trusting God to provide for their need. Riches and prosperity are only blessings if they draw us to God.

What is important for us to understand is that the Lord God chose to express His blessing to Solomon through prosperity, harmony and security in the land. He may not give you the wealth of Solomon. You may have to face enemies and struggle like David or suffer rejection like the Lord Jesus and His apostles, but God's blessing can still be a reality for you. You can know His presence in your situation. God's purpose for each of us is different, but His presence and blessing will go with us in every situation.

For Consideration:

- Does God have the same purpose for every believer? Does His blessing for us all look the same? Compare David and Solomon. How did God's blessing on their lives differ?
- Why is it dangerous to limit blessing to financial matters? Can financial blessing become a curse? Explain.
- A blessing is only a blessing if it leads us to God. Do you believe this statement? Explain.
- How has the Lord blessed you personally?
- Have you ever felt jealous when you saw how the Lord blessed another believer? How does knowing that God's blessing differs from person to person help?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to open your eyes to see how He is blessing you personally.
- Ask God to set you free from any jealousy you experience when He blesses others in a way He has not blessed you.
- Take a moment to list some of the Lord's blessings in your life. Thank Him for each of those blessings.

5

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE

Read 1 Kings 5:1-6:38

It was the desire of David to construct a temple for the Lord in the city of Jerusalem, but it was not God's purpose for him. In this next section of 1 Kings we see how Solomon would see David's vision through to completion.

In 1 Kings 5:1 Hiram, the king of Tyre, sent envoys to Solomon when he became king. Hiram had enjoyed a good relationship with David and obviously hoped that he could maintain the same relationship with his son. Solomon sent word back to Hiram reminding him how his father David could not build a temple to the Lord because of the numerous battles he had waged (verse 3). Now that God had given them rest in the land, it was Solomon's intention to build this temple. He saw the construction of the temple to be one of his callings in life (verse 5). In light of this calling, Solomon asked Hiram if he would supply him with workers to help cut down and transport cedar logs from Lebanon to Jerusalem. Solomon told him that he would provide whatever wages he requested for these workers.

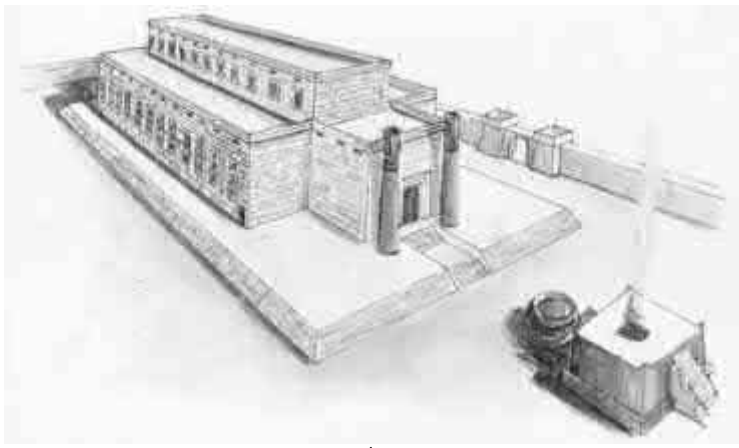
Hiram was pleased to hear Solomon's request, seeing it as a sign that the relationship he enjoyed with David would continue with his son Solomon (verse 7). He sent word to Solomon that he would be happy to provide him with cedar and pine logs. His men would cut them and haul them to the sea where they would be tied together into rafts and floated to a place Solomon would specify. Solomon's men could then separate the logs and take them to the construction site. In return, Solomon was to supply food for Hiram's household (verse 9). The agreement was made and Hiram kept Solomon supplied with all the cedar and pine logs he wanted (verse 10). In return Solomon supplied Hiram with 125,000 bushels (4,400 kilolitres) of wheat and 115,000 gallons (440 kilolitres) of olive oil each year (verse 11). This insured a peaceful relationship between Solomon and Hiram. Together they made a treaty of peace (verse 12).

Solomon enlisted 30,000 men from all over Israel to help in the construction of the temple (verse 13). This is an indication of us how big this project really was. These workers went off to Lebanon in shifts of ten thousand a month. The workers would spend one month in Lebanon and two months at home. Adoniram was given charge of this labour force (verse 14). Beyond these 30,000 men working in Lebanon, Solomon also had 70,000 carriers and 8,000 stonecutters in the hills (verse 15). There was another 3,300 foremen who supervised the workers. These men moved large blocks of stone used for the foundation of the temple (verse 17). Craftsmen prepared and cut timber for the construction (verse 18). This was a massive undertaking.

It was 480 years after the Israelites had come out of Egypt that the work on the temple began. This was the fourth

year of Solomon's reign (6:1). Chapter 6 gives us a description of the temple that Solomon constructed.

According to verse 2, the temple was ninety feet long (27 meters), thirty feet wide (9 meters) and 45 feet high (13.5 meters). A front porch or entrance extended the whole width of the temple (verse 3). It extended out from the front of the temple about 15 feet (4.5 meters). Solomon had a series of windows inset into the walls to let in light (verse 4).



1

Solomon built a three story complex of rooms against the outer wall of the temple. The rooms were made in such a way that nothing was inserted into the temple walls (verse

¹ As found at <http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=solomon's+temple+pictures&qpv=solomon%27s+temple+pictures&FORM=IGRE#view=detail&id=851918C7620400E563A8F127A7C6122C5BA0DA44&selectedIndex=50>

6). 1 Kings 6:10 tells us that the height of these rooms was seven and a half feet or 2.3 meters.

All the blocks used in the construction of the temple were prepared at a quarry. No hammer, chisel or any iron tool was heard at the temple site while it was being built (verse 7). The lower entrance was on the south side of the temple. A stairway led up to the second and third floor (verse 8). The temple was roofed with beams and cedar planks (verse 9).

As Solomon was constructing the temple, the word of the Lord came to him. God reminded him that if he followed His decrees, carried out His regulations and kept His commands, He would fulfil the promises made to David (verse 12). God promised He would not abandon them (verse 13). God would bless this temple and the nation with His presence as long as they lived in obedience to Him.

It is important that we note that God's blessing was not on the temple because of its magnificence. God was not impressed with the structure of the temple and the display of wealth. God was quite willing to receive this temple as a gift from Solomon but He wanted to remind Solomon that what was important was not the building but wholehearted obedience to His commands. God's blessing would fall on His people if they obeyed. The temple, as impressive as it was, would not guarantee God's presence if His people were not living in obedience. This was a powerful reminder to Solomon. These verses, in the middle of the detailed description of the temple, remind us of what is really important to God. He looks on the heart and not on the externals.

In verses 14 and 15 we return to the description of the temple. Solomon lined the interior walls and ceiling with cedar

boards. The floor was covered with pine planks. Solomon partitioned off thirty feet (9 meters) at the rear of the temple. This would be the Most Holy Place. It was panelled with cedar (verse 16). According to verse 17, the main hall in the front of the Holy of Holies was 60 feet long (18 meters). Everything inside the temple was made from carved cedar. There was no stone inside the temple. The carvings on the cedar wood were of gourds and open flowers (verse 18). This would have required significant effort and added to the beauty of the interior.

The Ark of the Covenant would be kept in the Most Holy Place at the rear of the temple. This inner sanctuary was thirty feet wide (nine meters) and the same height. Solomon overlaid the cedar panelling with pure gold. He did the same with the altar (verse 20). A gold chain extended across the front of this inner sanctuary (verse 21). This was a reminder to all that the ordinary person could not enter.

Solomon also made a pair of cherubim from olive wood for the inner sanctuary or Most Holy Place (verse 23). Each cherub was fifteen feet high (4.5 meters) and measured fifteen feet (4.5 meters) from wing tip to wing tip. These cherubim were placed inside the Most Holy Place with their wings spread out so that they touched the walls on each side (verse 27-28). These cherubim were overlaid with gold.

Solomon had cherubim, palm trees and open flowers carved in the walls of the inner and outer rooms of the temple (verse 29). He covered the floors with gold (verse 30).

The doors were made from olive wood and carved with cherubim, palm trees and open flowers for the inner sanctuary overlaid with beaten gold (verses 31-32). The doors

for the entrance to the main hall to the front of the temple were made from pine, carved with cherubim, palm trees and open flowers and overlaid with hammered gold (verses 33-35). We can only imagine the expense and the amount of work that was put into the construction of this temple. It took seven years to build (verse 38).

The temple was a significant structure. Thousands of people worked for seven years to complete the construction. It was obviously very beautiful. It is unlikely that there was a more impressive building in the world. It was an act of love and devotion. It would have fulfilled the desire of David's heart. It would be a place where God was honoured and served. We fail to understand the passage, however, if we don't grasp what God told Solomon in 1 Kings 6:11-13. As impressive as this wonderful building was, it was only the obedience of His people that could guarantee God's blessing and favour. God would not come to them because they had made Him an impressive building. This temple would not keep Him in their midst if their hearts were not right with Him. While the building did not particularly impress God, He was delighted to reveal His presence in it. He would meet His people there and receive their worship.

For Consideration:

- How much effort went into the construction of Solomon's temple? How much effort are you willing to put into the work of the kingdom of God?
- Solomon gave the best he had to build the temple of the Lord. He did not hold anything back. How is

this an example for us today? Are you giving the best you have?

- Do you think that God was impressed with the temple and all its wealth and artistry? What did God tell Solomon was the most important thing in the worship of his name in 1 Kings 6:11-13?
- How easy is it for us to look only at the externals? How easy would it be for people to be so impressed with the beautiful temple that they forget that their purpose was to worship God? How easy is it for us today to get caught up in the externals such as buildings, size of our church, programs and people? What is really important for a church that wants to honour God?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to give all you can for the work of His kingdom.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you failed to give generously and sacrificially for his kingdom.
- Ask the Lord to give you an obedient heart that is not distracted by externals.
- Ask God to help your church or fellowship group to focus on what is really important and not get distracted by the externals.

6

SOLOMON'S PALACE AND THE TEMPLE FURNISHINGS

Read 1 Kings 7:1-51

In the last section we examined the construction of the temple. In chapter 7 we read about the construction of Solomon's palace. Verse 1 tells us that it took thirteen years to complete the construction of the palace. From 1 Kings 6:38 we learn that the construction of the temple took only seven years. Some commentators feel that the mention of the time it took to build the palace is significant. They see the fact that it took Solomon longer to build his palace to be an indication that he placed greater value on his palace than the temple. This is not necessarily the case. It should be noted that Solomon built the temple first. He placed priority on the temple and had a large number of people working on it.

The palace was named "The Palace of the Forest of Lebanon." The palace measured 150 feet (46 meters) in length, 75 feet (23 meters) in width and 45 feet (13.5 meters) in height (verse 2). It had four rows of cedar columns supporting trimmed cedar beams (verse 2). The roof was

made of cedar and rested on forty-five beams, fifteen to a row (verse 3).

Windows were built into the walls in sets of three. The doors with their rectangular frames were set in rows of three in the front of the palace (verse 5). The hall was 75 feet high (23 meters) and 30 feet wide (13.5 meters). In front was a porch with pillars and an overhanging roof (verse 6). The Hall of Justice where Solomon would judge was covered from floor to ceiling with cedar (verse 7).

Solomon's living quarters were set further back in the palace. They had a similar design. Solomon also made another palace for his wife, the daughter of Pharaoh (verse 8).

The palace itself was made from high grade stone cut to size and trimmed (verse 9). The stones used for the foundation measured between 15 feet (4.5 meters) to measuring 12 feet (3.6 meters) in length. Obviously these huge stones would have required a significant labour force to move and put into place. The rest of the outside structure of the palace was made stones cut to size and cedar beams (verse 11). There were three rows of dressed stones in the courtyard and one course of trimmed cedar beams (verse 12).

Solomon sent to Tyre and brought a man by the name of Hiram to Israel. Hiram's mother was from the tribe of Naphtali but his father was from Tyre. He was brought to Israel because of his reputation as a craftsman in bronze (verse 14). Hiram cast two bronze pillars. Each of the pillars was 27 feet high (18.1 meters), and 18 feet around (5.4 meters). He placed a decorative bronze cap measuring seven and a half feet high (2.3 meters) on each of

these pillars. These caps were decorated with seven interwoven chains and two rows of pomegranates (verses 17-18).

Huram also made caps for the top of the pillars in the entrance of the palace. These were in the shape of lilies and were about 6 feet high (1.8 meters). They were also decorated with two hundred pomegranates in rows all around. The pillar installed on the southern side of the palace was named Jakin meaning "He establishes" and the one to the north was named Boaz meaning "in Him is strength." These pillars were a reminder to all who entered that the Lord had established the reign of Solomon and that He was Solomon's strength, an indication of Solomon's relationship with God.

Huram also made a large circular basin. This basin would likely have been used by the priests. The basin was 15 feet (4.5 meters) wide 45 feet (13.5 meters) around the outside edge (verse 23). It was decorated with two rows of carved gourds (verse 24) and stood on a stand of twelve carved bulls, three facing to the north, three facing to the south, three facing to the east and the last three facing west (verse 25). The sides of the basin were about three inches (8 centimetres) thick. It could contain about 11,500 gallons (44 kilolitres) of water (verse 26).

Huram made ten bronze stands for waters basins that could be moved from place to place as needed. Likely they would have been used by the priests in their various sacrifices. These stands were 6 feet long (1.8 meters), 6 feet wide (1.8 meters) and four and a half feet high (1.3 meters). The side panels of the stands were carved with lions, bulls and cherubim. Above these lions, bulls and cherubim were wreaths (verse 29). Each stand had four bronze

wheels. The water basins were suspended from four supports with wreaths on each side (verse 30). There was a one and a half foot (0.5 meters) engraved circular opening in each of the stands. The diameter of each wheel on the stands was two and a quarter feet (.7 meters). Four handles were crafted on each stand projecting from each corner (verse 34). Hiram then made ten bronze basins, each capable of holding 230 gallons (880 litres) of water (verse 38). These basins were placed on the stands he had made. Five of the stands were placed to the south side of the temple and the other five on the northern side (verse 39). Hiram also made shovels and sprinkling bowls for the priests (verse 40).

Verses 41-46 contain a list of all the work that Hiram of Tyre did for Solomon. So much bronze was used that it was difficult to determine the weight of it.

Solomon had the other furnishings made for the temple. These furnishings included the golden altar, the golden table, and the golden lamp stands (verse 48-49). Included also in the furnishings Solomon had made for the worship of the temple were the tongs, gold basins, wick trimmers, sprinkling bowls, dishes, censers and sockets for the doors (verse 50). When all these furnishings were completed, Solomon had them placed in the temple along with some furnishings that his father David had dedicated to the Lord (verse 51).

For Consideration:

- What should we understand from the fact that Solomon took longer to build his palace than he did for the temple?

- Take a moment to consider the tremendous creativity and artistry in the building of the temple, palace, and furnishings. Is there a place for creativity in the worship of God? How can we be more creative in our worship and service for God?
- The pillars that stood outside Solomon's palace were named "He Establishes" and "He Strengthens." What is the significance of these two pillars? How would these pillars be a reminder to God's people of their dependence on God? What pillars have you built your life on?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to examine your priorities. Ask Him to give you a heart that seeks Him.
- Take a moment to consider the beauty around you. Thank the Lord for His creativity. Ask the Lord to help you to be creative in your worship and service for Him.
- Thank the Lord that He establishes and strengthens His servants. Ask Him to give you grace to trust Him and not in your own strength. Ask Him to help you to remember that your dependence must be on Him.

7

DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE

Read 1 Kings 8:1-66

This chapter begins with King Solomon calling the elders of the tribes of Israel to gather in Jerusalem. It was his intention to move the Ark of the Covenant from its location in Jerusalem, where it had been since the time of his father, David, to the temple.

This transfer probably took place during the Feast of Tabernacles. This was a celebration commemorating how the Lord had taken His people through the wilderness and into the Promised Land. When everyone had arrived, the ark of the Lord and the furnishings that were in the old Tabernacle were brought to the temple. As prescribed by the Law of Moses, the priests and the Levites carried these furnishings and placed them in the appropriate place (verse 4). The whole ceremony took place with the sacrificing of many sheep and cattle. Verse 5 tells us that the number of sheep and cattle sacrificed that day could not be counted.

The priests brought the ark of the Lord's covenant into the inner sanctuary of the temple (the Most Holy Place) and set it between the wings of the two golden cherubim that had been placed there. Verse 8 tells us that the carrying

poles were so long that their ends could be seen from the front entrance of the Holy Place (verse 8). The fact that the poles were visible was a reminder of the presence of God represented by the ark. The ark contained the two stone tablets of the commandments placed there by Moses when God made a covenant with them in Horeb (verse 9).

These stone tablets were very significant. They were a reminder of the fact that the Lord God had called His people to obedience and that their blessing hinged on obedience. God was a God of mercy and compassion, but disobedience would quickly strip them of His blessing and favour. These stone tablets were a permanent reminder to God's people of their obligation to Him.

When the Ark of the Covenant was set in position, the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, and the Lord God revealed His presence. Verse 10 tells us that the Holy Place was filled with a great cloud. The presence of the Lord was so overwhelming that the priests could not perform their duties. God stopped their religious celebrations. All the priests could do was wait on the Lord and fall before Him in awe. This was a time that God's people would not soon forget. It was a reminder of the glory of God and His awesome holiness. It was a reminder of the responsibility of God's people to live for Him and honour Him in all they did.

In the midst of all this glory, Solomon cried out to the people. "The LORD has said that He would dwell in a dark cloud" (verse 12). In saying this, Solomon is reminding the people of the terrible awesomeness of the holy God of Israel. He had to hide His glory in a dark cloud lest it consume His people.

It was for this awesome God that Solomon had built the temple. It seemed almost ridiculous to imagine that such a holy and awesome God would be willing to dwell in a temple made with human hands. God was far bigger than this temple. This structure, though impressive by human standards, was not impressive to God. It was unworthy of His glory yet the Lord blessed the temple with His presence. This was an act of wonderful compassion and mercy on His part.

In verse 14 Solomon blessed the congregation that had come to the dedication and reminded them of how the Lord God had been faithful to His promise to his father David (verse 15). Solomon reminded his people that God had never chosen a particular city or tribe to have a temple built for his name (verse 16). The building of the temple was not a command of the Lord God--it was the desire of David (verse 17). Though this was not a particular command of God to His people, He did recognize the sincerity of David's heart and accepted his offering (verse 18).

That day, as Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord he spread out his hands before the assembly of Israel and cried out to God:

"O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way. You have kept your promise to your servant David my father; with your mouth you have promised and with your hand you have fulfilled it—as it is today" (verses 23-24).

Solomon asked God to keep another promise made to his father David. God had also promised David that his line would never lack a man to sit on the throne of Israel as

long as they obeyed Him and followed His commandments. Notice the connection between the blessing of God and the obedience of His people. God would provide a descendant for the throne of David as long as those descendants lived in obedience, otherwise His blessing would be removed from them. Solomon is in reality praying that God would keep him and his descendants faithful to the Lord God and obedient to His Word.

In verses 27-51 Solomon prayed for the Lord's blessing to fall on the temple. Realizing that God could not be confined to this building, Solomon asked that He would still reveal himself in the temple in a very special way (verse 26-28).

Solomon understood that God could not be confined to any particular place or structure, yet his prayer is centred on the temple building. Notice in verses 29 and 30 that he asked God to hear the prayers of those who prayed facing the temple. This brings up the question of what Solomon believed would happen if a person did not face the temple when he prayed. Is there an unhealthy focus on the building here? I leave this for the reader to decide. What is important for us to remember is that God is not limited to any one place in time or space. God hears the prayer of the person praying in a church as well as in their home. You don't have to dress a certain way, be in a certain place or face a certain direction. God will hear you wherever you are and will delight in answering the pray of your sincere heart.

Solomon was asking God that whenever a person turned to Him and sought His face in sincere prayer, He would hear and answer them. The temple was the place where sacrifices were made for the sins of God's people. In that temple were the symbols of the work that Christ would eventually accomplish. By praying that all who faced the

temple would have their prayers answered, Solomon is reminding his people that their only hope was in turning to the Lord God and trusting in His sacrifice for their sins. This was the basis for any relationship with God, for without the sacrifice for sins they would all perish.

In verses 31-51 Solomon cries out to the Lord about a variety of circumstances. In verses 31-32 he asked that God would exercise justice from the altar of His temple. He asked that He would judge those who had wronged their neighbour and bring justice on their head. He also asked that the innocent would be declared innocent from this altar. The temple was to be a place of justice where sin was revealed and dealt with.

In verses 33-34 Solomon asks that the Lord make the temple a place of forgiveness and restoration. Solomon prayed that God would hear the confessions of His people who had been defeated by their enemies because they were living in sin. He prayed that God would meet His people in this temple and restore them through the confession of their sin. The temple was to be a place of forgiveness. Wrongs were to be made right. Relationships were to be restored there in the place where God had chosen to make His presence known.

When there was no rain and the blessings of heaven were shut up because of sin, Solomon asked that God would forgive and bless His people if they turned toward this temple and confessed His name turning from their sin. He asked that God would teach them the right way to live so that the blessings could continue to flow (verses 35-36). The temple was to be a place of instruction and guidance. It was here that God's people were to learn to live under God and His blessings.

In verses 37-40 Solomon prayed that God would uncover the secret sins of His people from this temple. When famine, plague, disease, mildew, locust, grasshoppers or enemies came to the land, Solomon wanted God's people to come to the temple to seek God and the reason for the curse. He prayed that as God's people came to the temple and sought Him, the hidden things of the hearts of men and women would be revealed. God alone knew the hearts of men and women. He asked God to make the temple a place where those hidden sins would be exposed and the curse lifted from the land.

The temple was also to be a place of evangelism. In verses 41-43 Solomon asked that God would hear the cries of the foreigner who came to the temple to pray. Solomon knew that there would be many people of other nations who would hear about the God of Israel. He asked God to make the temple a place where even those who did not know God could call on His name and be saved. The temple was to be a place where the unbeliever could come to know the God of Israel.

The temple was also to be a place of support for those engaged in battle (verses 44-45). Solomon prayed that the warrior who prayed toward this temple would have his prayers answered and his cause upheld. The temple was a place where those doing battle with the enemy could find support and courage to continue their fight. It was to be a place of strengthening for those engaged in fighting the enemy.

Finally, Solomon prayed that the temple be a place where the wandering believer could be restored to fellowship (verses 46-51). Solomon asked God to show mercy to his people held in captivity because of their sin. He asked that their repentance would touch His heart. Solomon prayed

that God would hear the sincere confessions of those who turned from sin and would restore them to fellowship.

Solomon's prayer is very important for us today as well. Solomon prays for seven things here in this section. He prays that the Lord would make the temple:

- 1) A place where justice would be upheld
- 2) A place where believers could know forgiveness
- 3) A place where God's people could be taught His ways
- 4) A place where hidden sins would be revealed
- 5) A place where the foreigner would find God
- 6) A place where the weary warrior could be strengthened
- 7) A place where the wanderer could be restored

The church of our day ought to demonstrate these seven characteristics. It would do us good to make Solomon's prayer the prayer for our own churches today.

In verses 52-53 Solomon asked God to hear his prayer for the temple and his people. He reminded God that He had singled out Israel to be His holy people. As a people, however, they were in need of forgiveness and empowering. He pleaded with God to be merciful to them as a people. He knew that they were no better than the nations around them, but that they did have an obligation to be faithful to

God as His chosen people. They could not fulfil their obligations to God without His mercy, forgiveness and strength.

When Solomon finished praying, he stood before the people and blessed them (verses 54-55). He reminded them that God had given them rest from their enemies and had been faithful to all His promises (verse 56). It was Solomon's desire that God would bless His people in such a way that the whole earth would know that He was God. He reminded his people, however, that this would only be possible if they walked carefully in His ways (verse 61).

When Solomon finished blessing the people, he and all Israel offered sacrifices to the Lord God. In total, twenty-two thousand cattle and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep and goats were sacrificed in those days (verse 63). This was a massive sacrifice and demonstrated their commitment to follow and serve the Lord God.

As the people gathered before him, Solomon consecrated the courtyard in the front of the temple and offered burnt offerings, grain offerings and fellowship offerings. The bronze altar was too small to hold the burnt offerings and grain offerings presented that day (verse 64). The celebrations lasted for fourteen days (verse 65). On the fifteenth day Solomon sent the people away with a joyful and glad heart for all the good things God had accomplished in fulfilling His promise to David (verse 66).

For Consideration:

- The Ark of the Covenant held 2 stone tablets containing the commandments of God. How did these tablets remind God's people of their obligation to Him?
- What is the connection in this chapter between obedience and blessing?
- God interrupted the ceremonies of the priests in this chapter. What was the result of this interruption? Would your church be willing to let God interrupt their order of service?
- What are the seven requests of Solomon for the temple of his day? Does your church demonstrate all of these characteristics? Where is it weak?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give us a deeper awareness of sin and its repulsiveness to God. Ask Him to break us of our sin.
- Take a moment to pray for your church. Consider Solomon's seven requests. Ask God to give help your church to be an example of all of these requests. Ask God to help you to demonstrate these requests in your personal life.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord Jesus for His forgiveness and patience with us. Ask Him to help you demonstrate that same attitude toward those around you.

8

GOD CONFIRMS SOLOMON'S REIGN

Read 1 Kings 9:1-28

After the dedication of the temple, the Lord God appeared to Solomon a second time. The first record we have of the Lord God appearing to Solomon is recorded for us in 1 Kings 3:4-5. At that time, the Lord asked Solomon what He could give him. Solomon asked for wisdom and the Lord granted his request.

On this second appearance, the Lord told Solomon that He had heard the prayer he had made for the temple. God told him that He had set aside the temple for His presence. His eyes and His heart would always be there (verse 3). What a wonderful promise this was for Solomon. God had not only received the gift the king had made for Him but had chosen to take up residence in this temple.

In verse 4 God addressed Solomon personally. Solomon had prayed that God would keep one of his descendants on the throne forever. God reminded him, however, that this promise was conditional, according to the obedience

of his descendants and their faithfulness to God's commands. As long as Solomon was faithful to the Lord and walked in his ways, God would establish his throne as He had promised his father David. He would not fail to have a descendant on the throne of Israel as long as his descendants followed the Lord God and His commands (verses 4-5).

There was a condition applied to the promise of God. We need to understand that obedience and blessing walk hand in hand. While God is a merciful God, we must realize that we have no right to expect the blessings of God if we are not walking in His ways.

Notice in verses 6-9 that the blessings of God could be stripped from Israel by their disobedience. In these verses the Lord reminded Solomon that if he or his sons turned their backs on the Lord God and His commands and served other gods, they would be cut off from Israel and God would reject the temple. Israel's name would quickly become an object of ridicule and scorn among the nations (verses 6-7).

As for the temple, if God's people turned from Him, it would be destroyed. While the temple was a very impressive structure now, it would not take much for it to become a pile of ruins. It would testify against God's people. When people asked why the temple was in ruins, the answer would come back:

Because they have forsaken the LORD their God, who brought their fathers out of Egypt and have embraced other gods, worshiping and serving them—that is why the LORD brought all this disaster on them (verse 9).

God was willing to reveal His presence in this temple but it was not as important to Him as His relationship with His people. The temple was not what pleased God. He was not impressed with gold, silver and rituals. What He longed for more than anything was that His people walk in obedience. True religion is not a religion of externals but one of the heart. God has always been more interested in the heart than in our buildings and rituals.

For twenty years King Hiram of Tyre had worked with Solomon in the construction of the palace and temple. During that time Solomon had paid the wages of King Hiram's servants. Now that the work was completed, Solomon gave him twenty towns in Galilee (verse 11).

Hiram went to see the towns Solomon had given him. He was not impressed. "What kind of towns are these you have given me, my brother?" he asked in verse 13. It is hard to say what Hiram was expecting. He obviously knew the wealth of Solomon and the luxury in which he lived. Seeing an ordinary town compared to the luxury in which Solomon lived may have been disappointing to Hiram. He named the land Cabul meaning "good-for-nothing." Verse 14 tells us that Hiram supplied 120 talents of gold to Solomon for his construction (about 4 and a half tons). He expected to be rewarded more fully for his contributions to the work Solomon was doing.

Verses 15-23 describe for us the forced labour that Solomon used for the construction of the temple, palace, terraces, and the walls of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer.

Verse 16 explains how Gezer came to be part of Solomon's territory. Pharaoh attacked and captured the city

and set it on fire. After he had killed the Canaanite inhabitants he gave it to his daughter, Solomon's wife, as a wedding present. Solomon, in turn, rebuilt the city for his wife (verse 17). For this project he used forced labour. Forced labour was also used to rebuild Solomon's store cities as well as towns for his chariots and horses (verse 19).

The foreigners Israel had not exterminated were used by Solomon in his projects throughout the land. In effect, they became slaves (verse 20-21).

Solomon did not make slaves of any of the Israelites, however. He used them as soldiers, government officials, officers, captains and commanders of his chariots and charioteers. Solomon also had 550 Israelite officials supervising the men who did the work in his various projects (verse 23). When all the work was completed, Solomon's wife (the daughter of Pharaoh) came to live in the palace Solomon had built for her (verse 24).

Verse 25 tells us that three times a year Solomon would offer burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on the altar he built for the Lord. In doing so he fulfilled his temple obligations before the Lord.

The Lord's blessing was evident on the life of Solomon. He built ships at Ezion Geber which was on the shore of the Red Sea (verse 26). King Hiram sent his men to be sailors of Solomon's fleet. Under Solomon's direction, these men sailed to Ophit and brought back 420 talents (16 tons) of gold to Solomon.

For Consideration:

- We see in this chapter that God was willing to bless the temple and reveal His presence there. Is God's presence evident in your church? Have you ever been in a church where the presence of God was not evident? What can drive away the presence of God?
- Notice in this chapter the conditional nature of God's promises to Solomon. Can we expect God's blessing if we are not willing to live in obedience? Can we lose some of God's blessing if we are not willing to walk in obedience?
- God was quite willing to destroy the temple if His people chose not to walk in His ways. What does this tell us about God's priorities? Do you have those same priorities?
- What evidence is there of God's blessing in the life of Solomon? How has God been blessing you personally? Are money and riches the only evidence of God's blessing? How else does God bless His people?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to reveal His presence in your life and in the life of your church. Ask Him to show you anything that drives His presence away.
- Ask God to help you to walk in His priorities for your life.

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the blessings He has given you.

9

SOLOMON'S WEALTH

Read 1 Kings 10:1-29

Under the blessing of the Lord God, Solomon became a very wealthy and wise man. When the queen of Sheba heard about this she decided to test him with hard questions (verse 1). We should not be surprised that people will be watching us and our relationship with the Lord God. Nor should we be surprised if they test us to see if what we claim is really true. The queen of Sheba arrived in Jerusalem with a great caravan of camels carrying spices, gold and precious stones. She also came with many questions for Solomon to answer (verse 2). Notice particularly that the queen of Sheba came with “hard questions.” She wanted to be sure that what people were saying about Solomon was really true.

We can be sure that in our relationship with the Lord we, too, will have to face many hard questions. Satan will test us. People around us will test us. The truth of what we believe can be found in how we respond to this testing. Verse 3 tells us that Solomon answered all her questions. There was no question too difficult for him to answer.

The queen was impressed by what she saw. Verses 4-5 tell us that she was overwhelmed by the riches of Solomon's kingdom. His riches were evident everywhere from the food on his table and the robes of his servants to the burnt offerings in the temple. She was so overwhelmed by all this wisdom and wealth that she told Solomon that when she had heard the report of his wisdom and wealth in her country she did not believe it. Now that she had seen it with her own eyes she still had a hard time believing it. In fact, his wealth and wisdom had surpassed the report she had heard (verse 7).

The queen told Solomon that he and his servants were very privileged and happy to be under such blessing from their God. She praised the Lord God of Israel for the way he had taken such delight in Solomon and his kingdom. "Because of the LORD's eternal love for Israel, he has made you king, to maintain justice and righteousness," she told him in verse 9.

The queen of Sheba saw evidence of the blessing of God on the life of His people and was overwhelmed and moved to praise. Her life would not likely be the same after seeing the blessing of God on the nation of Israel. Does the world look on in awe at the work of God in our midst? Are people moved to praise God when they see the things He is doing in your life?

The queen of Sheba gave Solomon 120 talents of gold (four and a half tons), large quantities of spices and precious stones (verse 10). Verse 10 tells us that there were never so many spices brought to Solomon at one time. Obviously, she, too, was very wealthy. In return Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she desired and asked for. He also gave her gifts from his royal treasury. After these events the queen returned to her own land (verse 13).

In the remainder of the chapter the author describes for us the great riches of Solomon. In verse 11 he tells us that King Hiram's ships continued to bring gold to Israel from the region of Ophir. These ships also brought great cargoes of almug wood which Solomon used to make supports for the temple and his royal palace. This wood was also used to make musical instruments. Since the days of Solomon that amount of almug wood was never again imported into Israel. Hiram's ships also brought great quantities of precious stones into Israel.

Verse 14 tells us that the amount of gold Solomon received yearly was 666 talents (about 25 tons). This amount did not include revenue from merchants, traders and Arabian kings and governors in the land (verse 15), possibly in some form of taxation.

From the gold that came into his country each year, Solomon made two hundred large shields. Six hundred bekas of gold (7.5 pounds or 3.5 kilograms) went into each of these shields (verse 16). He also made three hundred small shields of hammered gold with less than half the weight of gold in them. These shields were stored in the Palace of the Forest in Lebanon (verse 17).

Solomon had a great throne made and inlaid it with ivory. It was overlaid with fine gold (verse 18). The throne had six steps leading up to it. It had a rounded back with arm-rests. A carved lion stood beside each of the arm rests and on each side of the six steps leading up to the throne (verses 19-20). It was an impressive throne, unlike anything in any other nation (verse 20).

The goblets in Solomon's household were made of gold. Nothing was made from silver because silver was not considered to be of much value in Solomon's day (verse 21).

Besides the ships of Hiram, Solomon had another fleet of trading ships at sea. These ships would return once every three years carrying gold, silver, ivory, apes and baboons (verse 22).

There was no other king as rich as Solomon in all the earth (verse 23). He surpassed all kings and queens in wealth and wisdom. His fame was such that the entire world sought to meet him and hear the wisdom that God had put on his heart. Notice that that Lord God is attributed as being the source of Solomon's wisdom. When these people came to Solomon to hear his wisdom they brought articles of silver, gold, robes, weapons, spices, horses and mules (verse 25).

Over the years Solomon accumulated chariots and horses. We see from verse 26 that he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses. These chariots and horses were kept in special "chariot cities" and also in the city of Jerusalem.

Silver was as common in Jerusalem as stones and cedar was as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees (verse 27). Solomon imported horses from Egypt and Kue (verse 28). In those days a chariot could be imported from Egypt at a cost of six hundred shekels of silver (about 15 pounds or 7 kilograms). A horse could be imported for one hundred and fifty shekels of silver (three and three quarter pounds or 1.7 kilograms). Israel also exported horses to the Hittites and Arameans.

What we need to see in this section of Scripture is that the blessing of God was overwhelmingly on Solomon. He was so blessed by God that he became the envy of the nations. People from all around the world came to Solomon to hear his wisdom and see his wealth. In all this the Lord God

received the glory, for it was clear to all that this came from His hand. Nations praised God and held Him in high regard because they saw His dealings with Solomon.

For Consideration:

- What evidence do we see here of the blessing of God in the life of Solomon? What evidence is there of God's blessing in your life?
- The nations saw what God was doing in Solomon's life and came from all over to see for themselves. Do people see what God is doing in your life? Are they attracted to what He is doing in you?
- The queen of Sheba came to test the wisdom of Solomon. She wanted to test him to see if what she had heard was true. How is our faith tested today? Are people moved to praise the Lord for the things He is doing in your life?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the blessings He has given you?
- Ask the Lord reveal His presence through you to those around you. Ask God to make your life to be an example of His grace and power.
- Ask God to give you grace to stand firm when your faith is tested.

SOLOMON'S DEATH

Read 1 Kings 11:1-43

God had promised that as long as His people lived according to His commands, He would always give them a man on the throne of David to reign over Israel. While Solomon started out well, he did not end his reign so well. Here in chapter 11 we see how Solomon, in his old age, was tempted to wander from the Lord God.

Solomon's path away from God began with his love for foreign women. We have already seen that Solomon had formed an agreement with Egypt by marrying the daughter of Pharaoh. Solomon was not content with her alone. He married women from various nations. Verse 1 tells us of women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and the nation of the Hittites.

God instructed His people not to intermarry with these nations lest they turn their hearts from Him (verse 2). Verse 2 tells us that Solomon "held fast to them in love." What we need to see here is that Solomon truly loved these women. How many times are we tempted to turn from the path of truth in order to follow love? Love is not the only reason to marry. Beyond love is the truth of God and His purpose. All too many believers have fallen into this trap.

They fall in love with an unbeliever and suppose that the relationship must be from God because it is based on love. This is not necessarily the case. We have a clear example here of Solomon who "held fast in love" for unbelieving women. This was clearly against the will and purpose of His heavenly Father.

Solomon had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines (verse 3). These women led Solomon into error. As he grew older, these wives turned his heart from the Lord God of Israel (verse 4).

In his old age, Solomon followed the goddess Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians and Molech, the god of the Ammonites (verse 5). In doing this, he turned his back on the true God of Israel (verse 6). God warned His people against the worship of Molech and its evil practice of child sacrifice (see Leviticus 18:21). In order to please his wives, Solomon built a high place for the worship of Chemosh the god of Moab. He also built a place for Moab the god of the Ammonites (verse 7). He permitted his wives to worship their foreign gods in Israel (verse 8). In doing so, he corrupted the land God had set apart for His glory.

It is hard to imagine that Solomon would fall so far from the truth of the Lord God. The reality of the matter, however, is that the company we keep will have a powerful influence on us. Solomon chose to keep company with pagan wives. Their influence was clearly seen in his life.

God saw what Solomon was doing and became angry with him (verse 9). Solomon had chosen to turn his back on the God who had revealed Himself to him on two different occasions. While God had blessed him abundantly, Solomon chose to walk away from Him. Solomon had a free will. God would not strip that free will from him. God will not

force us to listen to Him and obey Him, nor will he always keep us from sinning. We must discipline ourselves to live in obedience to the will and purpose of God. Solomon's love for foreign women was the entrance point for disobedience. How important it is for us to recognize our weaknesses and seek God's protection.

God punished Solomon for his disobedience. In verse 11 He told him that he would tear the kingdom from him (verse 11). This, however, would not happen during his lifetime. Instead, God would tear the kingdom away from his son (verse 12). Solomon's father had handed him a great heritage and kingdom, but Solomon would not be able to pass on such a heritage to his son. His rebellion against God would be felt for generations to come. God told Solomon that He would give him one tribe out of the twelve to carry on his name and the name of his father David (verse 13). The rest of the tribes would be given to another person. His great kingdom would become very small and insignificant. It was not for Solomon's sake that God would give him this tribe; it was for the sake of his father David. Solomon would die knowing that his disobedience would bring a great decline in his nation.

From verse 14 to the end of the chapter we see how God brought enemies against Solomon in his old age. There are three enemies mentioned in this chapter. Prior to this Solomon had no enemies. His sin and rebellion against God changed this.

In verses 14-22 we read about the first enemy God raised up against Solomon. Hadad was from Edom (verse 14). Verse 15 reminds us that Joab, David's military commander had struck down all the men of Edom. In 2 Samuel 8:13 we have a record of David slaughtering eighteen thousand Edomites. Verse 16 tells us that David's military

commander had stayed in Edom for six months slaughtering all the men.

Hadad was only a boy when this terrible six month slaughter was taking place in his land. He escaped to Egypt with some Edomite officials who had served his father (verse 17). The Pharaoh of Egypt gave him a house and land and provided him with food (verse 18). Eventually, Pharaoh would become so pleased with Hadad that he would give him his wife's sister Queen Tahpenes to be his wife (verse 19). They had a son by the name of Genubath, who was brought up in the royal palace and lived with Pharaoh's own children (verse 20).

Despite his prosperity in Egypt, Hadad never forgot his past. When he heard that David and his military commander Joab had died, he asked Pharaoh for permission to return to his own country (verse 21-22). As we have seen from this passage, Hadad would become a thorn in Solomon's side. He was now a man of tremendous influence and power.

The second enemy God raised up against Solomon was a man by the name of Rezon (verse 23). Rezon had fled from his master Hadadezer king of Zobah. Like Hadad, Rezon was angry with what had happened to his people under David's reign. In 2 Samuel 8:3-4 we read how David captured the region of Zobah. During that battle he took one thousand chariots, seven thousand charioteers and twenty thousand soldiers. David hamstringed all but one hundred horses.

Rezon gathered men around him and settled in the region of Damascus (verse 24). Verse 25 tells us that Rezon "added to the trouble caused by Hadad." He ruled in Aram and was very hostile toward Israel (verse 25).

The third enemy of Solomon was a man by the name of Jeroboam. This trouble came from within the nation. Jeroboam was one of Solomon's officials (verse 26).

Solomon first noticed Jeroboam when he was a young man. At that time, he was building a supporting wall for his terraces (verse 27). Jeroboam had a good reputation in the community. When Solomon saw how well the man did his work, he decided to put him in charge of the forced labour of the house of Joseph (verse 28).

One day when Jeroboam was leaving the city of Jerusalem, he met the prophet Ahijah. Ahijah was wearing a new cloak. When the two met, they were alone in the country (verse 29). Ahijah took his new cloak and tore it into twelve pieces. He told Jeroboam to take ten pieces for himself and prophesied that the day was coming when God would tear ten of the tribes of Israel away from Solomon and give them to him (verse 31). Ahijah told Jeroboam that for the sake of David, God was going to leave one tribe for his family to rule (verse 32).

Ahijah made it quite clear that the reason God was going to take away the kingdom from Solomon was because he had forsaken Him and turned to Ashtoreth, Chemosh and Molech, the gods of the nations (verse 33). God would take away his kingdom, for Solomon had not proved worthy of his role as king over His people.

Ahijah told Jeroboam that he would become king over the ten tribes (verse 37). The prophet reminded him, however, that God would bless him only if he kept His commands and statutes. This is where Solomon had fallen. He had failed to be obedient. The same warning was given to Jeroboam. If he fell into Solomon's error, he would lose his kingdom. If, on the other hand, he lived according to the

commandments of the Lord and walked in His way, God would bless him and build through him a dynasty as enduring as the one he had promised David. Jeroboam's success depended on his obedience to God and His word.

Likely Solomon heard about this promise to Jeroboam. Verse 40 tells us that Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but he was successful in fleeing to Egypt where he would stay until the death of Solomon (verse 40).

Notice in verse 39 that God promised to humble David's descendants because of their rebellion. The day was coming when God would raise up a great king from this family. The Lord Jesus would be a king from the line of David who would reign forever.

Further details of the life of Solomon were recorded in the annals of Solomon. This was a written document that recorded the events of his life (verse 41). In total Solomon reigned for forty years. When he died he was buried with his ancestors in the city of David. His son, Rehoboam succeed him as king over the nation of Israel (verse 43).

For Consideration:

- What is the connection between the success of Solomon's reign and his obedience to the Lord God? What change would take place in our land if we all lived in obedience to the command and purpose of God?

- What was Solomon's weakness? What is your weakness? How can you protect yourself so that you do not fall into sin in this area of weakness?
- How does the company we keep impact us in our spiritual walk? Have you ever been influenced by the people around you to turn from the Lord's ways?
- Solomon chose to follow "love" and not the path of obedience. Is it possible for our love for something or someone not to be from the Lord?
- What do we learn about free will in this passage? Did God keep Solomon from sinning? What is our responsibility in our walk with God?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to search your heart and show you if there is any way you have not been walking with Him in obedience.
- Ask God to show you your personal weakness. Take a moment to pray that God would protect you in that area of personal weakness.
- Ask God to give you godly friends who can help you walk more fully with the Lord. Ask God to protect you from the evil influence of unbelieving friends.
- Thank the Lord that He gives us a free will. Ask Him to help you to use that free will to seek Him and His purpose.

11

A NATION DIVIDED

Read 1 Kings 12:1-33

In the last chapter we saw how God had promised to Jeroboam that he would become king of Israel. Chapter 12 gives us the details of how that happened.

After the death of Solomon, his son Rehoboam became king in his place. According to verse 1, Rehoboam was crowned king in Shechem.

When Jeroboam heard that Rehoboam had been crowned king, he returned from Egypt to Israel (verse 2). He had fled to Egypt to escape from Solomon, who wanted to kill him (1 Kings 11:40). When Jeroboam arrived in Israel, he went to see Rehoboam with a very important request.

"Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labour and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you" (verse 4)

He offered his allegiance to Rehoboam on the condition that he would ease the burden of forced labour that Solomon had imposed on his subjects. Rehoboam asked for

three days to reflect on this. He told Jeroboam and his followers to come back in three days for his answer (verse 5).

During those three days, King Rehoboam consulted the elders of the land. "How would you advise me to answer these people?" he asked (verse 6). The elders told Rehoboam that if he would serve the people well and reduce their burden, they would be his faithful servants forever (verse 7). By submitting to this request he would gain many faithful supporters.

This was not what Rehoboam wanted to hear. In verse 8, we are told that he rejected their advice and chose to consult the young men he had grown up with. Rehoboam was really not looking for advice. His mind was already made up. He was looking for someone to confirm his position.

Rehoboam's friends gave him the answer he wanted. When he asked them for their advice, they told him to reply:

"My little finger is thicker than my father's waist. My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions" (verse 11).

Three days later, Jeroboam and the people returned to hear Rehoboam's response. He told them that he would be even more severe than his father, Solomon. In saying this, Rehoboam asserted his authority and rejected the advice of Jeroboam and the elders. He also fulfilled the words of Ahijah the prophet who prophesied that the kingdom would be taken from Solomon and given to Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:29-31).

Rehoboam expected that by asserting his authority, the people would fall into line and submit to him out of fear. The response of the people was very different. That day, the people rebelled against his authority saying:

"What share do we have in David, what part in Jesse's son? To your tents, O Israel! Look after your own house, O David!" (verse 16)

In saying this, the tribes of Israel were telling Rehoboam that they wanted nothing to do with him and his kingdom. They rejected Judah and the line of David. They told the tribe of Judah to look after their own affairs. They were going to choose their own king and move in another direction. Rehoboam would rule over Judah, but the rest of the tribes of Israel had rejected him as king (verse 17).

Rehoboam did not receive this rejection of his authority well. In verse 18 he sent Adoniram who was in charge of forced labour to deal with the matter, but men of Israel stoned him to death. By killing Adoniram, the tribes of Israel were clearly stating that they would have nothing to do with Rehoboam and his leadership. Notice also in verse 18 that an attempt was made on Rehoboam's life, but he managed to get into his chariot and escaped to Jerusalem.

The promise of God to Jeroboam was fulfilled. The tribes of Israel called an assembly and made Jeroboam their king. Only the tribe of Judah remained faithful to the line of David.

While the division was quite clear, Rehoboam still had problems accepting that these tribes had been taken from him. In verse 21 he decided to gather his army together to make war with Israel to regain his kingdom. One hundred

and eighty thousand fighting men were called in to fight their brothers.

As the men were preparing for battle, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Shemaiah. God told Shemaiah that they were not to go to war with their brothers because this division was of God's doing (verse 24). When Rehoboam heard this he decided to withdraw his men. He could not hope to succeed if God was not with him.

In Israel to the north, Jeroboam also had his problems and fears. Knowing that there was always danger of attack from Judah, he had the city of Shechem fortified. He also built up the city of Peniel (verse 25). These two cities were strategic locations for the defence of the newly formed nation of Israel under his leadership.

While attack from the outside was always a possibility, Jeroboam also needed to protect himself from the inside. His concern was that his people would turn back to the kingdom of Rehoboam. This would be a particular temptation for those who were following the ways of the Lord God of Israel. He knew that the people would want to go up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices in the temple, and he feared that their faith in the Lord God and the services at the temple of Jerusalem might cause them to rethink their allegiance to him. Jeroboam believed that if he was going to keep the allegiance of his people he needed to separate them from their connection to the temple in Judah.

After seeking the advice of his counsellors, Jeroboam made two golden calves. He told the people that it was too much for them to go to Jerusalem to worship God, so he made them their own gods (verse 28). He told them that these calves were the gods who had brought them out of Egypt. Remember that when the people of God left Egypt

they made a golden calf and worshiped it in the wilderness (see Exodus 32:1-6). Jeroboam was familiar with this incident and used it to his advantage. The golden calf was not unfamiliar to the people. It could be traced back in their history. The people would be more likely to accept these calves seeing that their ancestors had worshiped them.

Jeroboam had one golden calf set up in Bethel and the other in Dan. Bethel was located in the south about twelve miles from Jerusalem. Dan was located in the north. Jeroboam's idea was to facilitate the worship of these golden calves so Israel would not be tempted to go to Jerusalem for worship. Jeroboam also built shrines in the high places of the land (verse 31). He appointed his own priests and setup festivals that coincided with the festivals in Judah so the people would not be tempted to follow the commandment of the Lord (verse 32). He did all he could to turn the people away from the God of Israel and Judah. He offered them a totally new religion. Verse 30 tells us that the people fell into Jeroboam's trap and quickly adopted this new faith, turning their hearts from the Lord God to a man-made religion.

When the prophet Ahijah prophesied to Jeroboam that he was going to become king of the ten tribes of Israel, he also told him that God would bless his kingdom only if he obeyed His commandments (1 Kings 11:38). Jeroboam took matters in his own hands and turned his people away from God.

There is a real contrast here between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Rehoboam refused to listen to the counsel of his elders and got himself into real problems. His kingdom was stripped from him as a result. He wanted to send his army to regain control of the ten tribes he had lost. When he heard the word of the prophet Shemiah saying that he was

not to go to war with Israel, he obeyed and returned home. While he was humbled, he still was open to listen to the Lord. Jeroboam, on the other hand, ignored the counsel of Ahijah the prophet who told him that his kingdom could only be established by obedience to the Lord. Rehoboam accepted the word of the Lord. Jeroboam rejected that word and took matters into his own hands. While there was hope for Judah in her humiliation, Israel was already turning her back on God and all hope. There are times when God will have to discipline us. The challenge for us here is to accept this discipline and let God accomplish His purposes through it in us.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever sought the counsel of others with your mind already made up? Why is this wrong? What should be our attitude when we seek the counsel of others?
- Rehoboam had a hard time accepting the purpose of God for his kingdom? Are there things that you have a hard time accepting?
- What does Rehoboam's willingness to accept the word of the Lord and not fight his brothers tell us about his character? Are you willing to accept God's purpose even when it is not what you would want for your life?
- How does Jeroboam take matters into his own hands? What does this tell us about his confidence in the Lord God?

- Jeroboam is able to promote the worship of the golden calves. Why do you suppose the people of God were tempted to accept these calves? Have you ever been tempted to compromise in your faith?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you a heart that is open to whatever He asks from you.
- Ask God to give you grace to accept His purpose for your life. Do you have things in your life right now that you find difficult to accept? Ask Him to help you to surrender to His purpose.
- Ask God to keep you from taking matters into your own hands instead of trusting Him and His purposes.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for times you have been tempted to compromise. Ask Him to search your heart to show you any way that you may have compromised in your faith.

12

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE MAN OF GOD

Read 1 Kings 13:1-34

Jeroboam, king of Israel, had done much damage to the minds and hearts of the people of Israel. He turned them away from God, setting up two golden calves in the land for them to worship. In chapter 13 that Lord sends one of His servants to confront Jeroboam about his sin.

We are not told the name of the man God sent to confront Jeroboam. What is clear, however, is that the Lord had a very particular word for the king. As Jeroboam was standing by the altar making an offering, the man of God cried out with the word from the Lord. It should be understood that the altar before which Jeroboam stood was not an altar dedicated to the Lord God but likely to the golden calves he had set up.

Notice that the man of God cried out against the altar.

"O altar, altar! This is what the LORD says: 'A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests of the high

places who now make offerings here, and human bones will be burned on you" (verse 2).

This prophecy would be fulfilled under the reign of Josiah many years later. The account of how this took place can be seen in 2 Kings 23:15-20. The Lord God was angry with Jeroboam and would defile the altar he had set up by slaughtering his priests on it.

While Jeroboam would not be alive to see the fulfilment of this prophetic word, the Lord wanted him to know that it would come to pass just as the man of God had predicted. In verse 3, the Lord gave Jeroboam a sign. He told him that the altar would split and the ashes on it would be poured out (verse 3).

Jeroboam did not appreciate the words of the man of God. He had set up this altar to protect his reign and keep the people faithful to him. He saw the prophet as an enemy. Stretching out his hand, he commanded his men to seize him. The hand he stretched out, however, shrivelled up so that he could not pull it back (verse 4). As he stood before the altar, just as the Lord had said, it split apart and the ashes were poured out (verse 5). These were clear signs from God that the word of the prophet was true. Jeroboam was fighting against God. He could not possibly win this battle.

In verse 6 Jeroboam pleaded with the man of God to pray for him so that his hand would be restored. When he prayed, the king's hand was restored. Seeing these signs, Jeroboam's attitude changed somewhat. In verse 7 he invited the prophet to eat with him. He also promised to give him a gift.

The man of God refused to eat with Jeroboam or receive a gift from him. He told Jeroboam that even if he were to offer him half his possessions, he would not go with him nor would he eat bread or drink water with him (verse 8). When the prophet was sent to Jeroboam, the Lord gave him two clear commands. The first was that he was not to eat and drink with him. The second was that he was not to return home the way he came (verse 9). In obedience to the Lord, the man of God refused Jeroboam's invitation and returned home by another route (verse 10).

While it is not clearly stated in this passage why the man of God was not to eat with Jeroboam, it is clear that the prophet was not to have fellowship with Jeroboam, who was an ungodly king. God demanded separation from the ungodly. By refusing to eat with Jeroboam, the man of God was showing God's discontent with him.

There was an old prophet living in Bethel (verse 11). His sons had seen what had taken place between the man of God and Jeroboam. They told their father what had happened and what the man of God had told the king.

When the old prophet heard what had happened, he immediately asked what road the man of God had taken when he left Jeroboam. Discovering the route he took, the old prophet told his sons to saddle his donkey for him. When the donkey was saddled, he mounted it and pursued the man of God. When he found him, he was sitting under an oak tree (verse 14).

The old prophet invited the man of God to his home to eat with him (verse 15). The man of God refused to return because the Lord had clearly told him that he was not to eat or drink in that region (verses 16-17).

Then the old prophet told the man of God that he was also a prophet. He said that an angel had appeared to him, telling him that he was to bring the man of God back to his house and offer him bread and water. The old prophet was lying when he said these things (verse 18). Believing the old prophet, the man of God returned to his house and ate and drank with him.

As they were sitting at the table, the word of the Lord came to the old prophet for the man of God.

This is what the LORD says: 'You have defied the word of the LORD and have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you. You came back and ate bread and drank water in the place where he told you not to eat or drink. Therefore your body will not be buried in the tomb of your fathers' (verses 21-22).

When he had finished eating and drinking, the man of God left the old prophet's house. The old prophet saddled his donkey for him (verse 23). The act of saddling his donkey may have been an act of compassion for the man of God. He was giving him his donkey. It may have been an attempt to protect him on the way. It was also likely in recognition of the terrible evil he had done in deceiving the man of God.

As the man of God travelled home, a lion met him on the way and killed him. His body was thrown down on the road (verse 24). What is particularly interesting is that both the lion and the donkey remained with the body. This did not appear to be a natural occurrence. One would have thought that the lion would have devoured the body and left. Instead the lion seemed to be guarding the body of the man of God. One would also wonder why the donkey did

not flee out of fear of the lion. Again this was a sign from the Lord.

People passing by saw this strange occurrence and sent word to the old prophet (verse 25). When he heard the report, the old prophet recognized that it was the man of God. The death of the man of God was a confirmation of the word spoken by the old prophet.

In response to the report that had been brought to him, the old prophet asked his sons to saddle his donkey for him. He then went out in search of the body of the man of God. Finding the body thrown down on the road with the donkey and the lion beside it, the old prophet picked up the body, laid it on the donkey and brought it back to his city where he mourned for him and buried him in his own tomb (verse 29-30).

When he had buried the man of God, the old prophet told his sons that when he died, they were to bury him where this man had been buried (verse 31). He confirmed to them that the word of this man of God against the altar in Bethel and the shrines of Israel was true (verse 32).

Even after all these events and confirmations, Jeroboam did not change his evil ways. Instead, he continued to appoint priest for his high places (verse 33). This sin would eventually lead to the downfall and destruction of the nation of Israel (verse 34).

There are different lessons for us in this chapter. First, we need to see the connection between obedience to God and blessing. Jeroboam was leading his people away from God and His blessing because of his sin. God's judgment was upon him, and his efforts to lead the people away would only bring devastation.

Second, notice the importance of absolute faithfulness to the direction the Lord has given us. God had spoken to the man of God, but he believed the lie of the old prophet and suffered the consequences. All leading must be clearly tested. If God is leading us, He will confirm that to us personally. We ought not to take what others say as from the Lord until the Lord clearly confirms that to our own heart.

Notice finally, that the Lord is able to take our failures and use them to accomplish His purposes. The man of God failed by disobeying the Lord God when he returned to the city and ate with the old prophet. While he was eventually killed for his disobedience, God would use the circumstances of his death to confirm to all present that he spoke the truth. It also proved to all that the Lord was against them. This man of God was killed for associating with them. If God would do this to His chosen servant who had eaten in their city, what would He do to those who had turned their back on Him by worshiping the golden calf? This was a powerful statement to the whole nation and warned them of the danger of the path on which they were heading.

For Consideration:

- What is the response of Jeroboam to the word of God? What evidence is there of the hardness of his heart?
- Jeroboam was fighting against the will and purpose of a sovereign God. Have you ever found yourself fighting against the purpose of God? What is the challenge of this passage to you personally?

- The man of God in this passage was called to absolute obedience? Have you ever been tempted to compromise your faith and believe a lie? Explain.
- Why is it important for us to confirm the leading of the Lord as it comes through other people? Have you ever been misled by someone who felt they knew the will and purpose of God for your life?
- How does God use the death of the man of God to accomplish His purpose? Can God use even your failures to accomplish good? Does this mean that we will not suffer the consequences of our disobedience and unfaithfulness?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to soften your heart so that it is sensitive to His leading. Ask Him to forgive you for times you have ignored His gentle prompting.
- Ask God to help you to live in obedience to His will for your life and not to be distracted from it.
- Thank the Lord that He is a God of justice who will never ignore sin and rebellion. Thank Him that despite His justice, He is also a God of compassion and mercy.

13

JEROBOAM AND REHOBAM DIE

Read 1 Kings 14:1-31

God's people were now divided into two nations. Jeroboam was king of Israel in the north. Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, was king of Judah in the south. Chapter 14 tells the story of the death of both of these kings.

Jeroboam

As we begin chapter 14 we meet Jeroboam's son Abijah. From verse 1 we understand that Abijah became seriously ill. Jeroboam wasn't sure what to do about his son so he asked his wife to consult the prophet Ahijah in Shiloh. This was the prophet who had told him that he would be king in Israel (see 1 Kings 11:29-31). It is interesting to note that while Jeroboam had set up his own religion in Israel, he did not place any true confidence in the priests of this new religion. When he wanted to know what to do about his son, he sought the prophet of the Lord God of Judah.

Notice in verse 2 that Jeroboam wanted to consult Ahijah in secret. The passage does not give us a reason for this

but we can assume that this was because he did not want his people to see that he was consulting the prophets of the Lord in Judah. He had done all he could to keep the people of Israel from returning to Judah and to the faith of their fathers. Jeroboam asked his wife to disguise herself and go to Ahijah to inquire about their son. He told her to take ten loaves of bread and a jar of honey with her as payment (verse 3).

While Ahijah could not see because of his old age, the Lord told him that Jeroboam's wife was coming to ask him about her son. He also told Ahijah that she would pretend to be someone else. It is foolish to try to hide anything from the Lord. He sees and knows all things. When Ahijah heard the sound of Jeroboam's wife at the door he said:

Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why this pretence? I have been sent to you with bad news (verse 6).

Ahijah told Jeroboam's wife that God had taken the kingdom from David and raised Jeroboam up to be a leader over His people, but he had not been faithful to the Lord, nor had he kept His commandments. He had not followed the Lord with all his heart (verse 8). Ahijah told Jeroboam's wife that her husband had done more evil than all who had lived before him. He made gods in the land and provoked the Lord God to anger (verse 9).

Because he had done such evil, the Lord God was going to bring disaster on his household. Every last male in Jeroboam's house would be cut off from Israel, whether they were slaves or free men. God would burn up the house of Jeroboam like a farmer would burn dung. Nothing would remain of his household (verse 10). Dogs would eat those belonging to Jeroboam who died in the city. The birds of the air would feed on those who died in the country. There

would be no honour in the death of any of his descendants, nor would they have a proper burial. These would have been very hard words for Jeroboam's wife to take home to her husband.

Ahijah told Jeroboam's wife that as soon as she set foot in her city, her boy would die (verse 12). Israel would mourn the death of Abijah. He would be the only one from Jeroboam's household to be buried because he was the only one in whom the Lord found any good (verse 13).

While the Lord did find good in Abijah, it was not his intention that he become the next king. Though he was the best of all the household of Jeroboam, his life would be taken along with the others. The whole family of Jeroboam would be cut off. By allowing Abijah to die a peaceful death, God spared him from the terror of the days to come. We do not always understand the purposes of the Lord but we can be sure that they are right and just.

The day was coming when the Lord would strike Israel, throwing the nation into disarray. There would be no stability because they had turned from the Lord God, seeking their security in other gods (verse 15).

In verse 16 Ahijah the prophet told Jeroboam's wife that He would give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam (verse 16). This is not to say that God would reject the nation forever. For a time, however, God would remove His blessing and His presence because of their sin.

When Jeroboam's wife returned home, just as Ahijah had said, as soon as she stepped into her house the young boy died. He was buried and all Israel mourned for him (verse 17-18).

Altogether Jeroboam reigned for twenty-two years in Israel. He died and was buried with his fathers. Verse 19 tells us that the events of Jeroboam's reign and the wars he fought were recorded in the annals of the kings of Israel. These were the official records of the reigns of the kings of that day.

Rehoboam

From verse 21 to the end of the chapter the author shifts his attention to King Rehoboam of Judah. He was forty-one years old when he became king. He reigned for seventeen years in the city of Jerusalem (verse 21).

His reign was also characterized by evil. During his reign, Judah turned her back on the Lord God, stirring up His jealous anger (verse 22). Like the nation of Israel, Judah also set up pagan shrines on the high places of the land. They also set up sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree (verse 23). Asherah was a pagan goddess of fertility whose symbol was represented by a pole planted in the ground. Notice in verse 24 that Judah had also set up male shrine prostitutes in the land. Judah engaged in religious rituals that were as evil as those practiced by the nations that had been driven out of the land before them (verse 24).

These practices stripped the land of its blessings. In the fifth year of King Rehoboam's reign, Shishak the king of Egypt attacked Jerusalem (verse 25). He carried off the treasures of the temple of the Lord, taking everything including the gold shields that Solomon had made (verse 26). This was in fulfillment of the word God had spoken to Solomon in 1 Kings 9:6-8 when he told Solomon that if His people turned their back on him then He would reject the temple.

Rehoboam was forced to make bronze shields to replace the gold ones taken from the temple (verse 27). Whenever the king went to the temple the guards would wear the bronze shields and then return them to the guardroom (verse 28). From this we understand that the shields were for ceremonial use only.

What is quite clear from this is that God's blessing was also being stripped from the people of Judah because of their sin. Sin had driven the presence of God from both the nation of Israel in the north and also from the nation of Judah to the south.

The events of Rehoboam's reign were recorded in the annals of the kings of Judah. We do not have the full details recorded for us here. The focus of this record is to show us the spiritual climate in the nation of Judah at that time. Throughout the life of Rehoboam there was constant warfare between Israel and Judah. Rehoboam died and was buried with his fathers in the city of Jerusalem. Rehoboam's son, Abijah would become king in his place.

From this chapter we catch a glimpse of the spiritual climate in Israel and Judah at this time. Both nations had turned their backs on the Lord God and were suffering the consequences of their rebellion. The blessing of God was being stripped from the land. As long as God's people were not looking to Him and walking in obedience, there would be no hope for them.

For Consideration:

- In his time of need Jeroboam turned to a true prophet of God. What does this tell us about him? Do you know people who have chosen not to follow

the Lord but in their time of need come running back to him?

- Jeroboam's wife tried to hide from the prophet Ahijah. Why is it futile to try to hide from the Lord? Does God see what we are doing and know our thoughts? How should this affect how we live?
- God's judged the nations of Israel and Judah because of their sin. Their rebellion drove His presence from their nation. Is the presence of God evident in your land? What keeps Him from revealing His presence in your nation?
- How was the death of Jeroboam's son Abijah a blessing? Can you trust God with things you cannot understand?
- Both the nations of Israel and Judah were tempted to follow the world and its ways. Do you see evidence of this temptation in the church today? Explain.

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that in Him alone there is lasting blessing and hope.
- Ask the Lord to help you to live each day realizing that He sees and knows the attitude of your heart.
- Thank the Lord for His patience with us. Thank Him that He does judge sin and evil.
- Ask the Lord to stir up a spirit of repentance in your church and in your land.

- Ask God to give you grace to resist the temptations of the world to follow Him fully.

14

REIGNS OF ABIJAH AND ASA OF JUDAH AND NADAB AND BAASHA OF ISRAEL

Read 1 Kings 15:1-34

Probably one of the most confusing things about the history of the kings of Israel and Judah as recorded in the Old Testament is that some of the kings have the same name. We have already seen an example of this in the last chapter. According to 1 Kings 14, King Jeroboam of Israel had a son by the name of Abijah, who died. 1 Kings 14:31 tells us that King Rehoboam's son was also named Abijah. He would become the next king of Judah.

King Abijah of Judah

Rehoboam's son Abijah became king in Judah. Remember that Judah's kings were descendants of David. Abijah became king of Judah while Jeroboam was still reigning as king in Israel (verse 1). Abijah would only reign as king in Judah for three years (verse 2).

Although Abijah was a descendant of David and Solomon, he did not follow the God of his ancestors. Like his father, Rehoboam, he turned his back on the Lord (verse 3). Despite his rebellion, the Lord provided him with a son to succeed him. This son would honour the Lord God and restore a measure of strength and dignity to Jerusalem. God did not do this because Abijah deserved this mercy but because of His love for David (verse 4) and His desire to use the nation to accomplish His purposes for the entire world.

While the favour of God was on the nation of Judah, this did not mean that life there was easy or trouble free. Throughout the reign of Abijah there was constant war with Israel (verse 7). The record of his reign is recorded in the annals of the kings of Judah. Abijah died and was buried with his ancestors in the City of David.

King Asa of Judah

When Abijah of Judah died, his son Asa reigned in his place. By this time Jeroboam had been king in the rival nation of Israel for twenty years (verse 9). Asa would reign as king in Judah for a period of forty-one years (verse 10).

Verse 11 describes Asa as a good king who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord as David had done. He was the first king since David and Solomon who turned his heart to the Lord.

As king, Asa had much cleaning up to do in the land. During the reigns of Solomon, Rehoboam and Abijah, the nation of Judah had been walking in rebellion against God. Notice in verse 12 that Asa expelled the male shrine prostitutes from the land and got rid of the idols his father Ahijah had made. He even punished his grandmother Maacah by stripping her of her position as queen mother because she

had set up a pagan Asherah pole in the land. This shows us the dedication of Asa to cleaning up the nation. He cut down the pole his grandmother had made and burned it in the valley of Kidron (verse 13). While he did not completely cleanse the land of its evil, Asa was committed to the Lord God all his life (verse 14).

Asa brought silver and gold articles that had been dedicated to the Lord to the temple of God (verse 15). We are not told anything about these articles. Some commentators believe that these were articles taken as loot in some of his father's military campaigns. For some reason, while they had been dedicated to the Lord they were not being used in His service. Asa saw that what had been given to the Lord was brought to the temple for His use.

During Asa's reign there was war between Judah and Israel (verse 16). Baasha, king of Israel, invaded the city of Ramah and closed the border to prevent anyone from leaving or entering Judah. This caused serious problems for Asa and Judah. To deal with the problem, Asa took the silver and gold he had brought to the temple, entrusted it to his servants and sent them to Ben-Hadad of Aram. His intention was to offer this wealth to Ben-Hadad in exchange for his support against Baasha of Israel (verses 18-19). With silver and gold from the temple treasuries, Asa bribed Ben-Hadad and enlisted his support against Israel (verse 19).

Ben-Hadad was quite willing to break a treaty with Israel when he saw how much gold and silver he was being offered by Asa. In response he sent forces against Israel and conquered a number of Israelite cities (verse 20).

When King Baasha of Israel heard that Ben-Hadad had sided with Judah, he withdrew his troops. King Asa then

issued an order to all Judah and they went to Ramah to carry away all the stones and timber that Baasha had used to block the border of his country. He used the timber and stones to build up the cities of Geba and Mizpah.

What we see here is that while Asa did honour the Lord, he was not perfect. He did not trust God in this matter of Israel's opposition at Ramah. Instead, of turning to God for help, he stripped the temple of its treasures and bought the support of king Ben-Hadad. Even those who love the Lord can take matters into their own hands and fail to trust the Lord.

Asa had foot problems in his old age (verse 23). This would have limited his movement. A record of the events of his reign was kept in Judah. He was buried in the city of David with his ancestors. His son Jehoshaphat would succeed him as king (verse 24).

King Nabab of Israel

Attention now shifts to the nation of Israel to the north. After the death of Jeroboam, Nadab, his son, became king (verse 25). King Asa was king in Judah when Nadab succeeded his father in Israel. Nadab would reign for two years in Israel. He followed the ways of his father Jeroboam and did evil in the eyes of the Lord (verse 26).

A man by the name of Baasha plotted against Nadab. While Nadab and his army were besieging the Philistine city of Gibbethon, Baasha struck him down and killed him taking his place as king in Israel (verse 28).

Baasha of Israel

One of the first things Baasha did as king was to kill off the entire family line of Jeroboam (verse 29). He did not leave anyone from Jeroboam's family line alive. This was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Ahijah to Jeroboam's wife in 1 Kings 14:10-11. The judgment of God fell on the house of Jeroboam because of his sin and rebellion against God.

Throughout the reign of Baasha there was war between Israel and Judah. Baasha would reign in Israel for twenty-four years (verse 33). He too, however, did evil in the eyes of the Lord. While he was used of God to punish the family of Jeroboam, he still walked in the same sins. A record of Baasha's reign was kept in Israel (verse 32).

We see from this chapter that Israel continued in her path of rebellion against the Lord God. Nadab, son of Jeroboam was killed and his family line slaughtered. Baasha took control of the nation by force, but did nothing to turn the nation of Israel back to God.

In the nation of Judah, King Asa became the first king since David and Solomon to seek the Lord. He did much to cleanse the land of its impurity and sinful ways. Even he, however, failed to trust the Lord completely and we have a record of how he chose to strip the temple of its wealth to pay off Ben-Hadad for his support against Israel.

For Consideration:

- What evidence is there of the hand of the Lord God in the nation of Judah during the reigns of Abijah and Asa. Did the nation deserve this mercy? What evidence is there of God's hand in your life?
- What does Asa do to clean up the nation of Judah? What does this clean up show us about how far they had wandered from God?
- In his time of need, Asa did not consult the Lord God, but stripped the temple of its wealth to buy the support of a pagan king. Have you ever been tempted to trust in people instead of trusting the Lord? How does the work of God suffer in our day when we put our trust in people instead of trusting Him?
- God used Baasha to judge the family of Jeroboam for their sin, but he proved to be no better than Jeroboam. Is it possible for us to judge others and not be any better than those we judge? Have you ever been guilty of this?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the evidence of His hand in your life. Thank Him for His blessings.
- Take a moment to examine your life. Are there things that need to be cleaned up? What are those things? Ask the Lord to give you strength to do whatever needs to be done to be clean before Him.

- Ask God to help you to trust in His leading. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you did not trust Him but took matters into your own hands.
- Ask God to help you not to be quick to judge others. Ask Him for grace to see your own shortcomings and sins.

15

BAASHA, ELAH, ZIMRI, OMRI AND AHAB OF ISRAEL

Read 1 Kings 16:1-34

In this chapter we will focus on the nation of Israel. Chapter 16 describes the events that took place from the reign of Baasha to the reign of Ahab in the nation of Israel. We will see the condition of the land and how far they had turned their backs on the Lord God.

Baasha

We saw in chapter 15 that Baasha slaughtered the entire family of Jeroboam, fulfilling the prophecy of Ahijah the prophet. While Baasha was the instrument of God's justice and judgment against Jeroboam he fell into the same sins as Jeroboam. Because of this, God sent Jehu the prophet to speak to him (verse 1).

The Lord told Baasha that He had lifted him up from the dust to make him a leader of his people but he had chosen to walk in the ways of Jeroboam, provoking the Lord to anger (verse 2). Because of his sin, God was going to de-

stroy Baasha's house and make it like the house of Jeroboam. Dogs would eat those belonging to Baasha, who would die in the city, and the birds of the air would feed on those who died in the country. This prophecy of Jehu was identical to the prophecy of Ahijah against Jeroboam (see 1 Kings 14:11). Because Baasha had committed the same sin as Jeroboam he would be punished in the same way.

Baasha's family would not be given respect and honour. They would not be buried in a way that reflected their place in society. They would die violent and cruel deaths and be eaten by animals in the city and in the fields.

A record of Baasha's reign was kept in the annals of the kings of Israel. He died and was buried with his fathers in the city of Tirzah. His son Elah succeeded him as king in Israel (verse 6).

Elah

Elah, son of Baasha reigned for two years as king of Israel in the city of Tirzah (verse 8). One of his officials was a man by the name of Zimri. He was a man of influence and power, and was in command of half of King Elah's chariots (verse 9).

On one occasion King Elah was in the city of Tirzah getting drunk at the home of Arza, who was in charge of his palace. Zimri took advantage of Elah's drunken state, killing him and taking his throne as king (verse 10).

Zimri

One of the first things Zimri did when he took the throne was to slaughter the entire family of Elah. Verse 11 tells

us that he did not spare a single male in his household. This was in fulfilment of the prophecy Jehu the prophet to Elah's father Baasha. Zimri was God's instrument of judgment against Baasha and his family for their sin and rebellion (verse 13).

Zimri's reign in Tirzah, Israel would last only seven days (verse 15). When Israel heard that Zimri had killed Elah and taken the throne by force, they proclaimed Omri, commander of the army, as king (verse 16). When Omri was chosen to be king by Israel, he immediately laid siege to Tirzah where Zimri was reigning (verse 17).

Zimri knew that he had no chance of success against the army of Israel under Omri's command. He likely also knew that the nation was angry with him because he had murdered King Elah. As a way of escape from Omri and the wrath of Israel, Zimri went to the citadel of the royal palace and set it on fire around him, committing suicide (verse 18). The rebellion of Zimri was recorded in the official records of the kings of Israel (verse 20).

Omri

Not everyone in Israel supported Omri. Verse 21 tells us that the nation of Israel was politically divided. Half of Israel supported Omri and the other half supported Tibni. Verse 22 tells us that Omri's supporters were stronger than Tibni's and so Tibni died and Omri became king. While not clearly stated here we could assume that Tibni was killed by Omri's supporters.

Omri reigned twelve years in Israel (verse 23). Six of those years were in the city of Tizrah. Omri bought a hill from a man by the name of Shemer for two talents of silver (150 pounds or 70 kilograms). He built a city on that hill, naming

it Samaria after its former owner Shemer (verse 24). This city of Samaria would become the new capital of Israel.

Omri did not follow the Lord but did evil in the land. Verse 25 tells us that he did more evil than those who served as kings before him. He walked in the ways of Jeroboam and provoked the anger of the Lord (verse 26). A record of his reign was kept in Israel. He was buried in the city of Samaria which he had built. His son Ahab would succeed him (verse 28).

Ahab

The final king we will examine in this chapter is King Ahab. He reigned in Samaria for twenty-two years (verse 29). Ahab was more evil than any king before him, even his own father (verse 30). Ahab considered it a trivial matter to commit the sins of Jeroboam and went even farther than Jeroboam in his sinful ways.

Ahab married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon (verse 31). The name Ethbaal literally means "with Baal" and is an indication of the devotion of this king to the worship of Baal. His daughter Jezebel was a wicked woman. Ahab openly worshiped the god Baal (verse 31). He set up an altar and a temple for Baal in Samaria (verses 32). He also set up a pagan Asherah pole. Verse 33 tells us that Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God to anger than any king before him.

Around this time a man by the name of Hiel of Bethel took it upon himself to rebuild the city of Jericho. Verse 34 tells us that before he had completed this task, two of his sons died. This was in fulfillment of the word spoken by Joshua when he burned and cursed the city of in Joshua 6:26.

As we look at the nation of Israel at this time in history, we cannot help but see the terrible instability and chaos. One king after another led the nation deeper into sin and despair. Two royal families were slaughtered. Two kings were assassinated and their thrones taken by force. Political division caused the death of Tibni who challenged Omri's reign. Zimri, king for seven days, committed suicide by burning himself in his palace in Tirzah. Sin and evil were destroying the land.

Through it all, God continued to challenge and judge, but His people were not listening. They continued to rebel and walk away from God and His purposes.

For Consideration:

- Baasha did not learn from the judgment of Jeroboam and fell into the same sin. This resulted in him being punished by God in the same way. Do we learn from the experiences of others in their walk with God? Why do we often have to repeat the errors of others in order to learn the lessons ourselves?
- What are the effects of sin and evil in the land of Israel during this period of time? What are the effects of sin on your own land?
- How does sin affect relationships in this chapter? What evidence is there that each person is trying to defeat the other?
- What evidence is there of the patience of God with Israel at this time? How is His justice evident? How

does God demonstrate both patience and justice to His people?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to learn from the sins and errors of others.
- Ask God to deal with sin in your society? Ask Him to forgive and bring a spirit of repentance to your land and your church.
- Thank the Lord for His patience with us in our sin and rebellion. Thank the Lord that He is also a God of justice who will condemn sin and evil.
- Ask the Lord to search your heart and show you those areas where you need to confess your sin and be made right with Him.

16

ELIJAH, A TRUE PROPHET

Read 1 Kings 17:1-24

Deuteronomy 18:21-22 gives us the test for a true prophet.

"You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?" If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him."

Here in chapter 17 of 1 Kings we meet a prophet by the name of Elijah. In verse 1 Elijah makes a very powerful declaration to King Ahab. He told him that there would be no dew or rain in Israel, except at his word. This was an incredible statement from the lips of a man of God.

That bold statement was so incredible that Elijah risked his life in proclaiming it. The Lord told Elijah that he was to leave his town and hide in a ravine east of Jordan (verse 3). There in that ravine was a small brook from which Elijah could drink water. God told him that he would order ravens

to feed him there (verse 4). This shows us that the provision of God sometimes comes from the most unlikely sources. We also understand from this that all nature obeys the command of the Lord God. As the Lord had told him, the ravens brought Elijah both bread and meat in the morning and the evening. Elijah was well provided for and drank from the water in the brook.

In time the water in the brook dried up because there was no water in the land (verse 7). From this we understand that Elijah's word was from the Lord. What he prophesied was coming to pass.

When the water in the brook dried up, the Lord opened up another door of provision for the prophet, sending him out of Israel and into Sidon, to the home of a widow in Zarahphath. It should be remembered that Ahab's father-in-law ruled in Sidon. This territory was filled with worshipers of Baal. In the midst of this pagan land, God put His hand on this widow and would use her to provide for the physical needs of His prophet Elijah. Again, the provision of God comes from the most unlikely source.

Elijah went to Zaraphath. In the sovereignty of God, when he arrived, the widow was gathering sticks. Elijah asked her for some water to drink (verse 10). As she was leaving to get him some water, Elijah also asked her for some bread (verse 11).

The widow responded to this request by telling Elijah that she didn't have any bread. All she had was a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil. She told Elijah that she had come out to gather a few sticks to make a final meal for herself and her son. She was going to prepare herself to die. Remember that this was the woman that God had

called to provide for Elijah. Humanly speaking she was not a logical choice. She had nothing to give Elijah.

Elijah knew that God had told him that this widow would be the one to provide for his need. Though he did not understand what God was going to do, he told her not to be afraid. He commanded her to go home and make him a small cake of bread. Notice from verse 13 that she was to make this cake of bread for Elijah before she made anything for herself and her son. This was a bold request and required a step of faith on the part of the widow. Elijah told her that God had told him that the jar of flour would not be used up nor would the jug of oil run dry until the day the Lord brought rain (verse 14).

The widow did exactly as Elijah told her. She brought him a cake of bread and then prepared food for herself and her son. There was enough food for everyone (verse 15). The jar of flour was not used up nor was the jug of oil emptied even though she took from it each day. All this was in fulfillment of the word that God had spoken through Elijah (verse 16). Again we see how the Lord was speaking through this prophet. The proof that he was a true prophet of the Lord was in the fact that what he said came to pass.

While the widow did not have anything to give, God would miraculously provide all she needed to minister to Him. You may not believe that you have anything to give, or you may feel that your gifts are of no significance, but if you surrender what you have to God, He will use you in ways you never imagined.

After some time the widow's son became seriously ill. He grew weak and died (verse 17). This was a very devastating blow to the widow as this was likely her only son. In her grief, she blamed Elijah for the death of her son saying:

"What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" (verse 18).

Elijah asked the widow to give him her son. He carried him to the upstairs room where he had been staying and laid him on the bed (verse 19). He cried out to God about the widow's son stretching himself out on the boy three times and crying: "O LORD my God, let this boy's life return to him!"

God heard the cry of the prophet and restored life to the boy (verse 22). Elijah picked him up and brought him down to his mother, alive (verse 23). That miracle confirmed to the widow that Elijah was truly a man of God and that the word of the Lord that came from his mouth was true (verse 24).

This chapter is a very powerful introduction to the life and ministry of the prophet Elijah. His credentials are without question. What he prophesied came to pass because he was a true prophet and spoke what came from the mouth of the Lord. God confirmed this through great miracles in his life.

For Consideration:

- How do the events of this chapter prove that Elijah was a true prophet of God?
- Notice that Elijah had to hide from Ahab after proclaiming the word of God to him. Will all those who

preach the truth be accepted? Will people always accept what we preach, even though it is the truth?

- What does God use to provide for Elijah? What does this teach us about the ways of God?
- If you are willing to be a channel of God's blessing He can give you all you need to share that blessing with others. Are you willing to be a channel?
- Why is it significant that the widow provided for Elijah first before preparing a meal for herself and her son? Can we expect God to provide if we are not willing to put Him and His kingdom first in our lives?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you grace to proclaim the truth of His word no matter the cost. Ask God to raise up prophets in our day who will speak the truth.
- Thank the Lord for the way He has provided for your personal needs –sometimes through unexpected sources.
- Ask the Lord to help you to put Him first in your life. Ask Him to show you where you have put yourself before Him and His purposes for your life.
- Ask God to make you more willing to be a sacrificial channel of His blessings to others. Take a moment to ask the Lord how you can be this channel.

17

RAIN!

Read 1 Kings 18:1-46

Elijah had predicted that there would be no rain in the land of Israel. After about three years of famine and drought, the word of the Lord came to Elijah telling him to go to King Ahab of Israel (verse 1). God had seen the misery of His people and was going to reach out to them. He wanted to restore the land by sending rain again.

As Elijah was on his way to see Ahab, he met a man by the name of Obadiah. Obadiah was in charge of the king's palace. He was a devout believer who had secretly hidden one hundred prophets of the Lord and provided them with food and water when Queen Jezebel sought to kill them (verse 3-4).

At that time, Ahab and Obadiah were going throughout the land in search of grass to feed their horses and mules. Because there had been no rain, the animals were starving to death. Ahab was afraid that if he did not find food for them, he was going to have to kill them (verse 5).

King Ahab went in one direction and Obadiah went in the other in search of land to graze their animals. It was at this

time that Obadiah met Elijah (verse 7). Obadiah recognized the prophet and bowed down to him in respect.

Elijah told Obadiah to tell the king that he wanted to see him (verse 8). Obadiah was surprised by this request. For the last three years Elijah had hidden from Ahab. Queen Jezebel had been killing off the prophets of the Lord. Obadiah had done all he could to protect these prophets and did not want to be responsible for the death of one of the greatest among them. He did not want to inform Ahab of Elijah's presence.

Obadiah also feared for his own life. He told Elijah how Ahab had sent his servants to every nation and country in search of Elijah. He had gone to great expense to find and kill him. Obadiah feared that if he told Ahab that he had found Elijah, the Spirit of the Lord might take him away before Ahab could arrive (verse 12). If Obadiah had found Elijah and let him get away, then Ahab would surely kill him.

Notice in verse 12 that Obadiah reminded Elijah that he was a servant of the Lord God and had worshiped Him from his youth. He told him that Jezebel had been killing the prophets of the Lord and that he had been able to save one hundred of them by hiding them and supplying them with food and water (verse 13).

Elijah knew the dangers of speaking to the king. He also knew what the Lord had told him to do. He reassured Obadiah that he would not vanish but would present himself to Ahab as the Lord had instructed him to do (verse 14-15). Being reassured, Obadiah told the king he had found Elijah (verse 16).

Ahab did not waste any time in going to see Elijah. When he met Elijah, he accused him of being Israel's trouble-maker (verse 17). In saying this, he recognized that it was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Elijah that the nation had been plunged into this famine and drought.

In verse 18 Elijah told Ahab that the real reason for the trouble in Israel was because the king and his family had abandoned the Lord God and followed after the pagan god Baal. The drought in the land was the result of the sins of Ahab and his wife Jezebel. It was now time to deal with the question of who was really God in the land. To do this, Elijah called for a meeting on Mount Carmel. He invited the people of Israel, four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred prophets of Asherah who ate at Queen Jezebel's table (verse 19). Ahab agreed to this meeting and sent word throughout all Israel for the prophets to assemble on Mount Carmel (verse 20).

On the day of the meeting, Elijah stood before the people of Israel and asked them how long they would waver between two opinions (verse 21). "If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him," he told them. The people remained silent. They were not sure that they wanted to follow the Lord God of Israel.

When he had exhorted the people, Elijah reminded them that he was the only prophet of the Lord God of Israel present that day but there were four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal in their midst (verse 22). From a human point of view, what could one prophet of God do against four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal?

Elijah brought two bulls forward. He told the prophets of Baal to choose one of them. They were to sacrifice the bull and put it on the wood of the altar. He would prepare the

second bull and put in on another altar. They were not to set fire to the sacrifice. Instead they were to call to their god to reveal himself by sending fire to consume the offering. The God who answered by fire would be the true God (verse 24). All present agreed to the challenge.

The prophets of Baal were first to call out to their gods. They prepared the bull, set it on the altar, and began to call out to Baal. They called out from morning until noon, dancing around the altar, but there was no answer.

At noon Elijah began to mock the prophets of Baal telling them to shout louder. "Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened," he told them in verse 27. The prophets of Baal shouted louder. They even slashed themselves with swords and spears until blood flowed all over them. This continued until evening but there was still no answer from their god (verse 29).

Having given the prophets of Baal all day to call out to their god, the attention was then turned to Elijah. Verse 31 tells us that he took twelve stones, one representing each of the twelve tribes of Israel, and with them made an altar for the Lord. When he finished building the altar, he dug a trench around it large enough to hold about 13 quarts (15 litres). Next he arranged the wood and cut the bull into pieces, laying it on the wood. When everything was prepared, he called for four large jars to be filled with water and poured over the offering and the wood (verse 33). When this was done, he asked for this to be repeated. Four more jars of water were then poured over the altar, wood and offering. He asked a third time for this to be repeated and for the third time four more jars were brought and poured over the altar, the wood and the sacrifice.

From verse 34 we learn that the water ran down over the sacrifice and altar and filled the trench that Elijah had dug. Even if he wanted to, Elijah could not have set that sacrifice on fire. It was clear to all present that there could be no trickery in this matter. If that sacrifice was set on fire it would take a powerful miracle. Elijah placed himself in an impossible situation so that all could see that it was not he but the Lord who performed the miracle.

Then Elijah stepped forward and prayed to the Lord. He called on Him to let the people present know that He alone was God in Israel. He prayed that the Lord God would turn the hearts of the people back to Himself. When he finished praying, fire fell from heaven and burned the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the soil and licked up all the water in the trench (verse 38).

It was evident to all that the Lord God had done this miracle. Elijah simply prepared the way for the Lord to work. He did what God told him to do and stood back and watched the result.

When the people saw what God had done that day, they fell with their faces to the ground crying, "The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!" (verse 39). There was no doubt in their minds that they had witnessed a miracle. They had proof that the God of Israel was alive.

Elijah used this opportunity to command the people to seize the prophets of Baal, bring them down to the Kishon Valley and slaughter them there as false prophets (verse 40). God wanted to restore His blessing to the land of Israel but as long as these evil prophets were alive, that blessing could not be restored. Evil needed to be cleansed from the land if God's blessing was to be restored.

When the prophets of Baal were slaughtered, Elijah told King Ahab that he was to eat, drink and gather his strength for he could hear the sound of rain (verse 41). Ahab may not have eaten anything during the time that the prophets had been calling out to Baal. As Ahab went off to eat and drink, Elijah went to the top of Mount Carmel, bent down to the ground. Likely he was crying out to the Lord. As he cried out, he sent his servant to look out toward the sea (verse 43). The servant could not see anything. Elijah told him to go back seven times to see if there was any indication of rain. Likely during this time Elijah continued to pray and seek the Lord.

It was on the seventh time that the servant reported that he saw a cloud as small as a man's hand rising from the sea (verse 44). When Elijah heard this he told Ahab to hitch his chariot and leave before the rain hindered his return home.

The sky continued to grow blacker with clouds. A heavy rain began to fall on the land as Ahab rode off to his home in Jezreel. As for Elijah, the power of the Lord came on him and he tucked his cloak into his belt and ran all the way ahead of Ahab to Jezreel (verse 46).

Notice from this passage that the Lord wanted to restore blessing to the people of Israel. They were an evil people. King Ahab and Queen Jezebel were intent on destroying all prophets of God. They actively persecuted those who served the Lord God. They promoted the worship of Baal. If God's blessing were to be restored to the land the evil needed to be purged from it. God revealed Himself to His people in a special way. At least for a moment, they recognized Him as God and turned against the evil prophets of Baal. With the prophets removed, Elijah was able to pray for a breaking through of God's blessing on the land.

The rain that fell that day was a powerful reminder of God's grace toward a sinful people. Despite their sin, God had not given up on them.

For Consideration:

- While the people of Israel had turned their backs on the Lord God, He did not abandon them. He came to them in power, offering them another chance to come to Him and be blessed. What encouragement do you receive from this? Do you know people who need this second chance?
- What risk did Elijah take in returning to Ahab? Why does he take this risk? Are you willing to take a risk to do what you know God is calling you to do?
- It was Ahab's sin that brought a curse on the land? What sin brings a curse on your life or on your nation?
- The people on Mount Carmel saw clear proof that the Lord God of Israel was the true God. What proof do people see in you that your God is true?
- What would it take today for your nation to bow the knee to the Lord God and recognize that He is the one true God?
- What do we learn about the need to remove the sin that offends a holy God before His blessing can be restored? What sin needs to be removed from your life, your church or your nation for God's blessing to be more fully restored?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is a God of tremendous compassion and forgiveness.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to be obedient to Him no matter the cost.
- Ask the Lord to demonstrate through your life that He is real.
- Ask God to search your heart and reveal to you anything that would stand in the way of you receiving His full blessing.
- God particularly strengthened Elijah, giving him the ability to run before Ahab's chariot. What strength do you need today? Ask God to give you His strength to accomplish all He wants you to accomplish.

18

GOD STRENGTHENS ELIJAH

Read 1 Kings 19:1-24

Elijah had just seen a tremendous victory over the prophets of Baal. God had demonstrated His presence to the people of Israel in a wonderful way. Not everyone was willing to change their ways, however. When King Ahab went home and told his wife Jezebel how Elijah had killed the prophets of Baal, she was very angry. She sent a message to the prophet telling him that he would be dead by the same time the next day. No miracle of God was going to change the heart and mind of this evil queen.

What is particularly strange about this announcement was the response of Elijah. Verse 3 tells us that Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. He arrived in the region of Beer-sheba in Judah, left his servant, and went another day's journey into the desert where he sat down under a broom tree and prayed to die (verse 3-4). There are several things we need to see here.

Remember that just the day before, Elijah had stood up against four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal in the presence of King Ahab, who sought his life. That day Elijah had been very bold. Now we see the same man fearing for his life with the announcement of Jezebel. What is going on

here? While we cannot pretend to understand what the prophet was thinking at that time, there are several points we should note.

The day before Elijah fled from Jezebel, the Spirit of the Lord was very powerfully on him. The prophet was being moved by the Spirit of God into an incredible encounter with the prophets of Baal. Elijah was not ministering in his own strength and wisdom on that occasion. God's Spirit was using him to accomplish His purposes. What happened that day was not a normal everyday occurrence. Elijah was a human being just like any of us. When the Spirit of the Lord was on him he was bold and stepped out fearlessly, but he could get discouraged in his flesh just like anyone of us. He was weak and powerless without the ministry of God's Spirit.

This encounter with the prophets of Baal had been extremely draining on his spirit, mind and body. He was very likely exhausted both physically and emotionally. When he heard the news about Jezebel seeking his life, he was afraid, just like anyone would have been. That day Elijah felt his humanness. "I am no better than my ancestors," he told God (verse 4). He felt his weakness and frailty. He had no more strength or energy left. He didn't feel like a great man of God. He was too tired and weary. Notice that when he finished his prayer he fell asleep, exhausted, under the broom tree (verse 5). The broom tree was a shrub with tall spreading branches. These leaves provided shade for the prophet.

There have been many times in my life when the Lord has humbled me and reminded me of my weakness. I have been blessed to see how God has chosen to empower me in order to expand his kingdom. The fact of the matter is, however, that God has also taken me through times where

he has opened my eyes to see my frail human nature. He allows seeming failures to come into our lives at times to remind us that we are still mere humans, and that without His grace we would accomplish nothing of significance. This was an important lesson for Elijah. Even the apostle Paul was given an affliction sent in order to keep him from thinking too highly of himself. It is good to be reminded of our human weakness, because this is what keeps us clinging to God, the source of our strength. This is what was happening to Elijah in this passage.

God knew Elijah's weakness and his need of strength and encouragement so He sent His angel to touch him. The angel brought him food and water. Elijah ate and drank and fell back to sleep (verse 6). Again, this is an indication of his exhaustion. Sometimes the work God calls us to do is exhausting. God demonstrates to Elijah here that He was concerned for his recovery after this time of tremendous exertion. He sent His angel to provide for him. He gave him food and allowed him to sleep in order to build up his strength again. There in the desert, Elijah was able to be quiet, to rest and to reflect on what had happened.

After giving him time to rest, the angel of the Lord came back to Elijah and touched him again. The angel told him to eat because he had a long journey ahead of him (verse 7). In obedience to the angel, Elijah got up, ate and drank. In the strength that God provided through this food, he travelled for forty days and nights until he reached the region of Horeb, where he found a cave and stayed there for the night (verse 8-9).

To this point God had been restoring Elijah's physical and emotional health. While all this was important, Elijah would not be completely healed until God had touched him spiritually. While Elijah was in Horeb the Lord spoke to him.

God asked him what he was doing in the cave in Horeb (verse 9). Elijah told the Lord that it was because he had been very zealous for the Lord's cause and had broken down the altars of Baal. He told the Lord how he had put to death all the prophets of Baal and how the queen was now trying to kill him (verse 10).

We can only imagine the questions Elijah was facing in his heart. Why was it that because of his obedience to God, his life was now in danger? Where was the Lord now that the Queen was searching for him and wanting to kill him? These questions were of a spiritual nature and would have affected the prophet's relationship with God. Elijah needed spiritual healing and refreshment at this time.

God told the prophet to stand on the mountain because He was going to pass by (verse 11). We can only imagine what this would have meant to Elijah. The presence of the Lord has power to completely heal and restore. It brings refreshing and renewing like nothing else can bring. How many times have we craved that restoration and renewal?

Elijah went out on the mountain and waited on the Lord. While he was quietly waiting, a great and powerful wind tore through the mountains, shattering rocks, but the presence Elijah sought was not in that wind. After the powerful wind, a great earthquake shook the mountains, but again Elijah did not find in that earthquake the refreshing presence of God. After the earthquake came fire, but again Elijah was not touched by the presence of God. Finally, after the fire there came a quiet and gentle whisper. When Elijah heard this gentle whisper he covered his face with his cloak. He knew that God was present and he sought to hide himself from the glory of God he experienced in that moment.

God does reveal Himself in many different ways. God was revealing Himself to him through the wind, earthquake and fire as a God of justice and judgment. It was clearly the Lord who sent these signs to Elijah. Elijah experienced the harshness of these realities but God did not speak to him or reveal His presence to him through these events. It was not until Elijah heard the gentle voice of God that he knew God's special touch. God may have been communicating a message to Elijah through this experience. God had revealed Himself to him in great signs and wonders in the past but now he would minister through him in a quiet and gentle way.

Through that gentle voice, God asked Elijah why he was hiding in Horeb (verse 13). Elijah explained that he had been very zealous for the Lord. The Israelites had rejected God's covenant and broken down His altars. He was the only true prophet of God alive and they were trying to kill him. His concern is for the glory of God. He didn't know how the nation of Israel was going to be restored to the Lord. He believed he was the only true messenger of God left in the land. How could God's people grow and be restored to God if they were not taught and instructed in the ways of the Lord?

In verse 15 the Lord told Elijah to go to Damascus. When he got there he was to anoint Hazael to be king over Aram. Hazael was not from Israel or Judah. He was a foreign king. God still had a purpose for him, however, and sent Elijah to anoint him as king. Hazael would be God's instrument of judgment on His own people (see 2 Kings 8:28-29; 10:32; 13:3).

God does not give to Elijah the answers to his questions. Elijah did meet with God, however, and that in itself would have been enough. God's presence would have refreshed

him and encouraged him as he prepared for the next task. God does not always reveal His purposes to us. Elijah would have to continue to trust God for protection and strength to serve, even when he did not have all the answers to his questions.

In verse 16 God told Elijah also to anoint Jehu, the son of Nimshi to be king over Israel. Jehu was a military commander in Ahab's army. He would eventually be used of God to judge the household of Ahab. He would kill Jezebel (2 Kings 9:12) and wipe out the entire family of Ahab (2 Kings 10:11). Elijah did not know these things at the time, but God was answering his questions by raising p men who would be his instruments of His justice in the land.

Finally, Elijah was to anoint Elisha to succeed him as prophet (verse 16). Each of these men had a particular role to play in the judgment of Israel as a nation. Those that Hazael did not kill, Jehu would kill. Those that Jehu did not kill as king, Elisha the prophet would put to death in his ministry (verse 17).

What we need to understand here is that God knew that Israel would not be touched by the powerful work and ministry of Elijah. For a moment they were impressed by the powerful display of God's power on Mount Carmel, but that would not last. They would quickly turn their backs on the Lord God and His ways. How humbling this must have been for Elijah. God had moved powerfully through him, destroying all the prophets of Baal, but the hearts of His people remained untouched. Despite the hardness of the hearts of the general population, however, God told Elijah that he had reserved seven thousand people in Israel who had refused to bow the knee to Baal (verse 18). All was not lost. God still had a people of His own in this pagan land. He knew each one of them personally.

Elijah went and found Elisha ploughing a field with twelve yoke of oxen (verse 19). Elijah approached him and threw his cloak around him. This was a symbolic gesture and demonstrated to Elisha that he would one day take on Elijah's role as prophet in Israel.

Elisha ran after Elijah and asked him for permission to say good-bye to his mother and father before he followed him (verse 20). Elijah gave him permission. Elisha returned to say good-bye to his parents. He then took his yoke of oxen, slaughtered them and used his ploughing equipment to build a fire to cook the meat on. He gave the meat to the people and left everything to follow Elijah and the purpose of God for his life (verse 21). How we need to see more people like Elisha –willing to give up all for the call of God on their lives.

For Consideration:

- How does God remind Elijah of his humanness in this chapter? Have you ever been reminded of your weakness? Explain.
- The work that God had called Elijah to do on Mount Carmel required much effort and left him physically and emotionally drained. What does this tell us about the effort we will need to make from time to time for the sake of the kingdom?
- How did God minister to Elijah in his tiredness and weariness? Has God ever ministered to you in your physical, emotional and spiritual weakness?

- As powerful as the signs God performed through Elijah were, they did not have any lasting impact on the nation. What does this teach us about the hardness of the human heart?
- Elisha was willing to leave everything to follow Elijah. What holds you back from following the will and purpose of the Lord in your life?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is willing to use you despite your weaknesses. Thank Him that He is greater than your weaknesses.
- Take a moment to ask God to strengthen and meet you as He met Elijah. Thank Him that He does desire to minister to us in our weakness.
- Ask the Lord to keep you fully aware of your weakness. Ask Him to give you faith and confidence to step out in the strength He provides.
- Thank the Lord for breaking your stubborn will. Thank Him that He saved you from your sin and rebellion. Ask Him to minister to those around you who have not yet seen their need.
- Ask God to give you the willingness of Elisha to leave everything to follow Him.

19

ISRAEL'S BATTLE WITH BEN-HADAD

Read 1 Kings 20:1-43

Chapter 20 tells us about the difficulties between the nation of Aram, under the leadership of Ben-Hadad, and Ahab, king of Israel. In 1 Kings 15 Asa, King of Judah recruited Ben-Hadad's support against Israel by offering him treasures from the temple. Here in chapter 20 we see how Ben-Hadad gathered a coalition of kings to support him in his attack of Israel. With a coalition of thirty-two kings and their forces, Ben-Hadad attacked Samaria.

With Samaria captured, Ben-Hadad sent messengers to King Ahab with his demands (verse 2). He demanded that he surrender his silver and gold as well as the best of his wives and children. This was a significant demand, but Ahab agreed to the terms saying, "Just as you say, my lord the king, I and all I have are yours" (verse 4).

Ben-Hadad sent his messengers a second time to Ahab with a further demand. This time he told Ahab that by the same time the next day he was going to send his officials to search out his palace and the houses of his officials and

they were to be given permission to take anything of value they wanted (verse 6). In response, Ahab called for a meeting of the elders of the land, who advised him not to agree to these demands. They knew that Ben-Hadad was not going to be happy with taking a bit of wealth; he was seeking to provoke Israel into a battle.

When Ben-Hadad received Ahab's negative response, he told him that he was going to destroy Samaria. According to Ben-Hadad, their defeat would be so great that there would not be enough of the city left to give each of his men a handful of dust (verse 10). In other words, he was going to grind Samaria to powder.

Ahab responded to Ben-Hadad by telling him: "One who puts on his armour should not boast like one who takes it off" (verse 11). In other words, talk is cheap. It is easy to make great boasts but the real test would be the battle. The messenger returned with this message from Ahab. When Ben-Hadad received the reply he and his kings were drinking in their tents. Ben-Hadad immediately called for preparations to be made for battle against Israel (verse 12).

While Ben-Hadad and his fellow kings were preparing for battle, a prophet came to Ahab with a word from the Lord. The prophet told Ahab that while the army that was coming against them was a vast army, God would give him victory over them (verse 13). We need to understand here that Ahab was a wicked king in Israel. His wife was seeking to kill the prophets of God. This promise of victory was a tremendous act of grace. It was not something that Ahab deserved. He had turned his back on the God of Israel. God was still working in the nation of Israel even when they had turned from Him. God promised to hand this vast army over to Ahab that very day (verse 13). This would clearly

be a miracle. God was revealing His presence and His power to His people.

Obviously, this word would have been an encouragement to Ahab. He questioned the prophet further. Ahab asked the prophet who would lead his men into this victory and who should start the battle (verse 14). The prophet told Ahab that his young officers would bring this victory to him and that he was to initiate the battle.

On the basis of the word of the prophet, Ahab called his young officers to him. There were 232 officers in all. He also assembled the rest of Israel. The total number of men prepared for battle was seven thousand. This was quite a small army to face the thirty-two kings under Ben-Hadad. The enemy obviously had a large advantage. This was all in the purpose and plan of God, whose intention here was to remind Israel that He was God and that He could give them that victory. It is clear that it was the desire of God to capture the attention of this nation and show His love and grace toward them. God had not given up on His people. He continued to work in the life of the nation that had rejected Him seeking to reveal His presence and purpose to them.

Ahab's army set out at noon. This was not a normal time for battle as it was the hottest time of the day. Ben-Hadad's men were not expecting an attack at that time. They were in their tents getting drunk (verse 16). Ben-Hadad's scouts spotted the approaching Israelite army and sent word back to Ben-Hadad (verse 17).

Ben-Hadad did not seem to be overly concerned about this army. He told his men that whether the army came in peace or for war they were to take them alive. In saying

this, Ben Hadad showed that he really did not expect any difficulty in conquering Israel (verse 18).

As the battle unfolded, however, the young officers of Ahab's army struck down the forces sent against them, so that they fled with Israel in pursuit (verse 19). Ben-Hadad escaped on horseback with some of his horsemen. That day Israel inflicted serious losses on their enemies (verse 21). God was faithful to His promise.

After this tremendous victory over the forces of Ben-Hadad, the prophet returned to Ahab with another word from the Lord. In verse 22 he told the king that the army of Ben-Hadad would be back the next spring. He was to fortify his position. He was not to lose what God had given him that day. The prophet's word to Ahab is a word we all need to take to heart. Satan delights to strip us of the victories we have already attained. It is God's purpose that we remain in them and defend the territory He has given.

Following this unexpected loss, Ben-Hadad's officials gathered to understand the reason why they had lost this battle. They told the king that the gods of Israel were gods of the hills. If they wanted to have victory over the Israelites they needed to engage them in the plains (verse 23). The Arameans knew nothing about the true God of Israel. As they watched Israel they saw them making their sacrifices on the high places in the land. They saw them as Baal worshippers who bowed down to Ashteroth poles and worshipped pagan gods. Israel was not identified with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. What do people see when they look at us?

Ben-Hadad's officials advised him to remove the kings from their command and replace them with other officers

(verse 24). We are not told why the kings were to be replaced. Obviously, they had not proven themselves to be able to deal with Israel. Ben-Hadad's officials were to replace them with better military officers. They also advised Ben-Hadad to rebuild his army so that it was as large as the one he had lost (verse 25). Ben-Hadad agreed to this plan and did as he was advised.

As prophesied, the next spring Ben-Hadad gathered his forces together and set out again to attack Israel (verse 26). Israel went out to meet Ben-Hadad's forces. The comparison between the two forces is striking. On the one hand was Israel's army, compared to two small flocks of goats. Ben-Hadad's forces, on the other hand, covered the countryside. Israel's army was small and insignificant compared to the great army that Ben-Hadad had gathered against them.

Israel obviously noticed the difference in the size of their armies. In verse 28 a man of God came to the king with the word of the Lord. He told Ahab that the Arameans believed that the Lord God was a God of the hills and not god of the valleys. The prophet told Ahab that he would deliver Ben-Hadad into his hands in the valley. The Lord promised to deliver Ahab from this vast army so that he would know that He was God alone. Again we see the reason for this conflict with Ben-Hadad. The Lord's purpose was to reveal His power to Ahab and the nation of Israel. God wanted to restore them to a relationship with Him. This battle in the valley was the path to greater intimacy with God.

After a period of seven days silence, the two armies engaged in battle. As He had promised, God gave Israel tremendous victory that day. According to verse 29, the Arameans had one hundred thousand casualties in a single day. The rest of the army escaped to the city of Aphek.

When they were in Aphek, the wall of the city collapsed on twenty-seven thousand men. Ben-Hadad hid himself in an inner room in the city (verse 30).

Ben-Hadad's officials went to him with some advice. Realizing their defeat, they told him that they had heard that the kings of Israel were merciful. They suggested that they go to Ahab dressed in sackcloth and ropes around their heads in the hope that he would spare their lives. Historians tell us that ropes were usually put around the necks of a soldier captured in battle. They were then taken that way back to the city where they would be held as prisoners or used as slaves. By putting the ropes around their heads, these officials were willingly surrendering to the mercy of King Ahab. Ben-Hadad agreed to this and send messengers to Ahab pleading for his life (verse 32).

Ahab called for Ben-Hadad to come to him. When he approached he was invited to mount his chariot to speak with him (verse 33). Ben-Hadad offered to return the cities his father had taken from Ahab's father. He also told him that he could set up his own market area in Damascus (verse 34). Ahab was pleased with these conditions and made a treaty with him that day. After this he let him go.

After the treaty between Ahab and Ben-Hadad, the word of the Lord came to a prophet. Inspired by the Lord, the prophet spoke to his companion and asked him to strike him with his weapon (verse 35). His companion refused to strike him. Because he refused to do what the Lord had asked him to do, the first prophet told the other that as soon as he left his presence, a lion would devour him. This happened exactly as the prophet had predicted (verse 36). What is important for us to note here is that this incident was a symbolic word of warning to Ahab. God had determined that Ben-Hadad be stuck by the sword but Ahab had

made a treaty with him instead. As a result, he would suffer the consequences of his actions.

The prophet found another man and asked him to strike him. This time that man obeyed and wounded the prophet (verse 37). The prophet then stood by the road waiting for the king. Realizing that the king would recognize him, the prophet disguised himself with a headband over his eyes (verse 38).

When the king passed by, the prophet called out to him. He told him a story of how he had gone into the thick of the battle and someone came to him with a captive telling him to guard this captive with his life. If the captive escaped he would either pay with his life or with a talent of silver (75 pounds or 34 kilograms). This was a very significant fine and likely out of the reach for the average soldier. The disguised prophet continued his story and told Ahab how the captive escaped. Ahab told the man that because he had let the prisoner escape he would either have to pay his talent of silver or pay with his life as agreed (verse 40).

The prophet then removed his disguise and the king recognized him (verse 41). He told Ahab that he had set a man free that God had determined should die. Because of this, God had decreed that he would pay for this with his life and the lives of his people (verse 42). This word from the prophet angered Ahab (verse 43)

God had been trying to reveal Himself in a very powerful way to Ahab. God gave him tremendous victory over the enemy, but in the end Ahab made a treaty with him and spared his life. God wanted absolute obedience and faithfulness. Ahab offered half-hearted obedience and made an alliance with the enemy.

Many times we, like Ahab, have refused to remove all remnants of sin from our lives and ministries, allowing certain sins to remain. We who have been given great victory need to remain in that victory. God calls us to whole-hearted obedience with no compromise.

For Consideration:

- Initially, Ahab was quite willing to lose his silver, wives and children to Ben-Hadad. What are you willing to lose to the enemy without a fight? How easy is it for us to compromise for the sake of peace?
- What kind of a king was Ahab? How does the victory of God over his enemies show us the wonderful mercy of God?
- What was God's desire in giving Ahab and Israel victory over Ben-Hadad? What should have been Ahab's response to the God of Israel?
- The prophet of the Lord told Ahab to strengthen what he had attained in his first victory. How easy is it for us to lose what God had given us? Have you ever achieved victory only to lose what you had attained?
- Ben-Hadad's counsellors saw Israel as worshipers of pagan gods on the high places. What do people know about God by watching us?
- God is revealed here as a God of the valley as well as the high places. What valley are you going

through today? What encouragement do you find in this today?

- Is it possible for us to make an agreement with sin and evil in our personal lives and ministries? What kind of agreements have you made?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to keep you from compromise in your walk with Him.
- Thank the Lord for His mercy toward you even when you did not deserve that mercy.
- Ask God to give you grace and wisdom to hold onto the victories He has given you.
- Thank the Lord that He is the God of the valley as well as the God of the high places (in the struggles in life as well as in the good times).
- Ask the Lord to make you aware of any ways that you have been making alliances with sin and evil in your personal lives and ministries. Confess this and ask God to give you victory.
- Ask God to open your eyes to see what He is trying to teach you through the circumstances He had brought into your life.

NABOTH'S VINEYARD

Read 1 Kings 21:1-29

King Ahab was a man who was accustomed to getting his way. He was also a man who had many opportunities to turn to God. God had spoken to him through the incident with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. He had also revealed His power in a wonderful way when He gave him victory over the army of Ben-Hadad. In this, God was trying to communicate to him. The problem with Ahab, however, was that he could never give himself fully to the Lord. In part, his problem was his evil wife Jezebel. Here in this chapter we catch a glimpse of the terrible evil of Jezebel, Ahab's wife.

On one occasion Ahab noticed a vineyard belonging to a man by the name of Naboth. This vineyard was close to his palace. Ahab liked this vineyard and wanted to use it for a vegetable garden since it was so close to his palace (verse 2). He offered to give Naboth a better vineyard in exchange or, if he preferred, he would pay him whatever the property was worth. Naboth was unwilling to part with this particular piece of property because it had been in his family for many years (verse 3).

It is important that we understand what Naboth was feeling here. Notice how he said, "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers" (verse 3). He believed this land had been given to his family by the Lord and that he had an obligation before God to manage it. Naboth believed he would be sinning against God if he sold the property.

Naboth's response angered the king. He returned home in a bad mood. He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat (verse 4). When his wife Jezebel came to him and asked why he was not eating, Ahab told her about Naboth and how he would not sell him his property for his vegetable garden (verses 5-6).

Somewhat frustrated with her husband, Jezebel rebuked him. "Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite," she told him.

Jezebel would not take "no" for an answer. She would not let anything stand in the way of her getting what she wanted. She wrote a letter in Ahab's name and placed his seal on it. In this letter she told the elders and nobles of the city to proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people (verse 9). They were also to seat two evil men opposite him. These men were to say that Naboth had cursed both God and the king. They were then to take him out and stone him (verse 10).

Notice several things about this plan. First, Jezebel did not confront Naboth in person. She did not take the time to examine his situation or speak to him about the reason why he was unwilling to sell his property. She was not interested in hearing Naboth's position. She would get rid of

anyone who stood in the way of her getting what she wanted. People were disposable.

Second, truth was of no significance to Jezebel. She advanced her cause by means of lies and deceit. There was not to be any trial nor was truth to be given a voice. Naboth was not given an opportunity to defend himself.

Third, the whole matter was to be carried out swiftly. This would not give people opportunity to think about what they were doing. They would not give the voice of conscience or the Spirit of God opportunity to speak. The plan was to be carried out without regard for conscience or righteousness.

The elders and nobles did exactly as Queen Jezebel had told them to do. The evil men brought their charges against Naboth and the elders brought him outside the city and stoned him to death on false charges. It should be noted here that 2 Kings 9:26 gives us indication that Naboth's sons were also slaughtered at this time.

"Yesterday I saw the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons, declares the LORD, and I will surely make you pay for it on this plot of ground, declares the LORD.' Now then, pick him up and throw him on that plot, in accordance with the word of the LORD."

Jezebel's action insured that there would be no one in the family to inherit Naboth's land. After the death of Naboth, Jezebel went to Ahab and told him to take possession of the vineyard (verse 15). While Ahab did not have Naboth killed, he did not stop his evil wife from carrying out her plan nor did he hesitate to take advantage of the situation

to get what he wanted. This matter greatly angered the Lord God.

After this incident, the word of the Lord came to Elijah the prophet. God told him to meet Ahab in Samaria (verse 17). He was to tell him that he was guilty of murdering a man and seizing his property. While this plot was carried out by Jezebel, Ahab was responsible. He knew what his wife had done. He enjoyed the proceeds of her sin. He did nothing to stop this evil and God was going to hold him completely accountable it.

Elijah was to tell Ahab that in the place where the dogs licked up Naboth's blood, they would also lick up his blood (verse 19). From 1 Kings 22:29-37 we read how Ahab was stuck by an arrow in battle. He bled for a long time and eventually died in his chariot. His chariot was brought home to Samaria where the blood was washed out in a pool in Samaria. The dogs lapped up Ahab's blood in fulfilment of that prophecy (1 Kings 22:38). A more direct fulfilment of this prophecy of Elijah took place later in the life of Ahab's son Joram whose body was thrown on Naboth's field (2 Kings 9:25-26).

Elijah told Ahab that the Lord God was going to bring disaster on him because he had sold himself to sin (verse 21-22). Every descendant of Ahab would be cut off from the land of Israel. His house would be like the house of Jeroboam and the house of Baasha, whom the Lord cut off completely (see 1 Kings 15:28-29 and 1 Kings 16:10-11). As for Ahab's wife Jezebel, Elijah prophesied that dogs would devour her by the wall of Jezreel (verse 23). For the story of the fulfilment of this prophecy see 2 Kings 9:30-37. According to the prophecy of Elijah, dogs would eat those belonging to Ahab who died in the city and the birds of the air would feed on those who died in the country. The

dog was an unclean animal. To be eaten by a dog was a great indignity to the body.

All these things would happen to Ahab because he was an evil king who turned his back on the Lord God. According to verses 25 and 26 there was never a man like Ahab who sold himself out to evil. Notice also in verse 25 that he was urged on by his wicked wife Jezebel. Verse 26 tells us that he "behaved himself in the vilest manner by going after idols."

This prophecy of Elijah seemed to touch Ahab. Hearing the word of the Lord, Ahab tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted (verse 27). We do not have any indication of this same attitude on the part of Jezebel. She had no sense of the Lord and His purpose. Ahab, on the other hand, was an Israelite. While he lived in rebellion against God, there was a soft place in his heart toward the God of his fathers. God spoke to Ahab and revealed Himself to him on numerous occasions.

On this occasion, Ahab's hard heart seemed to be touched by the word of the Lord. God saw the attitude of his heart and how he was grieved over what he had done and the punishment of God on his entire family. God spoke to Elijah again telling him that He had seen how Ahab had humbled himself. In response, God told the prophet that He would not bring this disaster in his day but in the days of his son. Ahab was given the privilege of dying in battle as a warrior (1 Kings 22:29-37). Even in His judgment, God shows mercy to those who humble themselves.

Ahab heard from God but was unable to surrender to Him. In part, this was due to the influences of his wife who urged him on. He did not seem to be able to resist her influence. While there was a place in his heart where Ahab could

hear God, he never fully allowed his heart to be broken by the Lord. We have all met men and women like him.

For Consideration:

- What influence did Jezebel have on Ahab's life? How do people influence you and your walk with the Lord God?
- God had often spoken to Ahab through His prophets. At times Ahab's heart was broken by the words he heard but he never fully surrendered to the Lord. Do you know people like this today? How has God been speaking to them?
- Jezebel seemed to rule by fear, lies and deceit. Is there evidence of this type of leadership in our day?
- Though Ahab did not personally kill Naboth, why did God hold him accountable for his death?
- How do we see God's mercy demonstrated in the judgment of Ahab when he grieved over his sin and punishment?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to show you what influences there are in your life that keeps you from following completely after Him.

- Do you know someone like Ahab to whom God has been speaking? Ask God to give this person grace to surrender to His ways.
- Ask God to rid you of any lies, deceit or desire to manipulate or control. Ask Him instead to give you grace to trust Him to accomplish His purposes for your life and the lives of those around you.
- Thank God that He shows mercy in judgment.

21

THE DEATH OF AHAB AND THE REIGNS OF AHAZIAH OF ISRAEL AND JEHOSHAPHAT OF JUDAH

Read 1 Kings 22:1-53

In chapter 20 we read how Ben-Hadad of Aram suffered defeat when he attacked Israel with his alliance of thirty-two kings. King Ahab formed a treaty with him and released him, contrary to God's plan. The conflict between Aram and Israel did not end with the release of Ben-Hadad. 1 Kings 22:1 tells us that for three years there was war between these two nations.

After three years of conflict, King Jehoshaphat of Judah was approached by King Ahab of Israel about an alliance against Aram. Of particular concern for Ahab was the region of Ramoth Gilead that was, at that time, in the hands of Aram. This had been an Israelite city. It is unclear why he is concerned to see this town restored to Israel.

When Ahab asked Jehoshaphat if he would go with him to take the city back, Jehoshaphat replied, "I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses." In other words, he was willing to do all he could to help Ahab regain control of Ramoth Gilead. This was the first time in many years that any kind of gesture of friendship had been made between Israel and Judah. Before joining Ahab in battle against Aram, however, Jehoshaphat requested that they first seek the counsel of the Lord (verse 5).

It is interesting to note that Jehoshaphat wanted to consult the Lord before making any commitment to Ahab. This shows us that Jehoshaphat was concerned about the will and purpose of God. He was not depending on his own wisdom and strength here. He wanted to know what God would say.

In response to the request of Jehoshaphat, Ahab brought together the prophets of Israel. Four hundred prophets gathered in response to the king's command (verse 6). What we need to understand here is that these were not true prophets of God. Ahab and his wife had been killing the prophets of God. These prophets were likely associated with the pagan religions that were practiced in Israel at the time. When these false prophets were gathered, Ahab asked them if they should go to war against the king of Aram (verse 6). With one voice all the prophets said, "Go, for the Lord will give it into the king's hand" (verse 6).

Jehoshaphat was not convinced. He did not trust these false prophets, and asked Ahab if there was not a prophet of the Lord God in Israel he could consult (verse 7). Ahab told him that there was still one prophet of God in the land, but he hated him because he never said anything good about him. This prophet's name was Micaiah (verse 8). It is interesting to note how Ahab judged a prophet. He hated

the prophet Micaiah because he never said anything good about him. He loved the false prophets because they told him what he wanted to hear. There are many people like this in our day. They enjoy preachers who make them feel good about themselves but despise those who confront their sin. Jehoshaphat rebuked Ahab for this attitude toward the true prophets of the Lord, "The king should not say that," Jehoshaphat replied (verse 8). At Jehoshaphat's request, Ahab called for Micaiah.

When Micaiah arrived he saw quite a scene before him. The kings were dressed in their royal robes and seated on their thrones at the entrance of the gate of Samaria. All around them were the false prophets who were prophesying. One of them, a prophet by the name of Zedekiah, had made some iron horns and was declaring to the king that he would gore the Arameans with them (verse 11). All the other prophets were prophesying that the Lord would give Aram into their hand (verse 12). The messenger who had brought Micaiah told him that all the prophets were prophesying success for the king. He advised Micaiah that it would be in his best interest to agree with them and speak favourably to the king, prophesying success (verse 13).

Despite this pressure, Micaiah told the servant that he could only prophesy what the Lord told him to prophesy (verse 14). On his arrival, Micaiah was asked if Israel and Judah should go to war to regain Ramoth Gilead. Micaiah replied, "Attack and be victorious, for the LORD will give it into the king's hand" (verse 15). Micaiah simply repeats the words of the prophets around him. We should not see this as the word of the Lord. Instead we should see this as the frustrated heart of Micaiah telling the king what he wanted to hear simply because he knew that he would not listen to the truth. He speaks here in a sarcastic tone, telling the king to do what he wanted.

Ahab picked up on this sarcastic tone and demanded that he tell him the truth (verse 16). Micaiah then answered telling Ahab and Jehoshaphat that he saw Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd. He heard the LORD say, "These people have no master. Let each one go home in peace" (verse 17). Ahab turned to Jehoshaphat and said, "Didn't I tell you that he never prophesies anything good about me, but only bad?"

Micaiah went on to tell Ahab and Jehoshaphat that he saw the LORD sitting on His throne with all the hosts of heaven standing around Him (verse 19). He heard the LORD asking, "Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?" In time a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD saying, "I will entice him" (verse 20). When the Lord asked the spirit how he would do this, the spirit told the LORD that he would go out and be a lying spirit in the mouths of the prophets. Micaiah told Ahab that the Lord permitted this spirit to speak lies in order to bring disaster on him as had been decreed (verse 23).

We should not see from this that the Lord God lies and deceives to accomplish His purposes. What we should see, however, is that God is able to accomplish His purposes despite the lies and deceit of the enemy. The lying spirits here are not angels of God but fallen angels of Satan. Just as God allows sickness, evil and disaster in this world to accomplish His purposes, so He will at times use even the deceit and evil of Satan and his angels to fulfil His design.

The prophecy of Micaiah angered the prophet Zedekiah, who had made the iron horns and prophesied success to Ahab and Jehoshaphat. When he heard Micaiah's prophecy, he slapped him in the face saying, "Which way did the

spirit from the LORD go when he went from me to speak to you?" He may have been telling Micaiah that the lying spirit he spoke about in them was in reality in him.

Micaiah told Zedekiah that he would discover who was speaking the truth soon enough. He would know who was truthful on the day he went to hide in an inner room (verse 25). Likely Zedekiah would be hiding in this inner room from the enemy he prophesied would not overcome them.

Frustrated with the words of Micaiah, Ahab ordered that he be put in prison and fed nothing but bread and water until he returned safely from battle (verse 26-27). Unthreatened by this order, Micaiah told the king that if he returned safely from battle than the LORD had not spoken through him (verse 28). The test of whether Micaiah was speaking the truth would be found in what happened to Ahab in battle.

In verse 29 Ahab and Jehoshaphat decided that they would go up into battle. Just in case Micaiah had spoken the truth, Ahab decided to disguise himself. Deep down inside, he likely wondered if what Micaiah said was true. He would go into battle fearful of dying, despite the predictions of 400 false prophets. Jehoshaphat, on the other hand went into battle in his royal robes (verse 30).

According to verse 31, the king of Aram ordered his thirty-two chariot commanders to focus all their attention on Ahab. His heart was set on killing Ahab. At one point, the chariot commanders, seeing Jehoshaphat in his royal robes, pursued him thinking that he was King Ahab. When they discovered that he was not Ahab, they stopped pursuing him (verse 33).

One of Aram's soldiers drew his bow at random and struck Ahab between the sections of his armour (verse 34). This

was clearly an arrow from the Lord. Ahab told his chariot driver to wheel around and get him out of the fighting because he had been wounded (verse 34). The battle between Israel, Judah and Aram lasted all day. During that time Ahab was propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans. His blood ran down onto the floor of the chariot. By the evening, Ahab had died (verse 35). When the sun set, the battle stopped and everyone returned home (verse 36). The king's body was brought back to Samaria where he was buried. The chariot was washed out in a pool in Samaria where the prostitutes bathed. The dogs licked up his blood in fulfilment of the words of Elijah the prophet (1 Kings 21:19).

The full details of Ahab's reign were recorded in the annals of the kings of Israel. His son Ahaziah succeeded him as king in the nation of Israel (verse 40).

We conclude this chapter with a brief account of the reign of Jehoshaphat of Judah. We have already been introduced to Jehoshaphat here. He was king of Judah when Ahab reigned in Israel. He was thirty-five years old when he became king in Judah and reigned in Jerusalem for twenty-five years (verse 42). Verse 43 tells us that he walked with the Lord all his life. Jehoshaphat did not remove all the pagan high places in the land of Judah, however, and there were still people who sacrificed and burnt incense on these high places.

Generally speaking, however, Jehoshaphat brought a time of prosperity and blessing to Judah. We have seen how there was a measure of peace between Israel and Judah during his reign. He assisted Israel in her battle against Aram. He enjoyed success in his military exploits (verse 45). He removed the male shrine prostitutes that remained

after his father's reign (verse 46). Verse 47 leads us to believe that Edom was in subjection to Judah and had a deputy accountable to Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat built a fleet of trading ships to go to Ophir for gold, but those ships never set sail. According to 2 Chronicles 20:35-36, they were destroyed as a result of an alliance the king made with King Ahaziah of Israel. Jehoshaphat died after twenty-five years as king in Judah. Jehoram, his son would succeed him as king in Judah (verse 50).

Back in Israel, Ahaziah had become king at the death of his father Ahab in battle. Ahaziah reigned in Israel while Jehoshaphat was king in Judah. He would be king of Israel for two years. Ahaziah followed the evil ways of his father Ahab and his mother Jezebel (verse 52). He served Baal and provoked the Lord to anger just as his father Ahab had done (verse 53).

For Consideration:

- Do you think that Jehoshaphat's decision to make an alliance with Ahab was from the Lord? What happened to Jehoshaphat's fleet of ships when he made an alliance with Ahaziah, the son of Ahab?
- Notice the boldness of Micaiah the true prophet of the Lord in this chapter. Do you have the boldness of Micaiah?
- Ahab sought out those prophets who would tell him only what he wanted to hear. Have you ever met people like this? Are you ready to hear whatever the Lord would have you to hear?

- Ahab disguised himself in an attempt to hide from the enemy. Is it ever possible to hide from the Lord? Are there things you are trying to hide from the Lord today?
- How does God use the evil purposes and actions of Satan and his evil spirits to accomplish His greater purposes? How did God use the evil purposes of Satan toward the Lord Jesus at the time of His crucifixion to accomplish our salvation? How can God use the trials and difficulties that come your way to accomplish His purposes for you?
- Jehoshaphat's ships never set sail. Are there purposes and plans you are making that are contrary to the purpose and plan of the Lord God? Can those plans ultimately succeed?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to keep you from making partnerships and alliances outside of His will and purpose.
- Ask God to give you boldness to stand true to Him even when everyone else walks away.
- Thank the Lord that He can use even the evil purposes of the enemy for our good. Thank Him that He is a sovereign God.
- Ask God to show you if there are any purposes or plans in your life that are contrary to God's will. Ask Him to give you grace to surrender those purposes and plans to Him.

22

THE DEATH OF AHAZIAH, KING OF ISRAEL

Read 2 Kings 1:1-18

After the death of Ahab, his son Ahaziah reigned in his place in Israel. We have already seen from 1 Kings 22:51-53 that Ahaziah was an evil king who turned from the Lord and followed the ways of his father Ahab. From verse 1 we understand that the blessing of God was being removed from the reign of Ahaziah. After Ahab's death, Moab rebelled against Israel. 2 Samuel 8:2 tells us that Moab had been subject to Israel from the time of David. Because of the sin in the land, Israel began to lose their territory. Sin was making the nation weaker.

From verse 2 we learn that Ahaziah fell through the lattice work of his upper room in Samaria and was seriously injured. Wondering if he was going to die from his injuries, he sent messengers to consult the Philistine god Baal-Zebub to see if he would recover. Baal-Zebub literally means "lord of the flies." It is uncertain how he received this name. Some believe that it came from the fact that he was attributed with averting a plague of flies in the region. Others feel that it was because he revealed his will and purpose

through the flight patterns of flies. Still other scholars believe that the name was meant to demean the god. By calling him a god of flies, his enemies were calling him a god of insignificance.

The word of the Lord came to Elijah as Ahaziah's messengers were on their way to consult Baal-Zebub. The angel of the Lord told Elijah to meet the messengers and question them about going to see Baal-Zebub. "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?" Elijah was to ask (verse 3).

God was angry with Ahaziah because he did not consult Him but chose to turn to Baal-Zebub. Elijah told Ahaziah that he would die (verse 4). The messengers returned to Ahaziah and reported to him what Elijah had told them (verses 5-6). When Ahaziah questioned them about the prophet who had spoken to them, they told him that he was a man with a garment of hair and a leather belt around his waist (verses 7-8). Ahaziah recognized that this was Elijah.

When Ahaziah heard the prophecy of Elijah he sent fifty men to capture him. It is obvious that Ahaziah's intent was hostile. Some commentators believe that it was the understanding of some pagan traditions that a curse could be averted if that prophet was killed before his prophecy was fulfilled, but we do not know for sure if this was the intent of Ahaziah.

Ahaziah's messengers found Elijah on the top of a hill. They demanded that he come down to them (verse 9). Elijah responded, "If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men" (verse 10). Fire fell down from heaven and consumed the captain

and his men, confirming that Elijah was a man of God and that his word was true.

Hearing what had happened, Ahaziah sent another captain with fifty men. Again the captain demanded that Elijah come down from the mountain. Elijah gave him the same response and again fire came down from heaven and consumed the captain and his fifty men (verse 12).

When Ahaziah sent a third captain, this captain was much more cautious. Instead of demanding that Elijah come down from the hill, he fell down on his knees and pleaded with Elijah to have respect for his life and the lives of his men (verse 13). He came before the prophet in fear of his God.

This time the angel of the Lord told Elijah to go with the captain. He was not to be afraid. Elijah obeyed the word of the Lord and went with the captain to the king (verse 15).

When Elijah saw Ahaziah, he repeated to him what the Lord had told him. He told the king that God was angry with him because he had chosen to consult Baal-Zebub. Because he had turned his back on the God of Israel, he would not be healed of his injuries. He would die in his bed. Just as Elijah prophesied, Ahaziah died in his bed (verse 17). He had no son to succeed him. His brother Joram took his place on the throne.

While there were many other events in the life of Ahaziah recorded in the annals of the kings of Israel, these events were carefully chosen to show us where the nation of Israel was spiritually. In the history of Israel from the days of Jehoboam to Ahaziah not one king turned to the Lord and sought Him. What a tragedy this was.

For Consideration:

- We read in verse 1 that Moab revolted against Israel. How is this an indication of the loss of the Lord's blessing? How does sin strip us of the blessing of the Lord? What blessings has your community sacrificed because of sin?
- What does this passage teach us about the importance of seeking the Lord and His purposes? Do you consult the Lord about your decisions? Who else do we consult? Is it wrong to consult other people? Can the Lord use other people to lead us?
- The third captain of fifty had a very different attitude toward Elijah and his God. How did this save his life? How important is our attitude when we approach God? Have you ever approached God with a wrong attitude? Explain.

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you any sin in your life that is stripping you of greater blessing from Him.
- Ask the Lord to teach you how to seek Him more in the plans you make.
- Ask the Lord to search your heart to see if there are any attitudes that do not bring Him glory and honour. Confess these attitudes and ask for victory over them.

23

ELIJAH IS TAKEN AWAY

Read 2 Kings 2:1-25

Elijah's time as a prophet was coming to an end. God had told him that he was to anoint Elisha in his place (1 Kings 19:16). From verse 1 we learn that Elijah was going to be taken to heaven in a whirlwind (verse 1).

In verse 2, Elijah told his servant Elisha to remain at Gilgal while he went to Bethel. Elisha knew that something was going to happen to his master, and he refused to leave him. On their way to Bethel they were met by a company of prophets who told Elisha that the Lord was going to take Elijah from him that day (verse 3).

After meeting with the company of prophets in Bethel, Elijah decided to go to Jericho (verse 4). Again he told Elisha to remain while he moved on. Elisha refused to listen to his master and went with him to Jericho.

Notice that Elijah met with another company of prophets in Jericho. Some see this company to be some kind of school that Elijah may have founded for prophets. It seems that Elijah wanted to spend time with these prophets before the Lord took him away. As in Bethel, the prophets in Jericho

told Elisha that the Lord was going to take his master away (verse 5).

From Jericho, Elijah headed toward the Jordan. Again he told Elisha to remain where he was, but as on the other occasions, Elisha refused to obey and came along with his master (verse 6).

When they arrived at the Jordan they met fifty men from a company of prophets there. These men also knew that something was going to happen that day. Elijah and Elisha stopped at the Jordan River. Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water in the Jordan River divided and the two crossed over on dry land (verse 8). We can only imagine the amazement of the fifty prophets who stood at a distance watching what was happening.

When the two prophets crossed the Jordan, Elijah turned to Elisha and asked him what he could do for him before he was taken away. Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit (verse 9).

What did Elisha mean when he made this request? Some have come to believe that Elisha was asking to have twice as much power and prophetic gifting as Elijah. This is not the case. In asking for a double-portion, Elisha is simply asking that he would be given the privilege of carrying on Elijah's ministry as his successor. According to the Law of Moses, a first born child who was to be the successor of his father and the next head of the family was to receive a double portion of his father's estate. This is quite clear from Deuteronomy 21:17 where we read:

He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all

he has. That son is the first sign of his father's strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him.

Elisha is asking Elijah to appoint him as the heir to his position so that he could continue what his master had begun. This was in direct fulfillment of the command of the Lord in 1 Kings 19:16. Elijah told his servant Elisha that if he saw him being taken away the position would be his (verse 10). In stating this, Elijah is leaving the matter in the hands of the Lord, who alone could make such a decision concerning his successor.

After this conversation, Elijah and Elisha were walking alone and talking together when suddenly a chariot of fire appeared and separated the two of them. In an instant, Elijah was taken into heaven in a whirlwind (verse 11). Elisha was overwhelmed at the site of what had taken place and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!"

The expression, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" can be confusing. There are two things we should note in this statement of Elisha. Notice first how he saw his relationship with Elijah. Elijah was a father to him. Elijah had taken him under his wings and taught him as a son.

Second, notice that Elisha called his father "The chariots and horsemen of Israel." This phrase is difficult to understand. It may be a description of his power as a man of God in Israel. The chariots and horsemen of Israel represented the military strength of the nation. This one man had the power of the whole Israelite army. He was able to accomplish what the whole army of Israel with all their chariots and horsemen could not accomplish. It is interesting that Elisha would also be called by this same name in

2 Kings 13:14. He would bear the name, authority and power of his spiritual father Elijah.

That was the last time Elisha saw Elijah. As he stood alone by Jordan's shores, Elisha tore his clothes in a sign of grief and mourning (verse 12). After grieving for Elijah, Elisha noticed that his master's cloak had fallen to the ground. We need to understand something about this cloak. In 1 Kings 19:19 Elijah threw his cloak over Elisha in a symbolic gesture to show that he would be his successor and carry on his ministry. We should also note in verse 8 that Elijah used this cloak to part the waters of the Jordan. It is not that the cloak itself had any magical power. It was, however, a symbol of the authority of God on him. The cloak can be compared to the uniform a police officer wears. The uniform in itself has no magical power but when a police officer wears that uniform, people listen because they recognize it as a symbol of authority. When Elijah dropped his cloak he was appointing Elisha to be his successor and passing on his prophetic authority to him.

Elisha accepted that prophetic office by picking up Elijah's cloak. The first proof of his prophetic authority came when he stood by the bank of the Jordan which had returned to its normal flow. As he had seen Elijah do, Elisha took the cloak and struck the water. The waters parted and he crossed over (verse 14).

It is hard to say how much the company of prophets had seen from the other side of the Jordan. It is clear from verse 15, however, that they saw that the spirit of Elijah was resting on Elisha. When Elisha returned to them, they ran out to greet him and bowed to the ground before him in respect and submission (verse 15).

The company of prophets, wondering where Elijah was, suggested to Elisha that they go look for him. They felt that maybe the Spirit of the Lord had set him down on a mountain or in a valley somewhere (verse 16). Elisha knew that this was not the case. He knew that Elijah had gone to be with the Lord and would not return to them. He told the prophets that there was no sense in looking for him. The prophets insisted on searching, however, and Elisha finally gave them permission. After three days of searching, the prophets could not find Elijah so they returned to Elisha. The fact that they could not find him settled in their mind that Elisha was the successor and that the Lord had indeed taken Elijah to heaven.

The remainder of chapter 2 gives evidence of the power of God on Elisha. This evidence confirms that he was God's chosen servant to replace Elijah.

We see in verse 19 that the men of Jericho came to Elisha with a problem. They told him that the water in their city was bad and the land unproductive. This likely was the result of the curse of God on the city from the time of Joshua.

At that time Joshua pronounced this solemn oath:

"Cursed before the LORD is the man who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: At the cost of his firstborn son will he lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest will he set up its gates." (Joshua 6:26)

Even in the days of Elisha the city was still suffering from the curse of God. Elisha called for a new bowl with salt in it. When the bowl was brought to him he went to a spring and threw the salt into it and proclaimed, "This is what the LORD says: 'I have healed this water. Never again will it

cause death or make the land unproductive.'" (verse 21) From that time forward the water was healed and the curse removed from the land.

From Jericho, Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was traveling, some boys from the region came up to him and began to mock him because he was bald (verse 23). Elisha turned around and called down a curse of God on the boys. Two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of them. Again, this was a sign from the Lord that Elisha was God's anointed servant.

For Consideration:

- How does Elisha's persistence in following Elijah show us that God had burdened his heart to carry on the ministry of Elijah? What burden has God put on your heart?
- How did God confirm Elisha's call by signs? Does God confirm His call in our lives today? How does He do this?
- What does the incident with the boys who mocked Elisha teach us about the importance of respect for God's servants? Do you have respect for the spiritual leaders God has given you? How do you show that respect?
- Elijah is compared to the chariots and horsemen of Israel. What evidence is there of the power of God in your life?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you clear evidence of His call on your life.
- Have you ever shown a lack of respect for God's servants? Ask God to forgive you. Ask Him to help you to show greater respect for His chosen servants.
- Ask God to give you greater authority in the area of your calling. Ask Him to use you in a greater way.

MOAB FALLS INTO A TRAP

Read 2 Kings 3:1-27

Because Ahaziah, son of Ahab had no son to succeed him, his brother Joram became king in his place (2 Kings 1:17). He would reign as king in Israel for a period of twelve years. Verse 2 describes him as a king who did evil in the eyes of the Lord, though he was not as evil as his father Ahab and mother Jezebel. Joram got rid of the sacred stone of Baal that his father had made (verse 2). He also sought to rid the land of the influence of Baal worship. While this was a good thing, it is clear from verse 3 that Joram did not turn to the Lord God. Instead of following the sins of Ahab (Baal worship), Joram's allegiance was to the sins of Jeroboam. Joram's desire was to lead his people into a renewal of the worship of the golden calves set up by Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:28). While Joram did not follow the ways of his father, he still turned his back on the Lord God of Israel.

During the reign of Ahab, Mesha, the king of Moab supplied Israel with sheep, rams and wool. When Ahab died, however, Mesha rebelled against Israel (verse 5). In response Joram mobilized his forces (verse 6). He sent a message to Jehoshaphat, king of Judah asking for support to fight Moab. Jehoshaphat agreed to join him in battle

(verse 7). We understand from verse 9 that Joram also formed an alliance with Edom to fight Moab.

The kings of Israel, Judah and Edom decided that they would attack Moab by taking the route through the Desert of Edom (verse 8). This was not the easiest route to take. As they travelled for seven days in the desert, Israel and Edom ran out of water (verse 9). This put them in a very difficult situation. In their discouragement, they began to wonder if the Lord was going to hand them over to the Moabites (verse 10).

Jehoshaphat was the only one of these kings who was walking in the ways of God. He asked if there was a prophet of the Lord who they could consult to see the purpose of the Lord for them (verse 11). One of Joram's officers told them about Elisha the prophet. Jehoshaphat recognized his name immediately and said: "The word of the LORD is with him" (verse 12). Jehoshaphat knew Elisha's reputation and recommended him highly to the other kings. They decided to go to him.

When Elisha saw the kings, he directed his conversation to Joram, king of Israel. "What do we have to do with each other? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother," Elisha said to him (verse 13). In saying this, Elisha is expressing God's disapproval of Joram's ways. Joram should have been serving the Lord God but instead he had chosen to worship of the golden calves. Elisha asked him why he would consult the Lord God of his fathers when he served other gods. Joram told Elisha, however, that it was the Lord God who had called them to do battle and not his pagan gods.

In verse 14 Elisha told the kings that it was only out of respect for Jehoshaphat that he would even seek the Lord's

will on their behalf. If it were not for the presence of Jehoshaphat, Elisha would not have taken notice of Joram or spoken to him. If we want God to hear us, we need to seek him with a sincere heart. Joram's heart was not right with God.

Out of respect for Jehoshaphat, Elisha called for a harpist to be brought (verse 15). It was while the harpist was playing that the spirit of the Lord came on Elisha. It is important that we examine what is happening here. It appears that Elisha needed to clear his mind of all other things in order to hear from the Lord God. The music quieted his mind and allowed him to focus on the Lord and what the Lord might have to say to him about this matter.

All too often we wonder why we are not hearing from God and knowing His clear direction. Could it be that we are too busy and our minds are too cluttered with the things of this world? It would do us all good to take time of quiet reflection on God. We need to have times of quiet where we can listen and let God speak. Often in my life I have become so busy that I did not give the Spirit of God time and opportunity to lead and direct me? My mind has all too often become so preoccupied with service and ministry that I have not been able to sense the leading of the Spirit of God. Elisha took time to be quiet. He used music to focus his mind on God and rid it of distractions. This is not the only way to focus on God. For each of us it may be something different. What is important is that we quiet our mind so God can speak to us and we can hear.

In this quiet, the Lord spoke to Elisha and said:

Make this valley full of ditches. For this is what the LORD says: You will see neither wind nor rain, yet this valley will be filled with water, and you, your

cattle and your other animals will drink. (verses 16-17)

Elisha also prophesied that God would hand Moab over to them (verse 18).

There is clear evidence here of the wonderful grace of God. God would provide the water that this thirsty army needed. He would change the desert valley into a lake of water to meet all their need. In doing this, God showed Himself to be a God of mercy and provision. His blessing was going to fall on rebellious Joram. He would provide for their need. There in the desert, streams of water would flow in abundance. He can do the same for us as well.

Elisha told the three kings who came to consult him that it was the will of God that they destroy every fortified city and major town. They were to cut down every good tree and stop all the springs of water. Every good field was to be filled with stones. It is important that we understand what God was saying here. God wanted to give His people victory but he knew the temptation it would be for them to return to their sin and evil. He knew that if God's people did not utterly destroy the enemy, they would fall into the sins of the nations they conquered. God expected that when He gave these kings victory they would destroy their enemy completely so that their victory would not be in vain. He expected them persevere in the victories He gave them.

As Elisha had prophesied, the next morning, when the people got up for morning sacrifices, the valley was filled with water (verse 20). The water had rushed into the valley from the region of Edom.

The Moabites heard that the kings of Israel, Judah and Edom had come against them and gathered their weapons for battle (verse 21). When they got up in the morning, the sun was shining on the water that had rushed silently into the valley overnight. From where the Moabites were situated, the water was bright red with the sun reflecting off it. The Moabites believed it was blood. The only explanation the Moabites could find for such a great amount of blood in the valley was that there had been a terrible battle. Knowing that the kings of Israel, Judah and Edom were in the region, they assumed that they had turned against each other (verse 23). If this was the case then they would not have to fight. All they would have to do was to gather the plunder. Unsuspecting Moab rushed off to do just that.

When the Moabites arrived, they were surprised to see the camp of Israel unharmed. They did not expect to find anyone in the camp. They were greeted by an entire army ready for battle. The Israelite army rose up against unsuspecting Moab. Moab fled from them but they were slaughtered. Israel destroyed the towns and filled the fields with stones. They filled up the springs and cut down every good tree (verse 25).

Though the Moabites tried to break through the ranks of Edom with seven hundred swordsmen, they were unsuccessful (verse 26). Seeing that he had failed in this attempt, the king of Moab turned to his gods. In verse 27 he took his firstborn son, who was to succeed him and sacrificed him to his gods. Likely he was trying to gain the favour of his god so that he would come to help him in battle. Though his son was sacrificed, his god did not respond and the fury of Israel continued against him until he was completely defeated.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about seeking God when our hearts are not right with Him? Are there things in your life that are not right with God today? What are they?
- Elisha quiets his heart in order to hear from the Lord. Do you have time in your busy schedule to hear from the Lord God? How important is it for us to take time to listen to the Lord's leading?
- God provided water in the desert valley when His people were in need. What is your particular need today? Is God able to provide what you need?
- God expected His people to destroy their enemy completely. Why is it important that we close every door to past sin when the Lord gives us victory? Have you ever fallen back into defeat after God had given you victory? What is the challenge of this passage to you today?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you a heart that is right with Him.
- Ask God to show you how you can find time alone with Him in quiet so that He can speak to you and lead you in His path. Ask God to forgive you for being too busy for Him.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the victories He has given you in life. Ask Him to give you grace to walk in those victories each day.

25

ELISHA'S

MIRACULOUS MINISTRY

Read 2 Kings 4:1-44

In the last chapter we saw how Elisha prophesied that Joram's army would receive water in the desert and defeat the army of Moab. All these details took place exactly as the prophet had predicted. Elisha was not only a prophet mighty in words but also in deeds. In this chapter we see some of the miraculous deeds of this mighty prophet.

The Prophet's Widow

Verses 1-7 tell about the wife of one of the company of prophets who came to Elisha with a problem. She told him how her husband, a prophet, had died. Elisha obviously knew him because verse 1 tells us that he knew how he had revered the Lord. His widow, however, was in time of real difficulty. With her husband gone, his creditors were coming to collect their debts. The widow did not have money to pay this debt and they were going to take her children as slaves.

Hearing about her problem, Elisha asked the widow what she had in her house (verse 2). She told him that all she had was a little oil. Elisha told her to go to her neighbours and ask them for empty jars. The prophet was very clear. She was *not* to ask for a few jars (verse 3). She was to gather all the jars she could find. When she had gathered all the jars she could find, she was to bring them into her house and shut the door behind her two boys. When she had shut the doors she was to pour the oil she had into the jars. As each jar was filled she was to put it aside and fill another.

The widow did as Elisha had told her. She gathered the jars, brought them to her house and shut the door. She then began to pour the little oil she had into the first jar. To her surprise, that jar was filled. She put it aside and had her son bring another jar—she filled this jar, too. Only when all the jars had been filled did the oil stop flowing (verse 6). She told Elisha what had happened. He told her to sell the oil and use the money to pay off her debts. They were to live on what remained.

God provided for this widow in a miraculous way. Elisha was not present when this took place. He simply told the widow what she was to do and God did the rest. God used what the widow had, to accomplish this great miracle. The widow needed to take a step of faith that day. She needed to gather her jars in obedience to God's word through Elisha. She could have been content with one or two jars but Elisha clearly told her to gather all she could.

What has the Lord given you today? What resources or gifts are you willing to put at His disposal? Will you step out in faith and gather your jars so God can fill them? What has God been putting on your heart to do? Will you step out with what you have and use it?

The Woman of Shunem

In verses 8-37 Elisha met a woman from the region of Shunem. We learn from verse 8 that she was a very rich woman. She asked Elisha to stay for a meal at her home. Her invitation was an open invitation so that whenever Elisha came by that region he stopped there for a meal. We can be sure that this was a great blessing to the prophet.

One day the woman spoke to her husband about Elisha. She asked him if they could make a small room for him on the roof of their house. They would place a bed, a table and chair and a lamp in that room. This would be a place where the prophet could stay anytime he came to the region. Her husband agreed to this and a room was made for Elisha.

One day when Elisha was staying there, he called for the Shunemmite woman. When she came to him, Elisha expressed his deep appreciation for the room she and her husband had built for him. He told her that he wanted to do something for her in return. He offered to speak to the king or the commander of the army on her behalf (verse 13).

The woman desired no such favour from the prophet. She had all that she needed and was quite happy where she was.

When the woman went away, Elisha asked his servant Gehazi for his advice in this matter. "What can be done for her?" he asked (verse 14). Elisha's servant told him that the woman and her husband did not have a son. What made the matter more difficult for them as a family was that fact that the woman's husband was old. He would soon pass away and there would be no son to inherit his estate.

In verse 15 Elisha called the woman back. As she stood at the door of his room, Elisha told her that by this same time next year she would hold a son in her arms (verse 16). The woman had a hard time believing what Elisha was telling her. "Don't mislead your servant, O man of God!" she told him. The woman appeared to be touched deeply by this prophecy. Obviously, this was a problem she and her husband had been having. Just as Elisha prophesied, however, she became pregnant and gave birth to a son (verse 17).

One day the child went out to see his father who was in the field with the reapers gathering the harvest (verse 18). While he was with his father he complained of a severe headache. His father commanded one of his servants to carry him home to his mother. The servant obeyed and brought the young boy home. He sat for some time on his mother's lap and then died (verse 20). The woman took her son, laid him on Elisha's bed and shut the door.

Calling to her husband she asked him to send her and one of his servants with a donkey to Elisha. Her husband, not knowing that his son had died, questioned his wife about why she needed to go that day as it was getting late in the day. When she insisted, however, he gave her permission. She saddled the donkey and told her servant to move quickly (verse 24). They set out and found Elisha on Mount Carmel.

When Elisha saw the woman at a distance he asked Gehazi to run to her and ask her if her husband and child were all right (verse 26). God had hidden from Elisha what had happened. When he saw her, however, he felt that something had to be wrong.

The woman told Gehazi that everything was all right. She did not want to speak to him about this matter. Instead she came to Elisha. When she saw Elisha, she took hold of his feet. She did not want to let him go until he had heard her request. Gehazi tried to push her away but Elisha told him to leave her alone. The prophet recognized that the woman was in bitter distress but God had not shown him the cause (verse 27).

It is quite clear from the fact that God had hidden this distress from him that Elisha was fully dependent on God for every revelation. He had no natural ability in himself. His gift was a supernatural one. He only knew what God chose to reveal. Elisha is reminded of his inability in this.

The woman reminded Elisha of how he had prophesied that she would have a child. At that time she had told him not to raise her hopes (verse 28). When Elisha heard what the woman said, he turned to his servant, told him to take his staff and run with haste to the woman's house. He was to greet no one on the way. When he arrived he was to take Elisha's staff and lay it on the boy's face (verse 29). Elisha returned with the woman to her house (verse 30).

Gehazi ran ahead and did as Elisha told him. He laid the prophet's staff on the face of the boy but there was no response. Gehazi returned to meet Elisha and told him that the boy had not responded (verse 31).

Elisha reached the house and found the boy lying dead on the couch (verse 32). He went into the room and shut the door. He prayed to the Lord and lay on the boy putting his mouth to his mouth, his eyes to his eyes and his hands to his hands (verse 34). It is interesting to note here that Elijah, Elisha's master, had done a similar thing for a widow in Zarephath (see 1 Kings 17:17-22).

As Elisha stretched himself out on the boy, the boy's body began to grow warm (verse 34). Verse 35 tells us that Elisha walked back and forth in the room and stretched himself once more on the boy. At that point, the boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes (verse 35). We are not told if there was any significance to his sneezing seven times. Suffice it to say that this young boy was being released from the bondage of death.

When the boy's life was restored, Elisha called for the boy's mother (verse 36). When she came to Elisha, the prophet presented her son to her alive. In gratefulness to Elisha, the woman fell at his feet and bowed to the ground before him (verse 37).

Through the powerful work of God in Elisha, death itself was reversed. This was not a miracle that took place in an instant. Elisha had to wrestle in prayer for the life of this child. Sometimes God answers our prayers immediately and other times He calls us to fight hard and long for an answer.

Poisoned Stew

Verses 38-41 tell the story of what happened when Elisha went to the region of Gilgal. There was a famine in the land at that time. In Gilgal the prophet was spending some time with a company of prophets. One day Elisha asked his servant to cook a large pot of stew for the prophets who had gathered with him (verse 38).

One of the servants went out into the fields to gather herbs for the stew. He found a wild vine and gathered it with some gourds. He cut them all up and put them in the stew and served it to the prophets. As the prophets began to eat

they noticed the poisoned vine in the stew. "O man of God, there is death in the pot!" they cried out (verse 40).

Elisha called for some flour to be put in the pot of stew, for it to be served to the men. When this was done, the poison was neutralized and no harm came to the men who had eaten it (verse 41).

Multiplication of Bread

One day a man came from the region of Baal Shalishah to bring Elisha twenty loaves of barley bread baked from the first ripe grain. He also brought him some heads of new grain (verse 42).

"Give it to the people to eat," Elisha said (verse 42). Elisha's servant was somewhat perplexed by this request. "How can I set this before a hundred men?" he asked (verse 43). Elisha told his servant that the Lord had told him that this is what he was to do and that the people would eat and there would be some left over. In obedience to the Lord, the bread was set out before the people and they all ate. When the meal was done there was still some left over (verse 44). The Lord provided for the needs of His people by multiplying what they had.

What we see from this that God is a God of miracles and miraculous provision. We can take great comfort in this. We also see here how the Lord God used Elisha in a powerful way. There can be no questioning the fact that Elisha was a true prophet of God. We see evidence of the power of God at work in his life.

For Consideration:

- How does the miracle Elisha performed with the widow's oil show us how we need to put all we have at the Lord's disposal? What do you need to offer to the Lord today? Can the Lord use the little you have to accomplish His purposes?
- The woman of Shunem offered hospitality to the prophet Elisha? How do you think this encouraged him? How would the Lord have you minister to one of his servants today?
- God did not reveal to Elisha that the Shunemmite woman's son had died. What does this tell us about Elisha's dependence on the Lord God for everything?
- Consider Elisha's struggle to raise the son of the woman of Shunem from the dead. Has God called you to do battle in prayer for something particular? How does this encourage you to persevere?
- Consider the various miracles of Elisha in this passage. Notice that there is no particular pattern to these miracles. One time Elisha was not present when the miracle took place. Another time he had to wrestle and lay on the boy for his life to be restored. On another occasion he put flour in a pot to neutralize the poison. What does this teach us? How important is it that we listen to God and do things His way?

For Prayer:

- Thank God that He is a God of miracles and miraculous provision.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have questioned His power and ability.
- Thank the Lord that He is able to use the little you have to accomplish great things.
- Ask the Lord to show you how He would have you bless His servants this week.
- Ask the Lord to help you to do things His way and not try to do them in your own way. Ask Him to give you ears to hear Him and a will to listen and obey.

26

NAAMAN'S LEPROSY

Read 2 Kings 5:1-27

This is a story of Naaman, a military commander in the army of Aram. It should be noted that Aram was an enemy to Israel and Judah (see 1 Kings 11:15; 1 Kings 20:1-5). Naaman was a man who had gained respect as a military commander because of his many victories. He was highly regarded by the king of Aram. Naaman, however, had leprosy (verse 1).

Evidence of hostility between Aram and Israel can be seen in verse 2. Aram sent out raiding parties into Israel. On one of those occasions Aram took captive a young girl from Israel. She was given to Naaman's wife as a servant (verse 2). We need to see here that what appears to be evil can be used of God to accomplish His great purposes. Little did this young girl know the plan of God for her life?

One day the young girl said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." Obviously this stirred up hope in the heart of her mistress who mentioned this to her husband. Hearing this, Naaman went to the king and told him what the little girl had said (verse 4). In reality Naaman was looking for the king's permission to go to Israel to find this

prophet. The king of Aram granted him permission and agreed to send a letter to the king of Israel with ten talents of silver (750 pounds or 340 kilograms), six thousand shekels of gold (150 pounds or 70 kilograms) and ten sets of clothing. We see from this the value the king of Aram placed on the life of Naaman. To put this gift in perspective, we read in 1 Kings 16:24 that Omri purchased the city of Samaria, where Naaman was going, for the sum of 2 talents of silver (150 pounds or 70 kilograms). Here the king of Aram is offering five times this amount in silver and adding another 150 pounds (70 kilograms) of gold and ten sets of clothes for the healing of this important military official. His life was highly valued.

The king of Aram sent Naaman off with a letter to the king of Israel, asking that he cure Naaman of his leprosy. When the king of Israel read the letter, however, he was disturbed. He felt that Aram was trying to pick a quarrel with him. "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!" the king said (verse 6).

While the young servant girl knew of Elisha and understood the power of God in his life, the king of Israel had turned his back on God and His ways. He was helpless in this situation because none of his gods could do anything for Naaman's situation. The simple faith of a servant girl had set something in motion that the great king of Israel was incapable of handling.

God had a purpose in these events. Word of the king's problem reached the ears of Elisha. He sent word to the king asking that the man be sent to him. While the king of Israel did not serve the Lord God, he agreed to send Naaman.

Naaman went with his horses and chariots to Elisha's house. I like to picture a very official looking party arriving at the house where Elisha was staying. This was a display of Naaman's greatness. He was a man who was accustomed to pomp and ceremony. He was highly valued in his land and was used to having servants bow down to him and follow his commands. He expected to be noticed and demanded respect.

Elisha did not come to see him or greet Naaman. Instead, he told him to go to the Jordan river and wash himself seven times to be cured of his leprosy (verse 10). Naaman was insulted. He had thought that Elisha would have at least come out to greet him, called on the name of Lord and waved his hand over the spot affected by leprosy. Elisha did none of these things.

Naaman left Elisha's house in anger saying, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" (verse 12).

It was Naaman's servants who challenged him to listen to what Elisha said. "If the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'" they told him (verse 13). Naaman listened to his servants and went to the Jordan River. He dipped himself in the Jordan seven times and when he came out of the river his flesh was clean and free from all leprosy.

Let me mention three points here. First, notice the attitude of Naaman. Here was a man who was filled with anger and rage against the prophet of God. Here was a man who did not believe that the Jordan River had any more power than the rivers of his own country. He had a wrong attitude and

lacked faith in what the God of Israel could do. Despite this, the Lord healed him. God is still able to work in those who come to Him with bad attitudes and no faith. While it is important that we guard our attitudes and trust the Lord, God's answer to our prayers does not depend entirely on us. How thankful we need to be that He is able to work despite our weaknesses and shortcomings.

Notice second that Naaman almost missed the blessing of the Lord because he was looking for something big and spectacular. Sometimes the Lord answers our prayers in very simple ways. If we are always looking for a thunderbolt from heaven we will miss the wonderful things God is doing in silence. Most of what God does goes unnoticed. It is important that we open our eyes to see what He is doing in the simple things.

Notice finally that Naaman almost walked away from his healing. The rivers of his own land looked more attractive than the Jordan River. Were it not for the voices of his servants calling him to listen to the words of the prophet, he would have returned home to King Aram and died with his disease. Naaman was not a man who was accustomed to listening to the commands of his servants. He gave the commands and his servants listened to him. To take the advice of his servants meant humbling himself and recognizing that he was wrong. Not everyone is willing to admit they are wrong. Not everyone is willing to humble themselves and go to the Jordan to wash. I'm sure he felt silly. I'm sure he felt somewhat embarrassed, but deep down inside he realized then maybe, just maybe, there was truth in what the prophet had said. Unless he tested that word he would never know.

Naaman was powerfully touched by what had happened to him that day. Note here that the credit did not go to Elisha. Elisha was nowhere in sight when this healing took place. Naaman knew that his healing was from the God of Israel. He and his attendants went back to Elisha and stood before him. There in the presence of Elisha he said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel" (verse 15). Naaman had tested the word of God and found it to be true. He saw a clear demonstration of the reality of God and His power. None of his own gods could do what the God of Israel did.

Naaman wanted somehow to pay Elisha for his healing. He offered him a gift. Elisha refused to accept anything from him even though Naaman urged him (verse 16).

Before leaving, Naaman asked Elisha for permission to take as much earth as a pair of mules could carry. Naaman gives the reason for this strange request in verse 17. He told Elisha that he would never again make burnt offerings or sacrifices to any other god but the Lord God of Israel. Naaman believed that the Lord God could only be worshiped in the land of Israel. He did not understand that God was everywhere present. He felt that he needed to take part of Israel back with him to his own land in order to have a place where he could worship God. His intention was to take this earth back to Aram and set up a shrine where he could worship the God of Israel.

Notice that this new faith in the God of Israel put Naaman in a difficult situation. In verse 18 he told Elisha about his official obligation to enter with the king into the temple of the god Rimmon. As the military official, he was expected to bow down in respect to this god. Naaman recognized that this was not what he should do as one who was committing himself to serving the Lord God but he felt obligated

to carry out his official responsibilities. Elisha did not give him permission to do this. He simply told Naaman to go in peace. Naaman left Elisha a changed man (verse 19). He left him, however, with a very weak understanding of the God of Israel and his obligations toward Him.

After the departure of Naaman, Gehazi, Elisha's servant thought:

My master was too easy on Naaman, this Aramean, by not accepting from him what he brought. As surely as the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something from him (verse 20).

Gehazi saw here a means of enriching himself. He ran after Naaman and caught up to his chariot (verse 21). When Naaman questioned him, Gehazi told him that Elisha had sent him. He told Naaman that two young prophets had just come to visit and Elisha wondered if he could give them each a talent of silver (75 pounds or 34 kilograms) and two sets of clothing (verse 22). None of this story was true.

Naaman was more than happy to give Gehazi what he asked for. He tied two talents of silver in two bags and gave him two sets of clothing and had his servants carry them ahead of Gehazi (verse 23). When they arrived at a hill some distance away from where Gehazi and Elisha were staying, Gehazi took the articles from the servants and sent them away (verse 24). Obviously, it was not Gehazi's intention that Elisha discover what he had done.

When Gehazi returned to Elisha, the prophet asked him where he had been. Gehazi told him that he had not been anywhere, trying to hide what he had done. Elisha was not deceived by his reply. God had revealed to him what his

servant had done (verse 26). That day, Elisha told Gehazi that the leprosy of Naaman would cling to him and his descendants forever. He and his family were cursed because of his deceitful actions. When Gehazi left the presence of the prophet, he became leprous (verse 27). We see in this what God thinks of deception and greed especially in one of His servants.

The story of Naaman is the story of a young servant girl who was powerfully used of God in her exile. It is the story of how the God of Israel reaches out to a foreign military commander to bring him to an awareness of His power and grace. God's heart has always been for the entire world. We catch a glimpse of this missionary heart in this passage. This great man was reached by a simple servant girl. Who would God have you reach?

For Consideration:

- How did God use the Israelite servant girl in Naaman's household? What does this tell us about how God can use us?
- Consider the fact that Aram and Israel were enemies. How does the Israelite servant girl demonstrate compassion for her enemies? Would you have the same compassion if you were this servant girl?
- Consider the hopelessness of the king of Israel to deal with Naaman's problem. His gods were incapable of healing this military official. How do you suppose the healing of Naaman would impact the king of Israel?

- We see from this passage that God often works in simple ways. Consider some of the simple ways God has worked in your life. Have you ever missed what God was doing because you were looking for something bigger?
- What do we learn about how God can work despite our lack of faith or wrong attitudes?
- What does this chapter reveal to us about the missionary heart of God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the ways He can use even the simplest person to accomplish great things for His glory. Ask the Lord to open your heart to the things He would have you to accomplish for His glory.
- Ask the Lord to give you compassion for your enemies? Take a moment to pray for them asking that God would heal and restore them to Himself.
- Thank the Lord that His work does not depend on us. Thank Him that He is able to advance His kingdom despite our weaknesses and failures.
- Ask the Lord to give you more of a missionary heart. Thank him that it is His desire to reach out to the entire world.

27

THE DEFEAT OF ARAM

Read 2 Kings 6:1-7:20

Elisha was a powerful prophet of God. In chapters 4-5 we saw how God used him to raise the dead, heal the sick and predict great victories for God's people. He was a highly respected man of God, but one that was not free from struggles. There were those who sought to kill him because they did not like the message he proclaimed.

As we begin chapter 6 we discover there was a problem facing one of the companies of prophets with whom Elisha had an association. It seems that this particular company or school of prophets had outgrown its accommodations. Elisha had been meeting with the prophets at this location, but there were so many coming to listen to him that there was no more room for them. This may be an indication of the popularity of Elisha and his reputation as a prophet of God. All the prophets wanted to sit under his teaching and learn from him.

They decided to go to the Jordan River where they would build bigger accommodations (verse 2). Elisha agreed to this and so he and the other prophets set out to build a new school.

As they were building their new accommodations one of the prophets was cutting down a tree and his axe head fell into the water (verse 4). This was upsetting to the man because the axe had been borrowed. Elisha asked him where it had fallen into the water. When he was shown the location, Elisha cut a stick and threw it into the water at the precise location. When he did, the axe head floated to the surface, where it was lifted out (verses 6-7).

This was nothing short of a miracle. What particularly strikes me about this miracle is the fact that God was interested in the prophet's problem. God is not just concerned about the life and death problems we face in life. From our lost keys to knowing what to do in a given situation, God is interested in the daily difficulties we encounter. Sometimes we don't bring our problems to him because we believe He would not be interested in them. This passage shows us that God is indeed interested. He cares for the smallest detail.

What is true about the small details of everyday life is also true for the life and death situations we encounter. The remainder of chapters 6 and 7 show us how the Lord God cared for His people in a very difficult time in their history.

The Arameans and the Israelites were at war with each other. The king of Aram chose to set up camp in a certain place with the hopes of trapping the Israelites (6:8). Elisha sent word to the king of Israel of the Aramean plot. Israel's king checked out what Elisha had told him and found it to be true, thus avoiding the Arameans. This happened again and again. God would speak to Elisha and tell him the Aramean's plan and he would tell the king of Israel (6:10).

The king of Aram was enraged by this constant frustration of his plans. It was very obvious that someone was telling

the king of Israel his plans. He suspected a spy in his midst (6:11). The king's officials told the king, however, that Elisha the prophet was telling the king what he was speaking in private (6:12). Even the Arameans had heard of the wonderful ways that God would speak to Elisha. Naaman, the king's top official, had been healed through the ministry of Elisha.

When the king found out what was happening and how his plans were being foiled, he ordered that Elisha be captured (6:13). There could be no victory until Elisha was taken out of the picture.

Elisha was in the city of Dothan at that time. The king sent horses, chariots and a large force to surround the city and capture the prophet (6:14). When Elisha's servant woke up in the morning and discovered that the city was surrounded, he said to Elisha: "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" (verse 15). The servant was obviously fearful for his life and that of his master Elisha.

Elisha's response was quite different. "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (6:16). Elisha then prayed that the Lord would open the eyes of his servant. God answered that prayer and Elisha's servant saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (6:17). This army of God's angels was far more powerful than the Aramean army that surrounded them. God was watching out for his prophet. He sent an entire force of angelic warriors to guard him. This force was unseen to the natural eye but still very present. What an encouragement this ought to be to us today. We may never see the angels God has sent to protect us. We can be sure, however, that God watches

over those who belong to him. We can minister with confidence. God cares for His servants and will protect and keep them in their hour of need.

The Aramean army began to advance toward Elisha. As they did, Elisha called out to the Lord and asked Him to strike the army with blindness. The Lord answered (6:18). Notice that while the hills were surrounded by the angelic forces of God, victory only came when Elisha called out to God. Victory is ours but we must ask for it. There are times when we do not have victory simply because we have not asked for it.

The forces of Aram were blinded. We are not told exactly how they were blinded. It may be that they were completely blinded or it may be more likely that they were blinded to seeing and recognizing Elisha. When the men reached Elisha, the prophet told them that they were in the wrong city. He suggested that they follow him and he would lead them to the person they were looking for (6:19). The men, not realizing that they were speaking to Elisha, blindly followed him to the city of Samaria.

When they entered the city of Samaria, God opened their eyes to where they were (6:20). They had been led directly into a trap. When the king of Israel saw what had happened, he asked Elisha whether he should kill the Aramean soldiers (6:21). Elisha told him that he was not to kill them. Instead, he was to give them food and water and send them back to their master (6:22). That act of kindness caused Aram to stop pursuing Israel and Elisha for a time. Sometimes an act of kindness is a more powerful weapon than aggression.

Ben-Hadad, king of Aram would not be stopped for long. Sometime later he mobilized his army again and marched

to Samaria where he besieged the city (6:24). No food or provisions were permitted into Samaria, resulting in famine. The situation was so serious that a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver (2 pounds or 1 kilogram) and a quarter of a cab of seed pods (1/2 pint or 0.3 litres) was sold for five shekels (2 ounces or 55 grams). It should be noted that according to the Law of Moses in Leviticus 11:2-7) the donkey was an unclean animal and was not to be eaten. The famine was so severe in the land that people were willing to eat whatever they could to survive.

Another indication of the severity of the famine in Samaria at this time can be seen in the conversation that took place between Joram, the king of Israel and a woman who was seated by the wall of the city. When the king was passing by, the woman cried out to the king asking for help. Frustrated with his inability to do anything about the situation, the king replied to the woman, "If the LORD does not help you, where can I get help for you?" (6:27). The king did, however, ask the woman to tell him about her problem.

The woman at the city wall told him that she and her friend each had a son. They decided that they would eat her son and the next day they would eat her friend's son. Having agreed to this they cooked her son and ate him. The next day, however, the woman's friend refused to give up her son. She had hidden him so he would not be eaten (6:29).

This story grieved the king. He tore his robes as he walked along the wall surveying the situation. As he tore his robes the people saw that he had sackcloth on his body (6:30). He wore this because he was mourning. As he walked by the wall, he said, "May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat remains on his shoulders today!" (verse 31). The king blamed Elisha for what had taken place. He saw this catastrophe as being

from the Lord God of Israel, whom Elisha served. He vowed to kill Elisha.

King Joram sent his messengers to Elisha. His intentions were quite clear. He wanted to kill the prophet and cut off his head. Before the messengers arrived, however, the matter was revealed to Elisha. He was sitting in his house with the elders of the city. He told them what the king was trying to do and requested that they hold the door shut against these messengers (6:32). Even as the prophet spoke to the elders the king's messengers arrived.

Notice in verse 33 the attitude of Joram the king to what was happening in Samaria. He said, "This disaster is from the LORD. Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?" Possibly Elisha had been encouraging the king to wait on the Lord God for victory. Joram lost patience with the Lord. He believed that it was God's intent to destroy the city and he refused to wait for Him any longer. He saw God as his enemy and was going to take his stand against God and His prophet Elisha.

In 2 Kings 7:1 Elisha prophesied that by this same time tomorrow a seah (7 quarts or 7.3 litres) of flour would sell for a shekel (2/5th of an ounce or 11 grams) and two seah (13 quarts or 15 litres) of barley for a shekel (2/5th of an ounce or 11 grams) at the gate of the city. In other words, there would be food available for everyone the next day.

When the king's officer heard this prophecy, he said, "Look, even if the LORD should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?" (verse 2). His doubt was clear. He openly mocked the prophecy of Elisha. Because of his doubt and mockery, Elisha told him that while he would see the answer to this prophecy with his own eyes he would not eat any of it.

There were four lepers at the entrance of the city gate. They, too, were suffering from the devastation of the famine. As they considered their options, they asked themselves, "Why stay here until we die? (7:3). There was no help for them in the city. To remain in the city was to starve to death. They decided that they would go to the Arameans and surrender to them. If they spared them they would live. If they decided to kill them, they would only hasten what was going to happen anyway. They had nothing to lose.

At dusk they went to the Aramean camp. When they reached the edge of the camp, they discovered that it had been abandoned (7:5). The Lord had caused the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots, horses and a great army. This sound had sent the army into panic. Believing that the Israelites had hired the Hittite and Egyptian armies to attack them, the Arameans fled the camp, abandoning their tents, horses and donkeys (7:6-7).

The lepers entered one of the tents and discovered food, drink, silver, gold and clothes. They ate and drank and hid the treasure they found. They entered a second tent and did the same (7:8).

As they were feasting and carrying off the treasure, they were convicted in their hearts about what they were doing. They realized that there was a whole city perishing for lack of food and provisions. They knew that if they waited until daybreak and it was discovered that they had been helping themselves to the riches without telling the king, they would be severely punished. This was news that could not wait until morning. They decided to go to the palace and tell the king immediately (7:9).

The lepers went to the city gatekeeper and called out to him (7:10). They told him how they had gone into the camp

of the Arameans and found it was abandoned but filled with provisions. When the gatekeeper heard this news, he shouted it out and reported it to the palace (7:11).

The king was suspicious of this news and believed it to be a trap. He thought that the Arameans were hiding somewhere and when they went out to get the provisions they would attack and kill them (7:12). One of the king's officials, however, suggested that the king have some men take five horses and send them out to confirm the words of the lepers. The king agreed and sent out two chariots commanding the drivers to report what they discovered (7:14). The men went out and found that the road was strewn with clothing and equipment as if the Arameans had been in such a hurry to escape that they were casting off everything that would hinder their flight (7:15). The messengers reported this to the king.

When the king was assured that this was not a trap, the people went out and plundered the camp. Just as Elisha had prophesied, a seah of flour sold for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of the city (7:16). King Joram put the official who had mocked Elisha in charge of the gate. That day there was such a rush to plunder the Aramean camp that the king's official was trampled to death by the mob, fulfilling Elisha's prophecy that he would see the answer to the prophecy but never eat it.

For Consideration:

- Elisha was a good prophet of the Lord, yet he had many enemies? Does God promise that we will not have enemies?

- What do we learn in chapter 6 about Elisha's reputation as a prophet of God? What evidence do we have that he had a large following?
- Is God concerned about the small problems we have in life? What does the story of the lost axe head teach us?
- God is able to frustrate the plans of kings and officials. What does this teach us about His sovereignty over the events of history?
- God surrounded the prophet Elisha with a great heavenly army. Do you believe that He surrounds you in your problems as well?
- How is kindness a more powerful weapon than aggression and force?
- What happened to the official who mocked the prophecy of Elisha? What does this teach us about the importance of honouring the servants of God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is concerned about the little problems we have in life as well as the big ones.
- Thank the Lord that He surrounds you and protects you in your time of need. Ask Him to forgive you for doubting His loving care.

- Thank God that He is in control of the events of life. Thank Him that even the most powerful forces of this earth are under His watchful eye.
- Ask the Lord to open your eyes to see the victories He has for you. Ask Him to send His angels before you to prepare the way for your victory.

28

HAZAE L, JEHORAM AND AHAZIAH

Read 2 Kings 8:1-29

In 2 Kings 4:17-37 we read how Elisha raised a young boy to life. In 2 Kings 8:1 Elisha told this boy's mother to leave the region because there was going to be a famine in the land. Elisha told her that the famine would last seven years.

The woman and her family did as the prophet told them. They moved to Philistia, where they stayed for seven years (verse 2). At the end of this time, when they returned home, the woman had to see the king about getting her property back. It is unclear why this land had to be reclaimed.

It happened that when the woman was coming in to see the king, Elisha's servant was speaking with him. The king had asked him to tell about some of the great works of the prophet (8:4). Gehazi was telling the story of how the prophet Elisha had restored the dead boy to life when the woman walked in to beg the king for her property. It was

not by chance that the woman arrived at that precise moment. Gehazi recognized her and told the king that it was her son Elisha had raised from the dead.

The king was so intrigued by this story that he asked the woman to tell him what had happened (verse 6). The boy's mother told how Elisha had raised her son to life. The story touched the king and he assigned an official to her case, telling him to restore everything that belonged to her and her family. He even commanded that all the income derived from her land during her absence was to be given to her as well.

Notice several things in this story. First, we see the sovereignty of the Lord. The woman came at exactly the right time. Gehazi, Elisha's servant, was there to recognize her. The conversation was about her when she arrived. None of this was by chance. God was working out His purposes in a wonderful way.

Second, we see God's care for this woman. God saw that her land did not grow up in weeds over the seven year period. We can only imagine what the land would have looked like after seven years of not being cultivated. It appears that someone had been taking care of the land in her absence.

Third, notice the incredible blessing of the Lord in the life of the woman and her family. Not only did he restore her land but he restored all the years of harvest. The money from seven years of harvests was given to the woman and her family. This was an unexpected blessing.

The woman and her husband had opened their hearts to God's servant Elisha and God blessed them abundantly for this. God honoured them because they honoured His

servant. God sees how we treat His servants. He holds them in high regard and whoever honours his servants, honours him. This is the teaching of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 25:40 when he says, "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'"

Death of Ben-Hadad

In verse 7 of the chapter the attention is turned to the kings of Aram, Israel and Judah. We begin with the story of the final days of Ben-Hadad, king of Aram. Aram had been an enemy to Israel and had often raided Israel. In verse 7 we read that Ben-Hadad was sick. In the sovereignty of God, Elisha was in the region of Damascus at that time. The king was informed of his presence and he commanded his official Hazeal to take a gift with him and consult Elisha to see if he would recover from his sickness.

It should be remembered that Naaman, another of Ben-Hadad's officials had been healed miraculously by Elisha (2 Kings 5). Ben-Hadad knew Elisha to be a powerful prophet of God and had confidence in his words.

Hazeal went to meet Elisha. He brought with him forty camel-loads of the finest products of Damascus (verse 9). Obviously, this was a significant gift. When Hazeal found Elisha he told him that Ben-Hadad had sent him to inquire whether he would recover from his illness.

Elisha's answer is somewhat difficult to understand. He told Hazeal to return to his master and say, "You will certainly recover; but the LORD has revealed to me that he will in fact die." This word of Elisha seems to contradict itself. The king would recover from his illness but he would also die.

It should be noted that in 1 Kings 19:15 Elijah had anointed Hazael to be king over Aram. Elisha was obviously aware of this, as was Hazael. It may be that Hazael was just waiting for the opportunity to become king. It may be that he saw the sickness of Ben-Hadad to be the opportunity to become king in fulfillment of this prophecy.

As Hazael stood in the presence of Elisha that day, the Lord revealed many things to the prophet about him and his future reign. Elisha stared at Hazael as God spoke to him about him. Suddenly, Elisha began to weep (verse 11).

When Hazael asked him why he was weeping, the prophet told him that he knew the great harm he was going to inflict on the Israelites. He prophesied that Hazael would set fire to their fortified places, kill their young men, dash their children to the ground and rip open their pregnant women (verse 12). Hazael rejected this prophecy, reassuring Elisha that he would never be so cruel (verse 13). Elisha confirmed the prophecy of his master Elijah, telling Hazael that he would become king over Aram.

Hazael returned to the king and told him that Elisha said he would recover from his illness. Notice that he made no mention of the fact while he would recover from his illness he would die. Nor did he mention anything about Elisha's prophecy that he would become king in his place (verse 18).

Very likely, Ben-Hadad did recover from his illness as the prophet predicted. The next day however, Hazael took a thick cloth, soaked it in water and smothered the king so that he died (verse 15). It is likely that Hazael used the sickness of the king as a cover up. Everyone knew that Ben-Hadad was very ill. When they found him dead in his

bed, they would have assumed that he died of his disease and no one would have suspected that Hazeal had murdered him. After the death of Ben-Hadad, Hazeal became king in his place. The word of Elisha came true.

Jehoram of Judah

At this time, Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat became king in the nation of Judah (verse 16). He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and reigned for eight years in the city of Jerusalem. Jehoram was an evil king. Verse 18 describes him to be like the kings of Israel who had turned their backs on God. Jehoram married one of the daughters of evil King Ahab of Israel. It should be remembered that Ahab worshiped Baal. Very likely Baal worship was introduced to the nation of Judah through Jehoram. This was a radical departure from the path God had set out for the nation.

Despite this departure from His purpose, God did not forsake Judah. He was unwilling to destroy them because of the promise He had made to maintain a light for David and his descendants forever (verse 19).

While God did not turn His back on Judah under the reign of evil Jehoram, He did allow Edom to rebel against them (verse 20). During this time, Edom had been subject to Judah. According to 1 Kings 22:47 Edom did not have a king. Now because of the evil ways of Jehoram, Edom was released from Judah's control and became an independent nation with their own king. God did not reject Judah, but the nation did suffer loss because of its rebellion.

This rebellion of Edom was a declaration of war. Though Jehoram fought the Edomites he was not able to conquer them or regain control of their territory. Edom would be a

constant thorn in Judah's side. Notice in verse 22 that Edom was not the only nation to rebel against Judah. Libnah also revolted at the same time. The rebellion of these two nations was likely a direct result of Judah's rebellion against God. Judah was weakened as a nation because Jehoram king led them into the worship of Baal. Only in obedience to God is there true victory.

Jehoram died after reigning for eight years. 2 Chronicles 21:20 describe the feeling of the people of his day when he died.

Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years. He passed away, to no one's regret, and was buried in the City of David, but not in the tombs of the kings.

Jehoram would die at the age of forty and no one would mourn for him. In his death he was not even given the privilege of being buried with the kings of Judah. This was the result of walking away from God. His son Ahaziah became king in his place (verse 24).

Ahaziah of Judah

Jehoram's son Ahaziah became king of Judah at the age of twenty-two (verse 26). He only reigned for one year. From verse 27 it seems quite clear that Ahaziah had been influenced by his father's decision to marry into the family of Ahab and adopt their evil ways. Verse 27 tells us that Ahaziah walked in the ways of the evil king Ahab of Israel because he was related to this family by marriage. This is a reference to the fact that he worshipped Baal. Ahaziah's father Jehoram brought Baal worship into Judah because of his marriage to Ahab's daughter. His son followed in his ways.

Ahaziah was now connected to Israel and its evil ways by marriage. We see evidence of this connection in verses 28-29. Joram, the son of Ahab, king of Israel went to war against Hazeal of Aram and was wounded (verse 28). Joram returned to Jezreel to recover from his wounds. In verse 29 King Ahaziah of Judah went to see him. Ahaziah was now married into this evil family and would have been obligated to visit Joram. His marriage now put him in a place of obligation.

By marrying Ahab's daughter, Jehoram did not give his son a good example to follow. Instead he set him on the wrong path. Ahaziah simply carried on in his father's steps. He did not have the strength of character to do what was right. His new family ties seemed to obligate him to the path of evil. All this shows us just how important it is for us to set our children on the right path. It also shows us the influence of evil alliances and their power over us and our children.

For Consideration:

- How did the Lord God reward the woman whose son Elisha had raised from the dead? What does this story teach us about how God views acts of kindness toward His servants?
- What does the story of the woman in this chapter teach us about God's sovereignty over all the affairs of life? What encouragement do you find in this?

- Jehoram introduced Baal worship to Judah. While God did not destroy the nation, how did it suffer because of this?
- How did Jehoram's marriage to evil Ahab's daughter affect his reign and the reign of his son Ahaziah? What does this teach us about making alliances or partnerships with evil people? What partnerships have you made that have kept you from doing what God calls you to do?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you greater respect for your spiritual leaders. Ask Him to show you how you can minister more effectively to them.
- Thank the Lord for His wonderful sovereignty over all the affairs of life. Thank Him that He is Lord over your situation today.
- Ask the Lord to help you to get rid of any ungodly influence in your life that hinders you from being everything He wants you to be.
- Ask the Lord to help you to place your children's feet on the right path.

29

JEHU CLEANSSES THE LAND

Read 2 Kings 9:1-37

In the previous chapter we saw how King Jehoram of Judah and his son Ahaziah led the nation of Judah into the worship of Baal through their association by marriage with the family of Ahab. Attention now shifts in chapter 9 to the nation of Israel. At this point, Joram, the son of Ahab, was king in Israel. In chapter 8 he had gone to battle against the nation of Aram and was wounded in that battle. Ahaziah, king of Judah went to visit him.

While Ahaziah was in Israel, Elisha called one of the prophets from the company of prophets and told him to go to Ramoth Gilead with a flask of oil. There he would find a man by the name of Jehu. The prophet was to take Jehu away from his companions to an inner room and give him a special message (verse 2). He was then to take the flask of oil and anoint him, proclaiming: "This is what the LORD says: 'I anoint you king over Israel.'" When he had spoken that word, the prophet was to leave quickly (verse 3). We are not told why the prophet was to run without delay, but it may have been that his life would have been at stake, having committed treason against the King by this proclamation.

When the prophet arrived in Ramoth Gilead he found a group of army officers sitting together and told them that he had a message for their commander Jehu (verse 5). As Elisha commanded, the prophet took Jehu into a house and poured oil over his head and declared, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I anoint you king over the LORD's people Israel.'" Notice in verse 7 that the prophet told Jehu that he was to destroy the house of Ahab. This was God's way of avenging the blood of the prophets Jezebel, Ahab's wife, had killed (see 1 Kings 18:4).

The prophet told Jehu that God would destroy the household of Ahab, both family and servants. He would make Ahab's family like the house of Jeroboam and the household of Baasha who were completely destroyed because of sin (verse 9). Jezebel would be devoured by dogs and no one would bury her (verse 10).

When the prophet left and Jehu returned to his fellow officers, they asked him if everything was all right. Jehu did not want to tell his friends what the prophet had said. When they pressed him, however, he told them that the prophet had said he would become king in Israel (verse 12). When Jehu's friends and fellow officers heard what the prophet had said, they took off their coats and spread them before Jehu and blew the trumpet shouting, "Jehu is king" (verse 13).

Jehu told his men that they were not to let anyone leave the city to spread the news of his being proclaimed king (verse 15). He especially did not want this news to travel to King Joram. He wanted to take him by surprise.

Having commanded his officers to maintain silence about his desire to become king, Jehu then travelled to Jezreel

where Joram and Ahaziah were staying (verse 16). A watchman on the lookout tower saw Jehu and his troops approaching and warned the king (verse 17). The king sent a horseman out to meet Jehu to see if his intentions were peaceful. "What do you have to do with peace," was Jehu's reply. He then commanded the man to fall behind him (verse 18).

When the watchman on the lookout tower reported that the horseman had reached them but was not coming back, the king sent out a second messenger (verse 19). Jehu told him the same thing and instructed him to fall behind him.

This time when the watchman reported what had happened he added, "The driving is like that of Jehu son of Nimshi—he drives like a madman" (verse 20). When Joram heard this, he ordered that his chariot be hitched up. Despite his illness, Joram and Ahaziah king of Judah rode out to meet Jehu personally. The place where they met was the plot of ground that belonged to Naboth (verse 21). Jezebel, Joram's mother had Naboth and his sons killed so they could use his property for a vegetable garden (see 1 Kings 21:1-16). It would be here on this very plot of ground that God would bring vengeance on the family of Ahab.

When Joram saw Jehu he asked him personally if he had come in peace. Jehu replied, "How can there be peace... as long as all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel abound?" What is important to note is that Jehu understood something of the nature of Jezebel's evil and rebellion against God. He knew that God was going to avenge the blood of the prophets she had killed. He had a sense that he was on a divinely ordained mission to cleanse the land of evil.

It is significant that Ahaziah was also present that day. This was likely a warning to him as well of how God felt about the evil of Ahab. His coming to Israel to visit Joram was in the purpose and plan of God. God wanted to warn him of the evil of pursuing the path Ahab and Jezebel had set for the nation. Ahaziah would see first-hand the intense wrath of God against Jezebel and her evil ways.

When Joram heard the response of Jehu, he knew he was in trouble. He immediately turned around and fled, calling out to Ahaziah who was with him, "Treachery, Ahaziah!" (verse 23).

As Joram was fleeing his presence, Jehu drew his bow and shot him between the shoulders. The arrow pierced Joram's heart and he slumped down in his chariot (verse 24). Seeing that the arrow had hit its mark, Jehu told Bidkar, his chariot officer to pick him up and throw him in the field that belonged to Naboth. Notice that while the field had been taken from Naboth, it was still considered to be his.

In 1 Kings 21:18-24 Elijah had prophesied that because Ahab had taken the land of Naboth by force, dogs would lick up his blood on this very property. When Ahab humbled himself, God spared him from this indignity, but told him that the prophecy would be fulfilled in the life of his son (1 Kings 21:29). This is exactly what took place that day. Joram's body was thrown on Naboth's plot of land in fulfillment of Elijah's prophecy.

When King Ahaziah saw what had happened to Joram, he fled. Jehu chased after him, telling his men to kill him, too (verse 27). Ahaziah was wounded, but was able to escape to Megiddo where he would later die (verse 27). Ahaziah's

servant took him to Jerusalem and buried him with his ancestors (verse 28). Through Jehu, God removed two evil kings in Israel and Judah who were leading His people astray.

The work God had for Jehu was not finished. Queen Jezebel was still alive. She had been responsible for tremendous evil in the land of Israel. Because of her, many prophets of God had lost their lives.

When Jezebel heard about what had happened to her son Joram and Ahaziah, she put on her makeup and arranged her hair. She obviously knew that Jehu would not be long in coming to see her. She waited for him watching out her window (verse 30).

When Jehu entered the city gate she asked him if he came in peace. Notice that she called him Zimri. This is an historical reference to what took place in 1 Kings 16:8-20. Here we read how Zimri killed King Elah the son of Baasha and destroyed his entire family. Jezebel is accusing Jehu of being another Zimri. She accused him of treason by murdering his master, King Joram.

Jehu looked up to the window where Jezebel was and called up to those who were in the palace, "Who is on my side?" (verse 32). Two or three eunuchs looked down at him indicating that they supported him. Jehu ordered them to throw Jezebel down from her balcony (verse 33). The eunuchs obeyed and threw her down. Her blood splattered the wall and the horses as they trampled her underfoot.

Jehu left her on the ground and went in to the palace to eat and drink. When they had finished eating and drinking, he ordered that his men take care of the "cursed woman."

He told them to bury her body for she was, after all, the daughter of a king.

When his men went out to bury Jezebel, however, they only found her skull, her feet and her hands. They brought back this report to Jehu who immediately recognized that yet another word of the Lord spoken through Elijah the prophet had come to pass. In 1 Kings 21:23 Elijah prophesied that dogs would devour the flesh of Jezebel near the wall of Jezreel. Her body was destroyed beyond recognition by these dogs.

Jehu was particularly chosen by God to exercise judgment in the land. Ahab's family had done tremendous evil in Israel. They had led many astray into the horrible practice of Baal worship. They had been responsible for the death of many prophets of God. Ahaziah of Judah married into this family and was also following their evil ways. This was time for a major housecleaning in the lands of Judah and Israel. The time of judgment had come and God had swept the land clean of the influence of these ungodly leaders.

For Consideration:

- What role did God have for Jehu in this chapter?
- How do the actions of Jehu fulfil the prophecy of Elijah about Ahab's son and Jezebel?
- Was Ahaziah's presence in Jezreel with Joram an accident or a divine appointment? How does God use His presence in Israel with Joram to bring His judgment?

- God is pictured here cleansing the nations of Israel and Judah of the ungodly influences of its leaders. What ungodly influences does God need to remove from your land or your life?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He judges sin and evil. Ask Him to humble your nation before that judgment comes.
- Ask God to search your heart to see what ungodly influences need to be removed. Ask Him to remove those ungodly influences.

JEHU OF ISRAEL: MORE CLEANSING

Read 2 Kings 10:1-36

We saw in the previous chapter how God raised up a military commander by the name of Jehu to be king in Israel. Jehu was powerfully used of God to cleanse the land of the evil practices of Baal worship. He killed both Ahab's son Joram and the evil queen Jezebel. It was the purpose of the Lord, however, that he completely destroy the entire family of Ahab and wipe out Baal worship in Israel. Here in chapter 10 we see how Jehu continued in this role God had given him.

Samaria was the capital of Israel at this time. Seventy of Ahab's descendants lived in this city. Jehu wrote letters and sent them to the officials and to the guardians of Ahab's children (verse 1). In these letters he challenged them to take the best and most worthy of Ahab's sons and set him on the throne to defend his family (verse 2). This was a declaration of war against the household of Ahab in Samaria (see verse 3).

When the city officials received this letter they were afraid. They had heard how Jehu had defeated Joram of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah and said, "If two kings could not resist him, how can we?" (verse 4). The palace administrator, the city governor, the elders and the guardians sent a message to Jehu. In that message they declared their allegiance to him as their king. They refused to anoint any of Ahab's sons as king in opposition to him. They surrendered to Jehu and his wishes (verse 5).

Jehu responded to their letter by telling the officials that if they were truly on his side they would demonstrate this by cutting off the heads of Ahab's seventy descendants. They were to bring their heads to him in Jezreel by that time the next day (verse 6).

When the letter arrived, the city officials did as Jehu requested, putting the heads in baskets and sending them to Jehu (verse 7). Jehu ordered that the heads be put in two piles at the entrance to the city gate until morning (verse 8). Many people would have seen these heads. It would serve as an example to all who would follow in the ways of Ahab and the worship of Baal.

The next morning, Jehu went out and stood before all the people. The vision of the heads of Ahab's family would have been on the minds of the people. Jehu declared the people innocent in this matter. He accepted the blame for conspiring against his master Joram, but reminded the people that it was the city officials of Samaria and their guardians who had turned against Ahab's sons and killed them. The hand of God was against the family of Ahab. Jehu reminded the people that this was in direct fulfilment of the prophecy of Elijah the prophet (see 1 Kings 21:21-22).

Verse 11 tells us that Jehu also killed everyone in Jezreel who remained of the house of Ahab. He also killed his chief officials, close friends and priests who served him in the worship of Baal, leaving no survivors. This was in fulfilment of the prophecy of Elijah.

After destroying the family of Ahab in Jezreel, Jehu set out for Samaria. As he was on his way he met some relatives of King Ahaziah of Judah on their way to greet the families of King Ahab and his wife Jezebel (verse 13). Ahaziah of Judah was related to Ahab by marriage (see 2 Kings 8:26-27). Obviously, these relatives had not heard how Jehu had killed Ahab's entire family line. Jehu told his men to capture these relatives. They took them to the well of Beth Eked where they were slaughtered. There were forty-two men who died that day.

We should not see this as a coincidence. God's hand was on Jehu. He was using him to destroy Ahab's family line. God was sovereignly placing people on his path that He wanted to judge. Even the nation of Judah was experiencing the hand of God's judgment because of their association with Ahab.

In verses 15-16 we meet a man by the name of Jehonadab, the son of Recab. His descendants would become known as the Recabites. In Jeremiah 35:6-10 the Lord used them as an illustration of faithfulness. Some commentators believe that the Recabites were opposed to Baal worship and had resisted this movement under Ahab and his family line. When Jehu met Jehonadab on his way to Samaria, he greeted him and asked him if he was with him in his endeavour to wipe out the family of Ahab and the practice of Baal worship in the land (verse 15). Jehonadab reassured Jehu that he was in agreement with what he was doing. Jehu, being reassured, invited him to get in

his chariot to see his zeal for the Lord. Jehonadab obeyed and went with him to Samaria (verse 16). When Jehu arrived in Samaria he killed all remaining family members of Ahab's line (verse 17).

After exterminating the family of Ahab, Jehu gathered the people together and told them, "Ahab served Baal a little; Jehu will serve him much." He invited them to come to a great sacrifice for Baal. He threatened to kill anyone who failed to come to this sacrifice (verse 19). What Jehu did not tell the people was that the sacrifice he was going to make was the sacrifice of the lives of Baal's prophets and priests. Jehu was acting deceptively in order to kill the ministers of Baal.

A great assembly was proclaimed and word was sent throughout the land calling all ministers of Baal to this celebration (verses 20-21). Threatened with their lives if they stayed away, all of Baal's ministers came to this ceremony. They crowded into the temple of Baal in the city of Samaria (verse 21). Jehu had all the ministers of Baal put on their special robes (verse 22). This made them very easy to distinguish. He and Jehonadab then went into the temple and asked the prophets of Baal to look around to be sure that there were no servants of the Lord present (verse 23). When he was assured that no servant of the Lord was present, Jehu posted eighty men outside, warning them that if they let anyone escape the temple, they would do so at the cost of their lives (verse 24).

When Jehu finished with the burnt offering, he ordered his guards and officers to kill all the ministers of Baal. They were not to let any of them escape. The guards obeyed and killed the ministers of Baal, throwing their bodies out of the temple (verse 25). They entered the shrine and burned it taking out the sacred stone. They demolished the

sacred stone of Baal and tore down the temple. What remained of the temple was used as a toilet from that point on. 1 Kings 16:30 tell us that King Ahab had built the temple of Baal in Samaria. Jehu is credited with the removal of Baal worship in the nation of Israel (verse 28).

Jehu was not perfect. Verse 31 tells us that he was not careful to keep the law of God. He served the calf gods that Jeroboam had set up in Israel. He was a faithful servant, however, in ridding the nation of the worship of Baal. God was pleased with these efforts. In verse 30 the Lord blessed Jehu for his obedience. God promised that his descendants would sit on the throne of Israel for four generations (verse 30).

While Baal worship had been removed from Israel, there was still a lot of work to do in Israel. The golden calves were still being worshiped and God's people had still not turned to Him. This resulted in Israel's influence and size being reduced. Hazael of Aram overpowered Israel, taking some of its territory (verses 32-33). The Israelites were growing weaker because of their rebellion against the Lord God. Sin was stripping them of their power and influence.

Jehu ruled over Israel in Samaria for twenty-eight years (verse 36). The events of his reign were recorded in the annals of the kings of Israel (verse 34). He died and was buried in Samaria. His son Jehoahaz succeeded him as king on the throne of Israel (verse 35).

Jehu is an illustration of the tolerance of God. He was used of God to accomplish a tremendous work in Israel, but he was far from perfect. He worshiped the calf gods of Jeroboam. Despite these failures he was still used to accomplish God's purpose in Israel. God blessed him for what he

did though Israel, as a whole, suffered under his reign because of their continued refusal to turn from their calf gods to serve God alone.

For Consideration:

- What evidence do we have of God's presence with Jehu as he sought to rid the nation of Baal worship?
- Why was it so important that all remnants of Baal worship and the family of Ahab be removed from the land? What would have happened if these people and influences had not been removed?
- What sinful influences need to be removed from your life? How do these things make your walk with God more difficult?
- Jehu was not perfect. We are told that he was not careful to observe the law of God and he worshiped the calf gods of Jeroboam. God still used him to accomplish a particular purpose in Israel. What kind of person can God use? Do we have to be perfect for God to use us?
- While Jehu was used of God in a powerful way, the nation of Israel was weakened under his reign. What does this teach us about the importance of leaders seeking God with *all* their heart?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He can use us as we are. Thank Him that we do not have to be perfect to be used.
- Ask the Lord to give you a heart to seek Him more fully.
- Ask the Lord to search your heart to see if there is anything that would keep you from becoming stronger in Him. Ask Him to remove any disobedience and rebellion from your heart.
- Thank the Lord that when He calls us to do something He also goes before us and leads the way.

31

JOASH BECOMES

KING IN JUDAH

Read 2 Kings 11:1-21

As we begin chapter 11 of 2 Kings we meet Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, former king of Judah. Athaliah was the daughter of the evil king Ahab of Israel. She married Jehoram of Judah who fell into the ways of Ahab and worshiped the god Baal. She followed the ways of the evil Queen Jezebel.

When Athaliah heard that her son Ahaziah was killed, she conspired to assure her own place on the throne. To do this she needed to kill off all contenders for that throne. Verse 1 tells us that she proceeded to kill the royal family in Judah. This meant that she was killing her own family. This shows us just how evil a queen she really was. These were difficult days in Judah.

As Athaliah was killing off the royal family, Ahaziah's sister Jehosheba took one of Ahaziah's sons and stole him away to protect him from his grandmother. She hid Joash and his nurse in a bedroom so that he was not killed (verse 2). He remained hidden for six years (verse 3). From verse 21

we understand that Joash was seven years old when he became king. This means that Joash was just an infant when he was hidden away with his nurse. It is quite amazing how Joash could be hidden from Athaliah for such a long time.

In the seventh year of Joash's life, Jehoiada the priest sent for the military commanders and told them to report to the temple of the Lord (verse 4). When they arrived, he put them under oath and showed them King Ahaziah's son Joash. The nature of this oath is uncertain. It may be an oath of allegiance to Joash as the rightful heir to the throne.

When the military commanders had taken this oath, Jehoiada, the priest told them that those normally on duty on the Sabbath were to divide into three companies. The first company was to guard the royal palace, the second company was to station themselves at the Sur Gate and the final company was to support the guard who took turns at the temple. Those who were normally off duty on the Sabbath were to guard the temple for the king (verses 5-7).

These soldiers were to station themselves around the young king with their weapons in hand. Jehoiada told the soldiers that if anyone approached the king, they were to be put to death. Their task was to protect Joash at all costs. Jehoiada, the priest understood that Athaliah would not be happy with what was about to take place. She had already killed the other members of the royal family to assure her reign. She would not hesitate to kill Joash.

The commanders of the units did exactly as Jehoiada commanded. The priest gave them the spears and shields that

belonged to King David which had been stored in the temple of the Lord (verse 10). The guards stationed themselves around the king to protect him.

Jehoiada, the priest brought the king's son and put a crown on his head. He presented him with a copy of the covenant and proclaimed him to be king of Judah. Some commentators see this reference to the covenant to be a copy of the Law of Moses which the king was to read every day (see Deuteronomy 17:18-19).

After crowning Joash and giving him a copy of the covenant, the priest anointed him with oil and proclaimed him to be king. The people responded by clapping their hands and shouting, "Long live the king!" (verse 12).

When Queen Athaliah heard the shouting, she went to the temple to see what was happening. There she saw the newly anointed king standing by the pillar. Beside him were the officers and the trumpeters. The people were crying out and rejoicing. When she saw this, she tore her robes crying, "Treason! Treason!" (verse 14).

Jehoiada ordered the commanders to take Athaliah out of the temple and put her to death. Any who followed after her were also to be put to death (verse 15). In this way yet another descendant of Ahab was killed, fulfilling the prophecy of Elijah.

After Athaliah had been put to death, Jehoiada made a covenant between the people and the Lord God (verse 17). King Jehoram had introduced Baal worship to Judah and Ahaziah his son had followed in this path. Jehoiada the priest was calling for a renewal of the people's commitment to the Lord God. That day the people listened to Jehoiada and tore down the temple of Baal. They smashed

the altars and idols to pieces and killed Mattan, the priest of Baal (verse 18). We saw in the last chapter how Baal worship was removed from the nation of Israel by Jehu. Here in Judah a similar revival was taking place through the ministry of Jehoiada the priest.

With the guards posted around the temple and the palace, Jehoiada took Joash the newly crowned king from the temple where he had been proclaimed king to the palace where he would live. This was a great time in Judah. Verse 20 tells us that the people of the land rejoiced and the city was quiet because Athaliah had been killed. Her death caused the people to rejoice and brought quiet and greater stability to the nation. Joash was seven years old when he became king of Judah (verse 21).

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about the evil of Athaliah, queen of Judah? What does this tell us about the condition of the land of Judah at this time?
- How did God overthrow the evil rule of Athaliah and bring renewal into the land of Judah? Is God able to overthrow evil in our day as well?
- God protected Joash from the evil intentions of his grandmother. How has God's hand of protection been evident in your life? What does this teach us about how God keeps those he calls?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for His protection in your life. Thank Him for how He has protected you from physical and spiritual harm.
- Ask God to move in renewal in your personal life, your church and your nation. Ask Him to cleanse and renew your relationship with Him.
- Ask the Lord to cleanse you of any particular issue that keeps you from walking in deeper intimacy with Him.
- Thank the Lord that He does move in renewal and revival among His people. Thank Him that He is willing to break through our sin and rebellion to draw us to Himself.

32

THE REIGN AND DEATH OF JOASH, KING OF JUDAH

Read 2 Kings 12:1-21

In chapter 11 we saw how the young seven year old Joash became king of Judah, replacing his evil grandmother Athaliah. He would be king of Judah for a period of forty years reigning from Jerusalem.

Joash is described as a good king who did right in the eyes of the Lord all the years of Jehoiada the priest who had crowned him king (verse 2). From 2 Chronicles 24:17-22 we see that when Jehoiada the priest died, Joash listened to his officials and turned his back on the Lord God. It seems that his faith and loyalty was not tied to the Lord God so much as to Jehoiada. When Jehoiada the priest died, Joash found another allegiance. There are many people like this. They depend on other people in their spiritual walk. They do not have their own personal commitments but are followers of people they admire or respect.

While Joash generally did good in the eyes of the Lord all the days of the priest Jehoiada there were still pagan high

places in the land that had not been removed. People continued to worship foreign gods and offer incense to them in these high places (verse 3).

One of the greatest spiritual accomplishments of King Joash was the repairing of the temple in Jerusalem. Under the leadership of Jehoram and Amaziah, Baal worship had been introduced to Israel and the temple of the Lord was ignored and fell into disrepair. Now that Jehoiada the priest had removed Baal worship from the land it was time to clean up the temple and restore the worship of the Lord God in Judah.

Joash called the Lord's priests together and told them to collect money for the repairs of the temple. This money was to come from three sources. First, it was to be collected from a census. Exodus 30:11-16 tells us that this money was regularly collected from men of twenty years of age. This census money was to be used for the work of the temple. The second source of money was from vows that had been made to the Lord. The regulations concerning the vow and how much money was to be paid when a special vow was made are recorded in Leviticus 27:1-27. The final source of income was from voluntary gifts given by believers. Joash commanded the priests to gather this money and use it to make the necessary repairs to the temple (verse 5).

By the twenty-third year of his reign, the priests had still not repaired the temple (verse 6). We are not told when the king first gave the command to restore the temple, but the context seems to indicate that long time had passed and the repairs were still not being made on the temple.

Seeing that nothing was being done to repair the temple, Joash called for a meeting with Jehoiada and the other

priests. When they gathered at his request, he asked them why they were not obeying his orders to repair the temple. It appears that they were gathering money as he had requested but not using it for the repairs. It appears that all the money was going into one general fund which was also being used for the general work of the temple.

Joash made two recommendations to the priests in verse 8. First, he told them to no longer take money for their regular duties from their treasurers. This meant that the money that was coming in was to go directly to the repairs on the temple. Second, the priests were to concentrate on their priestly duties and hire someone else to do the work of repairing the temple.

In response to the command of King Joash, Jehoiada the priest took a chest and bored a hole in its lid. He placed that chest beside the altar. The priests who were responsible for guarding the entrance of the temple placed the gifts of the people in the chest (verse 9). Whenever they saw that there was a large amount in it the royal secretary and the high priest would count the money and put it into bags (verse 10). This money would then be given to the men appointed to supervise the work on the temple. They used the money to pay their workers and purchase supplies (verse 11-12).

This money was not to be used for anything but the repairs on the temple. Regular activities and supplies for the temple were to be paid for in another way. Verse 13 makes it clear that the money was not to be used to pay for making silver basins, wick trimmers, sprinkling bowls, trumpets or supplies for regular worship. Joash wanted all the money collected from the people to be used to restore the temple.

The priests were to be paid from the money received from guilt offerings and sin offerings (verse 16). This money was not brought into the temple but given directly to support the priests and the regular temple activities. There was no accounting required from those who handled the money to repair the temple. This was because these individuals acted in complete honesty (verse 15).

By hiring workers for this task and devoting all the offerings to the repairs of the temple the work would be completed. The people had to make a sacrifice by bringing their gifts. The priests also made a sacrifice by not taking money from the offerings of the people for their regular duties. This way the work on the temple would be completed and the building would be put in order.

Chapter 12 ends on a very sad note. We have seen how Joash had a burden to repair the temple of the Lord. Toward the end of his reign, however, after the death of Jehoiada the priest, Joash turned his back on the Lord God (see 2 Chronicles 24:17-22). Some commentators believe that this resulted in God sending Hazael of Aram against Gath (verse 17). Hazael was successful in taking the city of Gath. After his success at Gath he turned his attention to the city of Jerusalem. In order to save the city, Joash took the sacred objects from the treasuries of the temple and the royal palace and gave them to Hazael. When he received this large gift, Hazael withdrew from Jerusalem (verse 18).

What a change of heart we see in this chapter. Joash, who was known for his work of restoring the temple, ends his life by emptying it of its treasure. What seemed to mean so much to him at the beginning meant nothing in the end. His passion for the Lord God and His temple was no more.

What a warning this is for us. Joash served the Lord as long as the priest Jehoiada was living. When the priest died, however, he seemed to be influenced by other people. His faith was not his own. It depended on those around him and the influences of that day. He was not solidly anchored in a personal faith. How much is your faith influenced by the people around you? Are you able to stand firm no matter what happens? Do circumstances change your commitment to the Lord God? Do your friends determine how much you will serve the Lord? How we need men and women in our day whose faith is deeply personal and who will not change with the influences of people or circumstances in life.

Toward the end of Joash's life, his officials conspired against him and assassinated him. He died a violent death and was buried with his ancestors in the City of David (verse 21). His son Amaziah succeeded him as king. The events of Joash's reign were recorded in the annals of the kings of Judah. These particular events were chosen by the Lord, however, to give us a sense of the spiritual climate in the land of Judah at the time.

Joash's story is the story of a king who began well but did not end well. He walked away from his Lord and died in rebellion against the God he served. His story is a challenge to us to be vigilant in our walk with the Lord. It is a challenge for us to strive toward a deep personal faith that will withstand the influences of circumstances or people.

For Consideration:

- King Joash had a faith that depended on circumstances and the influence of the people who surrounded him. How is this a sign of weak faith?
- What influences the state of your faith and walk with God today? Do you have a faith that will remain strong despite the influences of people around you or circumstances that come your way?
- The priests of Joash's day seemed to be content to work in a temple that was in disrepair. Is it possible for us to live with wrong attitudes or habits in life? Do you have any "disrepair" in your life? What relationships, actions or attitudes do you need to mend?
- When Joash turned his back on the Lord, the enemy came against him. He was weakened because he turned from God. To what extent is the church of our day weakened because it has turned from the Lord God?
- Is it possible for someone to start well and not finish well? What kind of things can keep us from finishing well?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you a deep personal faith that will not be negatively influenced by people or circumstances. Thank the Lord that He is worthy of our commitment no matter what happens in life.

- Ask the Lord to show you areas of your life that need repair. Ask Him to give you grace and wisdom to do something about this.
- Ask the Lord to help you to value His priorities in life.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to finish well.

33

JEHOAHAZ AND JEHOASH, KINGS OF ISRAEL

Read 2 Kings 13:1-25

Jehoahaz

In chapter 13, attention shifts from the nation of Judah back to the nation of Israel. While Joash was king in Judah, Jehoahaz became king in Israel (verse 1). Jehoahaz would reign seventeen years in Samaria, the capital of Israel.

Verse 2 describes Jehoahaz as an evil king who followed the sins of Jeroboam. The sin of Jeroboam was the worship of the golden calf. Jehoahaz followed the worship of the golden calf and turned his back on the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Because of this, the anger of the Lord burned against Israel and He kept them under the power of Hazael king of Aram and his son Ben-Hadad (verse 3). Victory for God's people could only be in obedience to the Lord their God. As long as they were rebelling against the Lord God they would be weak and powerless against their enemy. This is the teaching of 2 Chronicles 7:14 where the Lord said:

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

Here in this verse God told His people that if they wanted their land to be healed they would need to humble themselves, turn from evil and seek His face. Victory in our spiritual life is found in obedience to God and His purposes. Israel, at this point, did not walk in obedience and was suffering the consequences of sin.

In verse 4 we see a rare thing for the nation of Israel at this point in its history. Jehoahaz sought the favour of the Lord. God listened to him and provided a deliverer for Israel so that they were able to escape the power of Aram. Verse 5 tells us that Israel again lived in their own homes as before. The land, which had been taken over by Aram, was now restored to them.

While the Lord did deliver Israel from the oppression of Aram, Israel did not turn from sin. God delivered them from their enemy but they continued to serve the golden calf of Jeroboam and left the pagan Asherah pole standing in Samaria (verse 6). Israel wanted the deliverance of God but she was not willing to turn from her evil ways.

God's wonderful grace is seen here in rescuing those who did not want Him. He reached down to them simply because Jehoahaz called out to Him. We might see a false motivation on the part of Jehoahaz. It is doubtful if Jehoahaz had any intention of turning from his evil practices. He had not served the Lord God, but God still reached out to him and was gracious to him. How much more does God

delight in rescuing those who love and serve Him with a sincere heart?

Even the weak and selfish cry of an evil king reached the ears of the Lord God. God heard that cry and responded. Maybe you are in a situation in life where you don't feel like you have a right to call out to God. This passage is a challenge to us. Even our frail cry is heard.

Evidence of just how weak Israel was at this time can be seen in verse 7. All that remained of Israel's army was fifty horsemen, ten chariots and ten thousand foot soldiers. The Arameans had destroyed the rest of Israel's army. We can see from this just how helpless Jehoahaz was before his enemy. The sin of Israel had weakened them significantly. The golden calves had been of no help to Israel. As long as they worshiped and served these calves they were weak and helpless before their enemies. Israel continued, however, to serve their calf gods.

Those who are caught up in sin do not consider its effects. They will willingly perish in order to enjoy the taste of sin. Only a powerful work of God's Spirit can break its desire. Israel was losing everything because of sin, yet they continued to lust after it.

Jehoahaz died and was buried with his ancestors in Samaria. The events of his reign were recorded in the annals of the kings of Israel (verse 8-9). His son Jehoash followed him as king in Israel.

Jehoash

Jehoash, son of Jehoahaz became king in Israel after his father's death. He reigned from Samaria for seventeen years (verse 10). Jehoash followed the ways of his father and continued in the sin of Jeroboam by worshiping the golden calves (verse 11). For many years now since its separation from the Judah, Israel had turned its back on God choosing rather to serve the golden calves and Baal.

In verses 14-19 we have the record of Jehoash's communication with the prophet Elisha. Here in these verses Jehoash consulted the prophet Elisha in a time of real need. The army of Israel was so small at this time that Jehoash was virtually powerless. The enemy was a constant threat. In his despair, Jehoash went to the prophet Elisha to seek his advice and help.

Notice in verse 14 what Jehoash called the prophet Elisha. First he called him "My father." This was an indication of the role that Elisha had played in the nation. Elisha was a spiritual father. He was one the nation could go to for advice, counsel and guidance. Second, Jehoash called Elisha, "The chariots and horsemen of Israel." This was the name that Elisha had given to his master Elijah in 2 Kings 2:12. Now Jehoash calls him by the same name. This name seems to represent the power and authority of Elisha as a man of God. This one man was more powerful than the entire military force of Israel because of his relationship with God. This one man and his God could do what the entire army of Israel could not do.

What is particularly important in verse 14 is the fact that Elisha was on his deathbed. He was suffering from the disease that would eventually take his life. When Jehoash went to see the prophet Elisha, he wept over him. While

the nation of Israel had not often turned to Elisha for help and counsel, in losing Elisha they were losing a very powerful man. Jehoash knew this.

Elisha understood the burden on the heart of Jehoash and the nation of Israel. They were oppressed and weak. He told Jehoash to get a bow and some arrows. Jehoash obeyed. Elisha told King Jehoash to take the bow in his hand. Elisha then put his own hands on the hands of the king (verse 16). Elisha told the king to open the east window. The east may have been the area controlled by the enemy. Jehoash would have understood this. Elisha told the king to shoot an arrow out the window. When Jehoash shot the arrow Elisha told him the significance of what he had just done. In verse 17 Elisha told the king that the arrow he had shot out the east window was the arrow of victory over Aram. He told Jehoash that he would have victory over the nation that had been oppressing him.

Having communicated the significance of the arrows and the east window, Elisha then told Jehoash to take his arrows and strike the ground with them. Jehoash obeyed and struck the ground three times (verse 18). Elisha became angry with the king for only striking the ground three times. In verse 19 he told him that he should have struck the ground five or six times. Had he done this he could have had completely destroyed Aram. As it was, now he would only defeat them three times (one time for each time he struck the arrows on the ground).

It is important that we examine what transpired that day between Elisha and Jehoash. Elisha told the king that he would have victory. That was clearly symbolized by the arrow he shot out the window. The question was not whether Jehoash would have victory but how much victory would

he have. This was represented by how many times the arrows were struck on the ground. How much victory depended on Jehoash? Victory was assured but the quality and quantity of victory depended on the king. We cannot miss this point. God has promised us victory. The Lord Jesus has already defeated the enemy. The problem, however, is that when we look around us we do not always see evidence of that victory in the lives of believers. This is because many believers are too timid. They have never learned to step out boldly into that victory. They are content with tapping the arrow of the Lord's victory three times on the ground. God wants to give them much more but they never step into that greater victory. This passage is a real challenge to us to step out in faith for even greater victories from God. The limitation is not in God but in our willingness to receive from Him all He wants to give. Jehoash was content with far too little. May we not fall into the same trap.

Jehoash died and was buried with his ancestors in Samaria. Other events of his reign were recorded in the history of the kings of Israel (verses 12-13). His son Jeroboam II succeeded him on the throne. While we do not want to read too much into the name of Jehoash's son Jeroboam it is interesting that he bears the same name as the first king of the divided Israel who led God's people astray into the worship of the golden calves. This may be some indication of Jehoash's allegiance at the time he had his son.

At this time, Elisha the prophet died and was buried. On one occasion, as some Israelites were burying a man's body they were caught by surprise by Moabite raiders. In their rush to escape these invaders they threw the body into the tomb of Elisha the prophet. When the body

touched the bones of Elisha the man's life was restored and he stood to his feet (verse 21).

This is an important passage and teaches us something very important about the prophet and the power of God. Elisha, at this point, was dead. He had no power of his own. He could not think or act, yet his dead bones brought life back to this man. This shows us that the power was not in Elisha or his ability. The power available to him was the power of God. There are those who might use this passage to show that there is power in the bones or clothing of dead saints. This is not what the passage is intending to teach. All healing come from God. The intention of the passage is to show us that God's power is not limited to great men and women of faith. His power can be demonstrated in anything He chooses.

While it is important for us to walk with God and live in obedience, we need to understand that great things are accomplished not because of us but because of God and his choice to use us. We should be careful to live for God and develop the gifts He has given us but need to realize that God can use the dead bones of a prophet to accomplish His purposes. He is not dependant on how skilful we are in the use of our gifts. This passage ought to humble us. If you think that God is using you because you are very spiritual and have really developed your gifts, take a look at this passage again. God used Elisha's bones to show us that it is not our skill or spiritual maturity that will win the battle, but His power alone.

Chapter 13 concludes with a word about the king that God had been using to judge Israel. Hazael of Aram had been oppressing Israel. He had been a thorn in the side of Israel for some time (verse 22). While Hazael had oppressed Is-

rael he was not given complete victory over them. God restrained him. God was gracious to Israel even in their rebellion. He did this because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (verse 23). Despite their rebellion against Him, God refused to leave Israel.

Hazael of Aram died and was succeeded by his son Ben-Hadad (verse 24). Jehoash was successful in recapturing the towns Aram had taken from Israel and defeated Ben-Hadad three times in fulfilment of the prophecy of Elisha the prophet.

For Consideration:

- What evidence do we have in this passage that God is willing to bless even those whose motivation is not always right?
- What does Elisha's word to Jehoash about the arrows teach us? To what extent are you claiming the victory that is yours through the Lord God?
- What is the lesson to be learned from the man who was given life through Elisha's dead bones? Is God dependant on our skills and maturity to accomplish His purpose? How does this humble us?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He can use you just as you are. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you somehow believed that your success in ministry was because of your own skills and maturity. Thank Him for the

reminder that all blessing in ministry is a result of His power through unworthy servants.

- Thank the Lord that He does not leave us even when we wander from Him. Thank Him for His faithfulness to you despite your sin.
- Ask the Lord to teach you to walk in greater obedience to His Word and the leading of His Holy Spirit.

34

AMAZIAH AND AZARIAH OF JUDAH AND JEHOASH AND JEROBOAM II OF ISRAEL

Read 2 Kings 14:1-29

Amaziah of Judah

Amaziah became king of Judah when he was twenty-five years old. He reigned for twenty-nine years from the city of Jerusalem (verses 1-2). He was a good king but followed the example of his father Joash, who served the Lord as long as Jehoiada the priest was alive but turned from the Lord after his death. Amaziah did not get rid of the high places in the land where the nation still served foreign gods (verse 4).

One of the first things Amaziah did as new king in Judah was to get rid of those who had murdered his father (see 2 Kings 12:21). This act would have secured his reign as king. Notice in verse 6 that Amaziah did not put the sons of the assassins to death because he was following what was written in the Book of the Law of Moses. This law is recorded for us in Deuteronomy 24:16.

Fathers shall not be put to death for their children,
nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to
die for his own sin.

The temptation for Amaziah would have been to exterminate the entire family of those who had killed his father but he exercised restraint in this matter out of respect for the Word of God. This tells us something about him and his character at this point of his reign.

Amaziah was also noted for his battle with the Edomites. In verse 7 he defeated ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt and captured the city of Sela (see also 2 Chronicles 25:11-12). He renamed the city Joktheel.

Relationships between Israel and Judah were strained during the reign of Amaziah. Evidence of this is found in verse 8 where Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash, king of Israel, challenging him to meet him face to face in battle.

The king of Israel sent a response to Amaziah's in verses 9-10. The response was sent in the form of a parable:

A thistle in Lebanon sent a message to a cedar in Lebanon, 'Give your daughter to my son in marriage.' Then a wild beast in Lebanon came along and trampled the thistle underfoot. You have indeed defeated Edom and now you are arrogant. Glory in your victory, but stay at home! Why ask for trouble and cause your own downfall and that of Judah also?

This reply from Jehoash is somewhat difficult to understand. Let's break it down to get the sense of what he is

saying to Amaziah challenge. In Jehoash's reply there are two characters.

First there is the thistle of Lebanon. The thistle is a thorny nuisance plant. This plant represented Amaziah the king of Judah.

Second there is the cedar of Lebanon. This was a very majestic plant and quite different from the thistle. This cedar represented Jehoash. King Jehoash is insulting Amaziah in this letter by calling him an insignificant thistle.

Notice that the thistle (Amaziah) asked the cedar (Jehoash) to give his daughter to his son in marriage. To understand this we need to see it in the context of Jehoash's parable. He speaks of himself as a majestic cedar tree and Amaziah as a lowly, insignificant thistle. What right would the lowly thistle have to demand that the majestic cedar give his daughter to him? It was an insult to the cedar that a mere thistle would consider itself worthy of asking for his daughter. Jehoash saw Amaziah as being proud and arrogant. He had defeated Edom and now thought he was important (see verse 10). Jehoash reminds him that he still saw him as a lowly thistle.

Notice finally in the parable that a wild beast came along and trampled the thistle underfoot. The thistle that felt so important would be trampled and killed by a wild beast walking through the forest. Jehoash saw Amaziah as an insignificant threat to him and his kingdom. He would be easily overthrown.

Jehoash made it clear to Amaziah that he thought him to be proud because he had defeated Edom (verse 10). He told him to stay in Judah and rejoice in his success but he

was not to leave his nation lest he be defeated and humbled by Israel.

Amaziah did not listen to Jehoash's warning. As a result, Jehoash followed through with his threat. He attacked Amaziah, scattered his army and captured the king (verse 13). He then broke down a six hundred foot section of the wall of Jerusalem and took gold, silver and articles found in the temple. He looted the treasury of the royal palace and took hostages with him to Samaria (verse 14). Other events of Jehoash's life and reign were recorded in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel (verse 15). He died and was buried in the city of Samaria with his family (verse 16). His son Jeroboam II took his place on the throne of Israel.

The defeat and the looting of Jerusalem by Israel were obviously very humiliating for Amaziah. God broke his pride. Judah was weakened under his reign. A group in Jerusalem conspired against him and he fled to Lachish. Those involved in the conspiracy found him in Lachish and killed him there. His body was buried in the city of Jerusalem and his son Azariah took his place on the throne (verse 21).

Jeroboam II of Israel

After the death of Israel's King Jehoash, Jeroboam II became king (verse 23). He would rule forty-one years in Samaria. He followed the ways of Jeroboam I who led the nation into the worship of the golden calves (verse 24). What is particularly interesting about the life of Jeroboam II is that, despite his sinful ways, there was still evidence of God's blessing on his reign. He restored land that had been taken from Israel. Verse 25 tells us that these bound-

aries were restored in fulfilment of a prophetic word spoken by Jonah the prophet. We do not have a record of this particular prophesy of Jonah.

From verse 26 we understand that when Jeroboam II came to power, the nation of Israel was suffering bitterly. Israel had brought this on themselves by their refusal to honour the Lord God. They had turned their back on Him to serve Baal and the golden calves. Because He still cared for them in their rebellion, God had compassion on them and brought relief through Jeroboam II (verse 27).

How important it is that we see what God is doing here. He is showing compassion on a people who have been serving other gods. He did not reject them even though they had turned their back on Him. His heart was grieved because of what they were doing but He still loved them and when He saw their need, He reached out in compassion to them. Do you have Christian brothers or sisters who have wandered and brought suffering on themselves? What is your response to them? Will you turn your back on them and say: "They brought it on themselves and until they repent I will show no compassion?" Or will you like the Lord God, reach out to them in the midst of their sin and rebellion and demonstrate love and tenderness in their need?

Jeroboam II was not a good king but he was one that God would use to restore a measure of blessing to His people in a time of tremendous suffering. God saw how sin was destroying the nation and He had compassion on them. This shows us that God knows how much we can handle and will at times reach out to us even when we do not deserve it.

Jeroboam II also experienced a number of military victories and would recover more territory for Israel including

the cities of Damascus and Hamath (verse 28). The details of his reign were recorded in the annals of the kings of Israel. He died and was buried with his fathers, the kings of Israel. His son Zechariah would succeed him as king on the throne of Israel.

For Consideration:

- How was the pride of Amaziah his downfall? What great accomplishment caused him to become proud?
- Have you ever been tempted to pride? What personal accomplishments are you proud of today? Do these accomplishments keep you from trusting God and His enabling?
- God used Jeroboam II of Israel despite his unwillingness to honour Him. What does Jeroboam II teach us about the compassion of God for His people in sin?
- What kind of person can God use? How does this humble us?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for how He has used you. Give Him the glory for the wisdom, strength and enabling to accomplish these things.
- Thank God that He can use us despite our shortcomings and sinfulness.

- Ask the Lord to give you a humble heart. Ask Him to show you if there is any way that you have allowed pride to creep into your life.

35

AZARIA, JOTHAM, ZECHARIAH, SHALLUM, MENAHEM, PEKAHIAH AND PEKAH

Read 2 Kings 15:1-38

Azariah of Judah

We begin with a few comments concerning, the reign of King Azariah of Judah. King Azariah was also known in Scripture by the name Uzziah. He was king in Judah when Jeroboam II was king of Israel. Azariah was sixteen years old when he began his fifty-two year reign as king (verse 2). Verse 3 describes him as a good king who served the Lord but did not remove the pagan high places in the land. The people of Judah continued to offer foreign sacrifices on the altars of the high places to other gods.

Azariah with afflicted with leprosy. A quick look at 2 Chronicles 26:16-21 shows us that Azariah (Uzziah) became very proud and went into the temple to offer sacrifices that only the priests could offer. When the priests confronted

him about this, he became angry with them. The Lord struck him with leprosy for his blasphemy.

Azariah's leprosy meant that he had to live in separate quarters, away from his family. His son Jotham took care of the palace and governed the people on his father's behalf until his death. At that time he succeeded him as king (verses 6-7).

Zechariah of Israel

Zechariah was king of Israel during the reign of Azariah of Judah. He would only reign for six months in Samaria (verse 8). He was an evil king who worshiped the golden calf gods of Jeroboam (verse 9). A conspiracy rose up against him led by a man named Shallum (verse 10). Shallum publicly killed Zechariah and took his throne (verse 10). This assassination and conspiracy fulfilled the word of the Lord spoken to King Jehu of Israel. Jehu had destroyed the worship of Baal in Israel. For this the Lord promised that his sons would reign in Israel until the fourth generation (see 2 Kings 10:30). Zechariah was the fourth generation to reign from Jehu's family. For four generations God had protected the family line of Jehu for his faithfulness in dealing with Baal worship in the land. Now that this promised had been fulfilled, this family would no longer reign in Israel.

Shallum of Israel

Shallum took the reign from Zechariah by force. He became king of Israel after he assassinated Zechariah. He would reign in Samaria for only one month (verse 13). He was assassinated by Menahem (verse 14). There was obviously great political instability and discontent in Israel at this time.

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Menahem of Israel

As king of Israel, Menahem attacked the city of Tirzah and Tiphshah. Menahem's character is seen in verse 16. When he attacked Tiphshah he ripped open all the pregnant women demonstrating his cruelty. Menahem became king of Israel and reigned from Samaria for ten years (verse 17). He did evil before the Lord and served the golden calves (verse 18).

During Menahem's reign, the Assyrian king, Pul (also known as Tiglath Pileser) invaded Israel. Menahem gave him a thousand talents of silver (37 tons or 34 metric tons) to gain his support. In order to pay this money to Pul, Menahem required that every wealthy man in Israel contribute fifty shekels of silver to the king of Assyria (1 1/4 pounds or 0.6 kilograms). When he had received this sum of money, Pul withdrew his army from Israel (verse 20).

Under Menahem's reign the nation of Israel was weakened. He died and was buried with his ancestors, leaving the throne to his son Pekahiah (verses 21-22).

Pekahiah of Israel

Pekahiah was king in Israel for two years. He served the golden calves and turned his back on the Lord. From verse 25 we understand that one of his officers, a man by the name of Pekah, conspired against him. Taking fifty men with him Pekah assassinated Pekahiah in the citadel of the royal palace in Samaria (verse 25). Pekah took Pekahiah's place on the throne.

Pekah of Israel

Pekah reigned for twenty years in Samaria (verse 27). As with the kings who reigned before him, Pekah served the golden calves that Jeroboam had set up when Israel separated from Judah.

During the reign of Pekah, Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria began to take over many cities of Israel and send captives into exile (verse 29). This was the beginning of a long battle with Assyria that would end with the Israelites being forced to leave their land to spend seventy years in exile. Since its beginning as a separate nation from Judah, Israel's kings had consistently turned their back on the Lord God, choosing to serve Baal and the golden calves. Their time of judgment was coming. Assyria would be the instrument God would use to exercise that judgment. King Pekah was assassinated by Hoshea who took his throne as king of Israel (verse 30).

There is tremendous instability in Israel at this time. Over a period of 33 years four out of five kings have been assassinated. Assyria has attacked twice. The first time Assyria attacked King Menahem gave a huge amount of money to him, weakening the economy of the land. The second time Assyria attacked, Tiglath-Pileser took control of many of Israel's cities (including the whole region of Naphtali). Assyria also took many Israelites into captivity, forcing them from their land. Things were not good in the nation of Israel.

Jotham of Judah

There was much more stability in the nation of Judah. King Azariah had reigned for fifty-two years in the nation. His son Jotham reigned for sixteen years in Jerusalem (verse

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Pekahiah and Pekah

33). Jotham served the Lord as his father Uzziah (Azariah) had done, though he did not remove the pagan high places in the land. Jotham is credited with rebuilding the Upper Gate of the temple of the Lord (verse 35).

During the reign of Jotham the Lord began to send enemies against Judah as well. Rezin of Aram and King Pekah of Israel both caused problems for Judah at this time in her history (verse 37). Jotham died and was buried with his ancestors in the City of David (verse 38).

For Consideration:

- The kings of Judah are described as being good kings. In other words, they served the Lord God. At the same time, however, they were far from perfect in their relationship with God. Azariah became proud. Neither Azariah nor Jotham dealt with the high places in the land of Judah. Take a moment to consider your relationship with the Lord. What areas of your life need to be brought in line with God's purposes?
- Pride led to the downfall of Azariah (Uzziah). Do you struggle with pride in your life?
- What does this chapter show us about the instability of Israel at this point in its history? What is the connection between Israel's spiritual condition and the state of her politics? Can we make this same connection today in our own lives?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to search you and show you any area of your life that needs to be more fully turned over to Him.
- Ask the Lord to move in power to transform the spiritual life of your community so that it is more in tune with His purposes.
- Ask God to open the eyes of your community to the futility of seeking other gods. Thank God that there is blessing in serving Him alone.
- Thank the Lord that He does reach out to even the most undeserving and shower them with His blessings. Ask Him to teach us to be grateful for this mercy.

36

AHAZ, KING OF JUDAH

Read 2 Kings 16:1-20

Chapter 16 deals with King Ahaz of Judah. He became king in Judah during the time that Pekah was king in Israel. Ahaz did not serve the Lord God. Many of the kings of Judah recognized and honoured the Lord God, though not wholeheartedly. Ahaz was different. He became king when he was twenty years old (verse 2). He chose to follow the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire according to the pagan rituals of the nations that the Lord had driven out of the land (verse 3). He offered sacrifices and burnt incense to false gods on the hilltops and under spreading trees in Judah. Ahaz openly practiced evil and rebellion against the God of his fathers. While this was common for Israel it was not so common for Judah. His sinful actions resulted in God sending enemy nations against him.

In verse 5 Rezin, king of Aram and Pekah the king of Israel marched against Judah. Ahaz was powerless against them (verse 5). Rezin recovered the city of Elath for Aram by driving out the men of Judah. The Edomites moved into the city (verse 6). Ahaz's sinful actions weakened the nation so that it was not able to resist their enemies.

Ahaz called on Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, to help him (verse 7). Ahaz did not seek the Lord God. He chose to turn to Assyria for help. In order to secure the help of Assyria, Ahaz took silver and gold from the temple and the royal treasury and gave it as a gift to their king (verse 8). Tiglath-Pileser agreed to come to Judah's aid and attacked the city of Damascus, deporting its inhabitants and killing Rezin of Aram (verse 9).

When Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser he saw an altar there. This was obviously a pagan altar used in the worship of the gods of that city (verse 10). Ahaz was so impressed with this altar that he sent a sketch with detailed plans for its construction to Uriah the priest.

Uriah built an altar according to the plans Ahaz had sent. By the time Ahaz had returned from Damascus, Uriah had completed the work (verse 11). When Ahaz saw the altar he approved its construction and offered burnt offerings and grain offerings on this new altar. He also poured drink offerings and sprinkled the blood of his fellowship offerings on the altar.

Ahaz then took the bronze altar that was in the temple and moved it to the north of the new altar. In doing this, he was clearly giving the altar of the Lord second place to this new altar which was set up now in the temple in a prominent place. By using this foreign altar in the temple he was desecrating the temple.

This bronze altar was a very important part of the worship of God in the temple. It was the place where the sacrifices were made for the sins of the people. It was, in many ways, a symbol of the sacrificial work of the Lord Jesus who would die for the sins of His people. Ahaz replaced that altar with his own. This same thing happens in our day.

There are many people who are offended with the message of the gospel and the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. They preach another message—a message that is less offensive to the human ear.

Ahaz gave orders to Uriah the priest to offer the morning offerings, the evening grain offerings, the king's burnt offerings and grain offerings as well as the offerings of the people on this new altar. He told Uriah that he was to keep the bronze altar for seeking guidance from the Lord (verse 15). Uriah did exactly as he was commanded.

Notice that the priest was not taking a stand for the Lord, but bowing to the wishes of the king. Neither the king nor the priest were willing to get rid of the bronze altar the Lord had commanded Moses to make, but it was no longer central in worship. This new altar had become more prominent. Again, how easy it is to replace God's commands and priorities with our own. It is not that we want to get rid of God or His Word it is just that they no longer have a central role in our worship and Christian life. In the place of the bronze altar is one that is more pleasing to the eye. Countless churches in our day have fallen into the sin of Ahaz. They have pushed God and His Word aside for things they consider more pleasing to those who come to worship.

Having replaced the altar with his own altar, Ahaz then took away the panels and basins from the stands used in the temple worship (see 1 Kings 7:27-29 for a description of these stands with their side panels). He removed the Sea (basin of water where the priests washed) from the bronze base and replaced it on a stone base (verse 17). Obviously, Ahaz is looking for anything of value possibly to pay the king of Assyria. To do this he empties the temple

of anything of value. One by one, the articles of the temple are disappearing.

Notice that Ahaz also removed those things that emphasized his royalty. Verse 18 tells us that he removed the Sabbath canopy that had been built at the temple. This may have been some form of canopy under which he as king would pass as he came to the temple to worship. He also removed the royal entryway through which he would pass as he came to the temple. These things emphasized his royalty and dignity as king. Now that they were removed he would approach the temple like anyone else. These articles may have been removed as a symbol of his submission now to the king of Assyria. He was no longer a true king but a subject of Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria. The great nation of Judah had become weak and powerless. Under David and Solomon they had been a mighty nation but now they were helpless before their enemies. They had not served the Lord with a whole heart and were now paying the price.

As believers, we are kings and priests before God (see 1 Peter 2:9). As such, we have God's authority in this world. How often, however, have we not exercised that authority? Instead of reigning with Christ, we choose like Ahaz to submit to other kings. We live in subjection to those over whom God has called us to have victory. The picture of Ahaz is a picture of defeat. It is a picture of a king who surrendered his authority. It is all too often a picture of many in the church of Jesus Christ today.

This is what the writer of 2 Kings wants us to remember about the reign of Ahaz. He was a king who turned his back on God and led his people into submission to Assyria. He did not seek the Lord but chose to ignore His purpose. He replaced the worship instituted by God with his own ideas.

The altar was removed from its rightful place and the temple stripped of its wealth. His trust was not in the Lord God but in Assyria who would eventually overcome and send the entire nation into exile. He flirted with the enemy and would suffer the consequences.

The story of Ahaz is a reminder to us of the cost of surrendering to the enemy. It is a reminder of what happens when we seek to do things our own way and do not pay heed to what God has in store for us. Ahaz died and was buried with his fathers in the City of David. His son, Hezekiah, succeeded him as king in Judah. He left his son Hezekiah a weakened nation that was dominated by Assyria.

For Consideration:

- How does Ahaz's sinfulness weaken the nation of Judah? How does the spiritual condition of the land influence its politics and prosperity?
- Ahaz did not seek the Lord in his time of need. Have you ever been tempted to look to other sources for help in your time of need? Explain.
- King Ahaz was impressed with the pagan altar he saw in Damascus. Have you ever found yourself looking longingly at the things of this world? What in particular are you tempted by?
- Uriah the priest was more a servant of the king than a servant of God. How does he show his weakness as a priest in this chapter and contribute to the evil of the land?

- Ahaz replaced the bronze altar with his own. To what extent are we tempted in our day to compromise on the message of the gospel?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to search you to see if there is any compromise in your faith today. Ask Him to help you to live faithfully for Him.
- Ask the Lord to help you to resist the flashy temptations of this world so that you can be true to Him and His purposes alone.
- Ask God to give His church discernment to recognize and defeat any false message that seeks to replace the truth of the gospel.
- Ask God to help you to live as His children with authority and power over the world and its temptations.

37

REBELLIOUS TO THE END

Read 2 Kings 17:1-41

One of the things we have seen in the history of the northern kingdom of Israel during the period of the divided kingdom is that they continually turned their backs on their God. From the time they separated from Judah under Jeroboam to their exile in the land of Assyria, there was not one king who turned wholeheartedly to the Lord God. They chose instead to serve Baal and the golden calves.

While Ahaz was king in Judah, Hoshea became king in Israel. He ruled for nine years in the capital of Samaria. He followed the tradition of the kings of Israel and turned his back on the Lord. He was not as sinful, however, as other kings before him (verse 2).

During the reign of Hoshea, King Shalmeneser of Assyria attacked Israel and made him pay tribute (verse 3). King Shalmeneser discovered later, however, that Hoshea had been seeking the support of Egypt against him and had not been paying his tribute money. Shalmeneser put him in prison for this (verse 4). He also invaded Israel and laid siege to the city of Samaria for three years (verse 5). Finally, in the ninth year of the reign of King Hoshea, Assyria

captured the city of Samaria and sent the Israelites to Assyria. They settled in Halah on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes. This meant that the people of Israel no longer lived in their own land. God took it from them because of their sin and rebellion.

The writer of the book of Kings felt it important that people know the reason God took them from the land He had promised to their ancestors. Verse 7 tells us that they lost the land because they had sinned against the Lord God who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. In Egypt they had been slaves under cruel oppression. God had set them free and given them a land of their own. Israel, however, had chosen to turn her back on the Lord to serve other gods, following the evil practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before them (verse 8). Not only did they follow the evil practices of these nations, but they also introduced their own evil. This was particularly true of Jeroboam who introduced the religion of the calf gods.

In verse 9 the author reminded Israel how they had secretly sinned against their God. This did not mean that the Lord could not see what they did. The idea here is that the people of Israel did these things in private. They built high places to worship foreign gods in their towns. They set up sacred stones and pagan Asherah poles on the high hills and under spreading trees in the land (verse 10). On those high places they burned incense to the gods of the nation that had been driven out before them. In doing this they provoked the Lord to anger (verse 11).

The Lord told them that they were not to worship idols, but Israel did not listen (verse 12). He warned them through the prophets to turn from their evil ways and observe His commands and decrees, but they would have nothing to do with the words of those prophets (verses 13-14). They

are described in verse 14 as a stiff necked people who could not turn their heads to see anything but what they wanted to see. Israel rejected God and His decrees despite the warnings of the prophets. They chose to follow worthless idols. As a result, the nation became useless to God. They imitated the nations around them rejecting God's command (verse 15).

Israel forsook God's command and made two idols shaped like calves. They also made an Asherah pole and bowed down to worship Baal and the stars of the sky (verse 16). They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire and practiced magic and sorcery. These things provoked the great anger of the Lord (verse 17).

The Lord was angry with Israel because of all this evil so He drove them out of His presence. Only Judah remained in the land promised to their fathers (verse 18). Judah, however, was also guilty of turning her back on God. Judah also fell prey to the practices that Israel introduced (verse 19). Their time of exile and deportation was coming as well. God would give all His people over to their enemies to be plundered and cast away from His presence for a time (verse 20).

In verse 21 the writer reminded his people that when the division of Israel and Judah took place under Rehoboam and Jeroboam, King Jeroboam enticed Israel to turn from the commands and decrees of the Lord. He gave them two golden calves. Israel persisted in the sins of Jeroboam until the Lord removed them from His presence, just as He had spoken through His prophets (verses 22-23). This is why Israel was deported to Assyria.

God was not unjust in His sentence. He had done everything for His people. For hundreds of years he had been

faithful to them despite their rebellion. His patience was very great but He was also a God of justice and righteousness. He would punish His people for their sins. They were exiled from their land and forced to serve as slaves in a land that was not their own. This is what God had rescued them from in Egypt. Their sins had brought them back into this bondage.

In verse 24 we see what happened to the land of Israel in the absence of God's people. Shalmeneser, king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim and settled them in the towns of Israel to replace the Israelites who had been sent to Assyria. The land that God had given to His people was now given to other nations.

It is interesting to note that when these new inhabitants came to live in the region of Samaria, God sent lions to kill the people (verse 25). This became such a problem that it was reported to the king of Assyria. The people who sent the report believed that they were dying from these lion attacks because they did not know the ways of the gods of Israel. They suggested that the solution to the problem was to have Israelite priests instruct them in the faith of the Jews (verse 26).

The Assyrian king decided to send one of the priests who had been taken captive back to Samaria to teach the people "what the God of the land requires" (verse 27). Verse 28 tells us that one of the priests came back from exile to live in Bethel and taught the people how to worship the Lord.

It is unclear what the teaching of this priest really was. It should be noted that Bethel was one of the centres where the golden calf of Jeroboam was located (see 1 Kings

12:28-29). When King Jeroboam established the worship of the golden calves, his priests were not from the tribe of Levi as God required (see 1 Kings 12:31). Verse 28 does tell us, however, that this priest taught the new inhabitants of Israel how to worship the Lord. It may be that this priest had a sense of why the people of Israel had been exiled and made an effort to teach the ways of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

It is clear that each group who had been sent by the Assyrian king to live in Israel brought their own gods with them. They set up those gods in the land. While they were being taught the ways of the God of Israel they continued to worship their pagan gods as well. Verses 30-31 lists the gods that were worshiped at this time in the land:

- Succoth Benoth the god of Babylon
- Nergal the god of Cuthah
- Ashima the god of Hamath
- Nibhaz and Tartak the gods of the Avvites

The Sepharvites practiced child sacrifice and burned their children in the fire to their gods Adrammelech and Anammelech.

The Lord God was being worshiped but so were all these other gods (verses 32-33). The nations who inhabited the land of Israel did not serve the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob alone (verse 34). They mixed Israel's faith with their own. They wanted the protection of the God of Israel but they also wanted their own gods as well.

When the Lord God brought His people out of the land of Egypt He told them that they were not to worship any other god or bow down to them or serve them (verse 35). They were to worship the Lord God who brought them up out of Egypt and Him alone (verse 36). They were to follow His decrees and commands (verse 37). They were not to forget the covenant they had made with the Lord their God and turn from all other gods (verse 38). If they honoured the Lord and worshiped Him alone, He would protect them and deliver them from the hands of their enemies (verse 39). Israel did not listen to these commands. They worshiped the Lord but they also served their idols (verse 40-41).

The Lord God was just in His punishment. His people had broken their covenant with Him, resisted every call to repent, and turned to other gods. Their punishment was justified. God had done everything for them. He had showed great patience toward them, but this was to no avail. Israel persisted in her disobedience. Now she would suffer the consequences of her sin. Her land was taken from her and given to another. This chapter shows us the terrible consequences of sin. Israel lost everything because she had turned from God. This can happen to us as well.

For Consideration:

- We read how the land of Israel was given over to the enemy. What territory have we as believers lost to the enemy today?
- What do we understand about the hardness of Israel's heart? Is there evidence of hardness in your

heart? Are there areas in your life you are not willing to surrender to the Lord? What are they?

- Was God justified in His punishment of Israel? Explain.
- What evidence is there of God's patience with Israel throughout this time of rebellion? How has God been patient with you?
- Israel's tendency was to mix the worship of God with the practices of the nations around them. Could we be guilty of doing this today as well? Explain.
- Why is it important for us to realize that God is a holy God who will judge sin? What hope would we have if God did not judge sin and evil?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help us as believers to reclaim territory that has been lost because of our sin.
- Ask God to soften your heart so that you will listen and obey when He speaks to you.
- Thank the Lord for His patience with us.
- Thank the Lord that He is a holy God who will judge sin.
- Ask God to help you to serve Him alone. Ask Him to take away any influence that does not bring honour to His name.

THE ASSYRIAN FIELD COMMANDER

Read 2 Kings 18:1-37

Hezekiah became king in Judah while Hoshea was king of Israel (verse 1). He was twenty-five years of age when he began his reign. He would reign for twenty-nine years in the city of Jerusalem (verse 2). Hezekiah was a good king who served the Lord with his whole heart. Verse 3 tells us that he did just as his father David had done. This was a rare compliment as very few kings could measure up to the standard of intimacy with God that David had experienced.

Hezekiah was responsible for a great cleansing of the land of Judah. Verse 4 is an important verse. Notice how Hezekiah removed the high places from the land, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. Notice also that he broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made in the wilderness (see Numbers 21:8-9) because the people were burning incense to it. This snake was called Nehushtan (simply meaning “a thing of brass”).

There are two things we need to see from verse 4. First, notice that while the nation of Judah had not fallen as

deeply into sin as the nation of Israel, they were still guilty before God. While many of their kings served the Lord to some extent, there were still many sins in the land. They worshiped the Lord God in the temple and outwardly performed their religious duty to Him but they were also worshipping other gods. Their faith was not pure. Their hearts were divided.

Second, notice how the bronze serpent that God had intended for good, had become a stumbling block for Judah. This serpent was never intended to be worshiped. In Numbers 21:8-9 God used it as a means of healing those who had been bitten by snakes in the wilderness. Whoever looked to the bronze snake on the pole would be healed. The people of God began to worship this bronze snake. How careful we need to be that what God intends for good does not become a god to us. I have been in churches where their theology has become a god. Other churches seem to worship the particular lifestyle they have chosen. Still other churches worship their building or their pastor. While these things are God-ordained and good in themselves, they can easily become a bronze snake to us. Only God is worthy of our worship and adoration.

Hezekiah destroyed the bronze snake. This took a certain amount of courage. This bronze snake had a very important place in the history of God's people. God had ordained that it be crafted. It was used of God to heal a number of their ancestors. Hezekiah, however, saw that it had become a stumbling block. He chose to destroy the snake rather than have it be misused. Jesus told his listeners in Matthew 5:30:

And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one

part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

This is exactly what is happening here. Hezekiah was cutting off something good that had become a means for God's people to sin. Sometimes, God must deal harshly with us to remove things that have become gods and are taking us away from the true worship of His name.

Hezekiah trusted the Lord. There was not a king like him among all the kings of Judah from its very beginning as a nation (verse 5). He held fast to the Lord and did not cease to follow Him (verse 6).

God blessed Hezekiah because of his faithfulness. Verse 7 tells us that whatever he undertook was successful. He was even successful in a rebellion against the king of Assyria. God honoured him because he honoured God. Hezekiah defeated the Philistines as far as Gaza (verse 8). Obedience to the Lord was the secret to this victory.

While Hezekiah was king in Judah, Assyria invaded the land of Israel. Shalmaneser captured Samaria (verses 9-10). More Israelites were sent into exile in Assyria.

In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib, king of Assyria attacked the fortified cities of Judah and captured them (verse 13). We have already seen that Hezekiah served the Lord and had cleansed the land of its evil. What we need to understand from this is that bad things happen even to people who honour the Lord. In this life not even the righteous are free from pain and trials.

When Hezekiah saw how his fortified cities had been taken, he sent word to the king of Assyria. He confessed

that he had rebelled against his authority and asked that he withdraw from him and he would pay whatever the king demanded (verse 14). We have no record of Hezekiah going to the Lord at this point. While he will speak to the Lord later about his situation, he does not seem to do so here.

The king of Assyria took three hundred talents of silver (11 tons or 10 metric tons) and thirty talents of gold (about 1 ton). Hezekiah was forced to give him the silver that was in the temple and in the treasuries of the royal palace (verse 15). He stripped off the gold that covered the doors and the doorposts of the temple to give it to the Assyrian king (verse 16).

The king of Assyria sent his supreme commander, his chief officer and his field commander with a large army to the city of Jerusalem (verse 17). They arrived and camped outside the gates. They called for a meeting with Hezekiah but Eliakim the palace administrator, Shebna the secretary and Joah the recorder went out to meet them in his place (verse 18).

The field commander spoke to Hezekiah's officials. He gave them a message for King Hezekiah. He questioned Hezekiah's ability to resist the Assyrian army. "On what are you basing this confidence of yours?" he asked in verse 19. He accused Hezekiah of speaking empty words when he said that he had any military strength (verse 20). He reminded him that even the Pharaoh of Egypt was like a splintered reed that would break and pierce his hand if Hezekiah were to lean on him for support (verse 21). Hezekiah could not trust in an alliance with Egypt.

The field commander went on to remind the officials that Hezekiah had broken down the high places and altars of

the land. They could not trust in these gods because Hezekiah had insulted them by removing them from the land (verse 22).

The field commander then told Hezekiah's officials that he was willing to make a deal with them. He told them in verse 23 that he would give them two thousand horses if they could put riders on them. This was an insult. He was reminding Judah of how small and insignificant their military force was compared to his. It was only a matter of time before the superior Assyrian army would overtake and destroy them. He told them that they did not even have the strength to push back the smallest of his officers even if they were to have the support of Egypt (verse 24).

The Assyrian field commander told Hezekiah's officers that he had himself consulted the Lord. He told them that the Lord had told him to march against Judah and destroy it (verse 25). Whether he had heard this word from God or not is unclear. He does, however, want to discourage Hezekiah and break him emotionally.

The field commander's words were intended to discourage and break the spirit of God's people. They were spoken out loud so that those standing by the wall could hear. Eliakim and Shebna asked that he speak to them in Aramaic and not in Hebrew so that the people on the wall would not be discouraged (verse 26). They were obviously seeing the effect the words of the field commander were having on the people.

The field commander told Eliakim and Shebna, however, that these words were not only intended for the king but also for all his men. Notice how he insults the men by telling them that they had to eat their own filth and drink their own urine to survive (verse 27). This may have been an

indication of the state of the city of Jerusalem with all supplies cut off.

The field commander spoke in the Hebrew language for all to hear. He told them not to let Hezekiah deceive them into thinking that he could deliver them from the hands of Assyria (verse 29). He told them not to let Hezekiah persuade them that the Lord could deliver them from his hands (verses 29-30). He told them not to listen to Hezekiah, challenging them instead to make peace with Assyria and surrender (verse 31). He promised that if they did, they would eat from their own vine and fig tree and drink water from their own cistern (verse 31). He would take them to a land like their own where they could have grain, new wine, bread, vineyards, olive trees and honey (verse 32). In reality he was telling them that he was going to deport them but he made their deportation look attractive. Satan will often make evil look very attractive. He will attempt to make us feel that we are without hope. He will offer us great promises of pleasure and contentment. This is what the field officer is doing.

In verses 33-34 the field officer drives home his point by telling those who listened to him that no god had ever delivered their nation from the hand of the king of Assyria. He gave examples of Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim, Hena, Ivvah and Samaria. All these cities fell into the hands of Assyria. He asked them why they believed that Jerusalem would be successful when all the other nations had fallen and their gods could not help them (verse 35).

As the field commander spoke, the people remained silent because the king had commanded that no one answer the Assyrian commander (verse 36). Eliakim, Shebna, Joah, however, tore their clothes in a sign of grief and mourning

and returned to the king to report what the commander had told them.

This was a very difficult time for the people of Judah. Despite Hezekiah's faithfulness to God, problems and struggles abounded in the nation. Hezekiah's faith and the faith of the entire nation were being put to the test. The enemy was lashing out boldly and insulting the people of God. The enemy would eventually be humbled but at this moment God's people were being severely tested.

For Consideration:

- The nation of Judah claimed to serve the Lord God but still there were idols in the land. What kind of idols are there in your life?
- The bronze snake was something God gave His people as a means to bring healing from their snake bites in the wilderness. Hezekiah did not hesitate to destroy this because it had become a god to the people of Judah. What good things can become gods to us today?
- The Assyrian field commander sought to discourage and break the spirit of Judah. Have you ever been in a situation that appeared to be hopeless? Has God ever brought you to a place where all you had seemed to be stripped from you? Explain.
- The Assyrian field commander offered Judah an easy way out of their struggle by telling them to surrender. He promised them many wonderful things if they would surrender to him. Have you ever been

tempted to turn your back on what you knew to be right because it looked more attractive to you than obedience? Explain.

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to search you and reveal any sinful way that needs to be broken and surrendered to Him.
- Ask God to show you if you have placed too much value on the good things He has given you. Ask Him to show you if these things have taken His place in your life.
- If you are facing a difficult trial in your life, ask the Lord to give you strength to persevere and not give up. Ask Him to keep you faithful to the end.
- Thank the Lord that while we may have to struggle in this life, He is still Lord and bigger than anything the enemy can throw at us.

39

THE DELIVERANCE OF GOD

Read 2 Kings 19:1-37

In chapter 18 we saw how the Assyrian field commander had insulted the people of God and tried to break their spirit. The Assyrian army was camped outside the city of Jerusalem. With supplies cut off from Jerusalem, things were quite difficult for the people inside.

When Eliakim, Shebna and Joah reported to King Hezekiah the words of the Assyrian field commander, Hezekiah tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and went into the temple of God to mourn and pray (verse 1). He sent Eliakim, the palace administrator and Shebna the secretary, as well as the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah, asking him to pray for them in this difficult time (verse 4). Hezekiah compared the situation they were facing that day to a young mother who has come to the point of delivery but did not have the strength to deliver. Hezekiah knew that he did not have the strength to conquer the Assyrians. If they were going to have any victory that day it would have to come from the Lord. It was Hezekiah's hope that the Lord would hear the insulting words of the field commander and rebuke him for his pride and blasphemy (verse 4).

Hezekiah had nowhere else to turn. The Lord had brought the nation to a place where they could not trust in any other nation, nor could they put any confidence in their own strength. The Lord alone was their only source of hope and confidence.

When Hezekiah's officials went to Isaiah, the Lord gave him a word for the king. The prophet told Hezekiah that he was not to be afraid of the words he had heard from the Assyrian field commander. God had heard the blasphemy, and would take his life (verse 7).

The answer seemed so simple. There would not be any need for Judah to fight the Assyrians. Their enemy would simply pack their belongings and leave. This is exactly what happened. Verse 8 tells us that the field commander heard that the king of Assyria had left the region of Lachish. When he heard this news, he withdrew and found the king fighting against Libnah. King Sennacherib received a report that Tirhakah the Cushite was marching out to fight against him. This meant that he had to use the troops camped outside Jerusalem to fight against Tirhakah's army.

Before leaving Jerusalem, however, Sennacherib sent word to Hezekiah in a letter. In that letter he told him that he was not to let his God deceive him by telling him that Jerusalem would not be handed over to the Assyrians (verse 10). Sennacherib reminded Hezekiah of how Assyria had completely destroyed all the nations around them (verse 11). It was only a matter of time before Judah would be destroyed. He told them that their God would not be able to save them. According to the field commander, no god from any nation could deliver them from the powerful hand of Assyria.

The words of Sennacherib disturbed Hezekiah. When he received the letter he went up to the temple and spread it out before the Lord God and prayed. His prayer is significant.

As Hezekiah began his prayer in verse 15 he took a moment to worship God who was enthroned between the cherubim. This is a reference to the Ark of the Covenant in the temple. On the cover of the ark were two angelic forms with wings outstretched. God revealed His presence between the wings of the cherubim.

Notice also that Hezekiah recognized the Lord God as God over all the nations of the earth. There was nothing any nation could do against Him. Hezekiah's God was the One who made the earth. His power and ability were unquestionable. He was God over all nations and the One who gave life and breath to all.

Having recognized who God was, Hezekiah then asked Him to open His ears and eyes to hear and see what Sennacherib had written in this letter. He reminded God that the Assyrian king had insulted Him (verse 16).

As Hezekiah poured out his heart to God, he reminded Him how they had been a very powerful force on the earth. They had laid waste the nations and their lands (verse 17). They had thrown the gods of the nations into the fire and destroyed them (verse 18). Hezekiah recognized that the gods of the nations were not real gods. They were merely wood and stone shaped by the hand of a craftsman. Hezekiah knew that the God of Judah was the one true God. He cried out to Him for deliverance from the hands of the Assyrians so that the entire world would see His power and know that He alone was God (verse 19).

Again, the word of the Lord came to Hezekiah through Isaiah. In verse 20 the prophet told him that the Lord had heard his prayer. We have a record in verses 21-28 of the word that God spoke through Isaiah to Hezekiah. We will examine this briefly here.

Isaiah's word comes in poetic form. In verse 21 he spoke of Judah as the virgin daughter of Zion. She was pure and innocent before the Lord. This virgin daughter speaks to Assyria who had been so proud and boastful. "The Virgin Daughter of Zion despises you and mocks you," Isaiah said to the Assyrians. These Assyrians had been mocking the people of God but now it was time for Judah to mock Assyria and her proud boasts. Jerusalem would shake her head in disbelief and wonder as Assyria fled before them.

Assyria had blasphemed the Holy One of Israel. They had raised their voice and lifted their eyes in proud boasts against the God of Judah (verse 22). They had heaped insults on the Lord God (verse 23). They claimed to be strong by their own effort. With their chariots they boasted about ascending to the heights of the mountains, cutting down the tallest cedars and choicest of pines (verse 23). They boasted of digging wells in foreign lands and drinking their water. With the soles of their feet they dried up the streams of Egypt (verse 24). Egypt depended on the great Nile for its livelihood. By saying that he dried up the streams of Egypt, King Sennacherib is saying that he stripped Egypt of the prosperity that the Nile River gave her. By stepping onto her soil, he diverted all her wealth to himself, leaving her barren and desolate.

In Isaiah's prophecy the Lord spoke of how He would use Assyria to accomplish His purpose in bringing judgment on His people. Assyria, however, had raged against the Lord God and acted in insolence and pride. For this, God would

put a hook in their nose and a bit in their mouth making them return by the way they came (verse 28).

To reassure Hezekiah of the truth of this prophecy, God would give him a sign. He told him that he would eat what grew by itself that year and the next, but in the third year they would sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit (verse 29). Judah would take root and again bear fruit (verse 30). Out of Jerusalem would come a remnant and a band of survivors. God's zeal for His people would accomplish this great work (verse 31).

Concerning the king of Assyria, Isaiah prophesied that he would not enter the city of Jerusalem nor even shoot an arrow toward it. He would not build a siege ramp against it nor would he stand before it with a shield (verse 32). Instead, he would return by the way he came (verse 33). God would defend the city of Jerusalem for the sake of his servant David (verse 34).

That night an angel of the Lord went out to the Assyrian camp and put to death one hundred and eighty-five thousand soldiers. The next morning, when those still living woke from their sleep, they discovered these dead bodies all around them (verse 35). This caused Sennacherib to break camp and return to Nineveh as Isaiah had prophesied (verse 36).

One day when Sennacherib was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his own sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him. This was in fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah. He was succeeded by his son Esharhaddon (verse 37).

This whole incident with Assyria was very difficult for the people of God. Judah was brought to the end of her

strength and resources so that she could see the power of God at work on her behalf. The answer to their prayers came in an unexpected way. God fought for them. One hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians died without Judah having to take up arms. The Assyrian army retreated in humiliation and defeat. The passage is a real encouragement to us when we come to the end of our resources. God is able to defend us and fight for us if we wait on Him.

For Consideration:

- Judah was brought to a place of absolute helplessness. They had nowhere to turn but to the Lord. Have you ever been brought to this place in your life? What did this situation teach Judah about God?
- Compare how complicated the situation looked in Hezekiah's eyes with how simple the answer really was. What does this teach us about the difference between our limited understanding and God's absolute power and wisdom?
- More was accomplished through prayer and trusting God than could have been accomplished in military force and human strength. What does this tell us about the power of prayer?
- Have you ever found yourself wanting to rush ahead of God rather than waiting for Him? What do we learn about waiting on God in this passage?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the times He had bought you to a place where all you could do was trust in Him. Thank Him that He is big enough and strong enough to overcome all our enemies.
- Thank the Lord that His ways are different from ours. Thank Him that He is able to do more than we could even imagine.
- Thank the Lord that He sees our problems and is willing to reach out to us in our need.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to wait on Him and trust Him for victory. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have tried to overcome in your own strength and wisdom.

HEZEKIAH'S ILLNESS

Read 2 Kings 20:1-21

Though King Hezekiah was a good king who sought the Lord, he still had problems. The trials he experienced at the hand of the king of Assyria, recorded in chapters 18 and 19, are examples of this. Here in chapter 20 we see that Hezekiah also had physical afflictions in life. As we begin this chapter, Hezekiah is on his deathbed with a serious illness.

In verse 1 the prophet Isaiah came to Hezekiah and told him to put his things in order for he was going to die. Isaiah was quite specific in verse 1. He told Hezekiah that he would not recover.

It is interesting to note that when Hezekiah became king of Judah he was twenty-five years old (2 Kings 18:1). He reigned as king for a total of twenty-nine years (2 Kings 18:2). This means that he died at the age of fifty-four. From the context of this chapter we learn that Hezekiah's life would be extended fifteen years. This means that Hezekiah was thirty-seven years old when he received the news from Isaiah that he was going to die. We can understand why the news of his early death would have disturbed Hezekiah greatly.

When the king heard this word from the Lord, he turned his face to the wall and cried out to the Lord (verses 2-3). In his prayer he reminded the Lord how he had walked with wholehearted devotion. He had done what was right in the Lord's eyes. As Hezekiah prayed and sought the Lord in this matter, he wept bitterly. We have no record of Hezekiah asking for anything particular in this prayer. Obviously, he was wrestling with the purpose of the Lord in taking his life.

It may also be important to mention that 2 Chronicles 32:25 tells us that because of the many blessings of the Lord, the heart of Hezekiah became proud. It may be for this reason that the Lord allowed Hezekiah to become critically ill.

Hezekiah's prayer moved the heart of God. After Hezekiah prayed, the prophet Isaiah returned to him with another message from the Lord. This time the Lord told the king that He had heard his prayer and seen his tears. Isaiah told the king that God would heal him. God responded to Hezekiah's tears of repentance for his pride. The repentance of Hezekiah moved the heart of God. Isaiah told the king that three days from then he would go up to the temple to worship the Lord. God would add fifteen years to his life and He would also deliver the city from the hands of the king of Assyria (verse 6). Isaiah then called for a poultice of figs to be prepared and applied to Hezekiah's boil. When this poultice was applied to the boil, the king recovered from his illness.

Hezekiah wanted to be assured of the word of Isaiah to him. He asked Isaiah for a sign that he would be healed and go to the temple on the third day (verse 8). God was willing to give the king a sign to confirm His promise. God asked Hezekiah if the shadow on his steps went forward or back when the sun shone on them (verse 9). Hezekiah

told the Lord that the shadow of the sun always went forward on his steps. He asked God to reverse this so that the shadow would go back ten steps (verse 10). Isaiah called on the Lord, who did exactly what Hezekiah had asked. He made the shadow go back ten steps instead of forward. This was a confirmation to Hezekiah that the word of the Lord through Isaiah was true. He would have fifteen more years to live.

We learn from this that there are times when God's prophetic word is conditional. That is to say, what He proposes will happen as long as certain conditions are in place. If those conditions change, God may permit something else to happen. As long as Hezekiah remained in his pride he faced death. If he humbled himself before the Lord, however, he would live. The same is true when it comes to sin in our lives. As long as we are sinners we will perish under the judgment of God, but that can be changed. Jesus came to offer forgiveness. If we accept His forgiveness we can be saved from the judgment of God. Isaiah told Hezekiah that he was going to die. That statement was true as long as Hezekiah remained in his present state. Repentance from his pride and sin, however, changed everything and set him free from the judgment of God.

At that time, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon sent Hezekiah a letter and a gift because he had heard that he was sick (verse 12). Hezekiah received the messengers and showed them all the wealth of the land of Judah. He showed them the silver, gold, spices and fine oil. He also showed them his armoury and everything he had among his treasures. Verse 13 tells us that "there was nothing in his palace or in his entire kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them." We are left to wonder why Hezekiah would

show these foreigners all his wealth. Could it be that Hezekiah was still wrestling with pride? He wanted Babylon to see how rich and powerful he was. It may be that Hezekiah had repented of his pride, but it remained a stronghold in his life.

After this event, God sent Isaiah the prophet to Hezekiah. God had seen the pride of his heart when he showed all his wealth to the Babylonian messengers. Isaiah asked the king what the messengers had to say to him and where they came from. Hezekiah told him that they had come from Babylon (verse 14). When Isaiah asked him what these men had seen in his palace, Hezekiah told the prophet that he had shown them everything (verse 15).

Isaiah then told Hezekiah that the time was coming when everything he had shown to these messengers would be carried off to Babylon. Nothing would be left (verse 17). His own descendants would be taken to Babylon and become eunuchs in the palace of its king (verse 18). All that he had taken pride in would be stripped from him and his descendants.

Hezekiah's response to God is somewhat disturbing. He fully accepted what the prophet said because he realized that this would not take place in his lifetime (verse 19). He was not concerned about what future generations would have to face. His concern seemed to be only for himself. Again, this is an indication that he had not overcome his pride.

Hezekiah is remembered for the construction of a pool and tunnel that provided water for the city of Jerusalem. This project may have been inspired by what happened when the city was surrounded by Assyria. The pool could provide water for the city even if the city was under siege. When

Hezekiah died, his son Manasseh took his place (verse 21).

Hezekiah's story is the story of a man who served the Lord faithfully all his life but whose blessings became an obstacle in the end. Pride was his downfall. Hezekiah's life is a warning to us to beware of pride. It shows us that even the blessings of God can become obstacles if we hold on to them too tightly. How important it is for us to hold these blessings lightly lest they take the place of God.

Hezekiah's story also reminds us of the power of repentance and prayer. Hezekiah's pride was his downfall but his repentance reversed the curse of God on his life. God was willing to extend his life and heal his sickness because he repented. While not all sickness is the result of sin, it appears that Hezekiah's was. Only repentance could bring the healing he needed. Through repentance and prayer his circumstances were changed.

For Consideration:

- What is the connection between repentance and healing in the life of Hezekiah? How does God speak to us through circumstances today?
- God was willing to change his plan for Hezekiah when he prayed and repented of his sin. What do we learn about the conditional purposes of God? Are there circumstances in your life that could be changed if you repented or made things right with God?

- What evidence is there in the life of Hezekiah that he had not really had victory over pride? Are there sins in your life that you have confessed but don't seem to have victory over? What are they?
- All the blessings of the Lord in Hezekiah's life made him proud. Are there blessings from God that have made you proud today? What are they?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you if there is anything in your life that hinders the blessing of the Lord.
- Are there things in your life that God is willing to change if you would repent and make things right with Him? Ask the Lord to show you those things. Ask Him to give you victory.
- Do you have a particular sin in your life that you do not seem to be able to overcome? Ask the Lord to give you complete victory over that sin.
- Ask God to give you grace never to allow His blessings to come ahead of your relationship with Him.

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MANASSEH AND AMON OF JUDAH

Read 2 Kings 21:1-25

Manasseh

Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king. He served in Jerusalem for fifty-five years. This was a long time to be king. During this time, Manasseh led the nation of Judah into rebellion against God.

2 Kings 21 spends a fair amount of time describing the evil of King Manasseh. Verse 2 tells us that he followed the detestable practices of the nations the Lord drove out before the Israelites. He restored the pagan high places that his father had destroyed. He erected altars to Baal and made an Asherah pole. He also worshiped the stars.

Manasseh brought his evil into the temple of the Lord. Verse 4 tells us that he built altars in the temple. These were not altars for the worship of the Lord God. We see from verse 5 that he built these altars to the "starry hosts." They were used in the worship of the stars. By using the

temple for the worship of the stars, Manasseh was blaspheming the name of God.

Manasseh went even further than this. Verse 6 tells us that he sacrificed his own son in the fire in a pagan act of worship. He practiced sorcery and divination, consulting mediums and spiritists. In doing these things he became an enemy to the God of his fathers and provoked Him to anger (verse 6).

Notice in verse 7 that not only did Manasseh bring altars for the worship of the stars into the temple but he also took a carved Asherah pole and put it in the temple. Verse 7 reminds us of how God had promised to put His name in this temple. This was a holy place where the presence of God dwelt. When Manasseh brought these foreign objects into the temple he showed that he did not respect or honour the name of the Lord. He openly defied and blasphemed the name of the God of Judah.

It is surprising that Manasseh reigned for fifty-five years in Jerusalem. God could have stopped him but He didn't. He allowed him to reign. During this time, Judah fell more and more into sin and rebellion. God had promised that He would preserve His people if they followed His ways and kept His commands (verse 8). Judah did not listen to Him or follow His ways. Under Manasseh, they did more evil than the people the Lord had destroyed in the land before them. This was a time when God allowed the nation to see their true nature. Israel had turned her back on God and was captured and sent into exile. Judah had seen this but did not learn from it. She fell into that same rebellion.

God spoke to His prophets about Manasseh. In verses 10-12 He told them that He was going to bring disaster on Jerusalem because King Manasseh had committed more

evil than the Amorites who preceded them in the land (verses 11-12). The disaster God would bring on His people would be so terrible that it would cause the ears of those who heard it to tingle in terror and fear (verse 12).

Through the prophets, God revealed that he was going to stretch a measuring line over Jerusalem. Notice, in verse 13, that this measuring line was the same line used against Samaria. God would use the same standard He had used against the house of Ahab that had been wiped out for their sin. He would measure the people against the standard of His word. Jerusalem had fallen short of God's standard and would pay a serious price. God would wipe out Jerusalem as one wiped a dish, turning it upside down (verse 13). The idea is that God would remove from this dish all the scraps of sin and evil. He would turn it upside down so that every scrap of sin would be cleansed from the land. This process of cleansing the land would be a very difficult one for the nation of Judah.

The day was coming when the Lord God would turn His back on His people and hand them over to their enemies. They would be plundered and looted. They would lose all they had (verse 14). All this would happen because of their sin. They had provoked God to anger from the time He brought them out of Egypt by their rebellion (verse 15).

King Manasseh of Judah was a very cruel and violent king, shedding much innocent blood. When he died he was buried in the palace garden. His son Amon would become king in his place (verse 18).

Amon

Amon became king in Judah when he was twenty-two years old. He only reigned for two years (verse 19). He followed his father's rebellion, worshiping idols, bowing down to them (verses 20-21), and forsaking the Lord God.

King Amon's officials conspired against him and assassinated him in the royal palace (verse 23). This sparked a reaction in the land. Verse 24 tells us that the people of Judah killed those who had plotted against Amon and made his son Josiah king in his place. Amon was buried with his father in the Garden of Uzza. Josiah his son took his place on the throne (verse 26).

For Consideration:

- Manasseh was a very evil king in Judah, and yet he reigned for fifty-five years. God does not always stop evil people. What does this teach us about His patience?
- King Hezekiah was a good king who led his people away from sin to the Lord. Manasseh his son rebelled against the ways of his father. What does this tell us about the need of every person to make a personal commitment to the Lord? Is there any guarantee in Scripture that our children will be believers just because they have been raised in a believing home?
- Israel's rebellion against God led to her judgment at the hands of the Assyrians. Did Judah learn a

lesson from this? Why is it so difficult to learn from the mistakes of others?

- The whole nation of Judah followed Manasseh into sin and rebellion. What does this say about the spiritual climate of the nation at that time?
- God was going to use His measuring line in Judah. That measuring line was the Word of God and His commandments. What would God see today if He sent his measuring line into our churches and nations?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to pray for your children. Ask God to open their hearts to Him.
- Ask God to reveal any sin and rebellion in your heart. Ask Him to give you a humble heart that will repent of evil and turn to Him.
- Take a moment to pray for your nation. Ask God to renew and restore it so that it walks more closely to His Word.
- Thank the Lord for His patience with us even when we fall.
- Thank the Lord that He will judge sin and that righteousness will one day triumph.

JOSIAH, JEHOAHAZ AND JEHOIAKIM

Read 2 Kings 22:1-23:37

Josiah

Manasseh was an evil king who shed much innocent blood and encouraged the worship of foreign gods. He defiled the temple and led Judah into terrible sin and evil. When he died his son Josiah became king in his place. Josiah was eight years old when he became king. He reigned for thirty-one years in Jerusalem (verse 1). Josiah was a good king who walked with the Lord (verse 2).

In the eighteenth year of his reign, King Josiah ordered his secretary Shephan to go to the high priest and command him to gather the money the doorkeepers had collected from the people. He was to entrust this money into the hands of capable men and have them pay workers to repair the temple of the Lord. They were also to use the money to purchase timber and dressed stone for use in the repairs. It should be remembered that Manasseh had done much damage to the temple by his introduction of pagan idols and foreign worship.

Josiah, Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, Kings of Judah 289

As the repairs were being carried out, the high priest found the Book of the Law in the temple. This book contained the Law of Moses and the requirements of God for His people. He gave this book to Shaphan the secretary who brought it to King Josiah (verses 8-10). The fact that this book had been lost is an indication of the spiritual climate of the land. Manasseh had reigned for fifty-five years. He had no desire for the law of God. Josiah had been king for eighteen years before the book had been discovered. This book may have been lost for sixty or seventy years. Some of the temple workers had likely never seen or heard from this book. This shows us how low the spiritual life of Judah had fallen in the days of Manasseh.

Shaphan, the secretary, read the Book of the Law to the king (verse 10). Josiah was so touched by the words that he tore his robes in grief and fear. He realized that the nation had not kept the law of God. Wanting to know the will of the Lord, he sent some of his officials to inquire about the words of this book. He knew that God was angry with the nation (verse 13).

Josiah's officials spoke to the prophetess Huldah (verse 14). She told the men that the Lord was going to bring disaster on the nation of Judah, just as was written in the Book of the Law, because they had forsaken Him and provoked Him to anger (verses 16-17). Huldah told Josiah's officials to tell the king that God had heard his prayers (verse 19). Because he had humbled himself, he would not see this terrible disaster in his lifetime (verse 20). The officials took the words of the prophetess back to Josiah.

When Josiah heard that word of the Lord, he called the elders of Judah and Jerusalem together (23:1). He brought them to the temple along with the men of Judah and there he read the words of the Book of the Covenant to them

(23:2). That day the king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant with God. Those present promised to follow the Lord and keep His commandments, regulations and decrees with all their heart and soul (23:3). Obviously this was a very powerful meeting.

The renewal of the covenant required a significant cleansing of the land which was full of idolatry and evil. Josiah ordered Hilkiah, the high priest, the priests and the doorkeepers to remove the articles made for Baal, Asherah and the starry hosts from the temple (23:4). These articles were burned outside the city of Jerusalem. The ashes were taken to Bethel. Josiah got rid of the pagan priests who had been burning incense on the high places to the moon, and the stars (23:5). The Asherah pole was taken from the temple and burned in the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem. It was ground to powder and its ashes scattered over the graves of the common people (23:6). The quarters where the male shrine prostitutes lived were torn down as well as the location where women did weaving for Asherah (23:7).

Josiah desecrated the high places in the land where the priests burned incense and broke down numerous shrines (23:8). In 2 Kings 23:10 we read how he also desecrated Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom so that it could no longer be used to sacrifice children in the fire to the pagan god Molech. Horses were removed from the entrance of the temple of the Lord because former kings had dedicated them to the sun. He burned chariots that had been dedicated to the sun (23:11). He pulled down altars the kings of Judah had erected on the roof and the altars Manasseh had built in the two courts of the temple. These he smashed to pieces, throwing the rubble into the Kidron Valley (23:12).

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Josiah also destroyed high places to the east of Jerusalem. These high places had been built by Solomon for Ash-toreth the goddess of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the god of Moab and Molech the god of the people of Ammon (23:13). He smashed sacred stones and cut down more Asherah poles covering the site with human bones to desecrate it (23:14).

In verse 15 Josiah smashed down the altar Jeroboam had made at Bethel to the calf god. He burned the high place and ground it to powder. He destroyed the Asherah pole in that region. As Josiah looked around him, he noticed tombs built into the hillside. He removed the bones from the tombs and had them burnt on the altar to defile it. This fulfilled the words of the prophet to Jeroboam many years prior to this in 1 Kings 13:1:

By the word of the LORD a man of God came from Judah to Bethel, as Jeroboam was standing by the altar to make an offering. He cried out against the altar by the word of the LORD: "O altar, altar! This is what the LORD says: 'A son named Josiah will be born to the house of David. On you he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who now make offerings here, and human bones will be burned on you.'"

Josiah also noticed a tombstone in that area. He questioned the men of the city about it and they told him that the stone marked the grave of the prophet who had prophesied the very things that had happened that day. Josiah told his men not to disturb the grave (23:17-18).

What we need to remember is that, at this point, the people of God were divided into two nations. Josiah is destroying and desecrating the altars and high places not only in his

own nation of Judah but also in the nation of Israel that had been exiled many years prior to this.

Josiah moved throughout the nations of Israel and Judah destroying high places and pagan altars. He slaughtered all the priests who served at the high places, burning human bones on the altars to desecrate them (23:19-20). After this massive campaign to cleanse the land, Josiah returned to Jerusalem.

When the land was cleansed of its evil, Josiah then gave an order for all the people to celebrate the Passover of the Lord as it was written in the Book of the Covenant (23:21). There had not been a Passover Celebration like this since the time of the judges in Israel (23:22). This Passover was celebrated in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign. This means that he had wasted no time cleansing the land. The whole process of cleansing the land took place within a period of about one year.

Josiah got rid of the mediums, spiritists, household gods and the idols of other gods found in Judah and Jerusalem (23:24). All this was done to fulfil the requirements of the law of God that had been discovered in the temple.

Verse 25 tells us that there was not a king like Josiah before or after who turned to the Lord with all his heart, soul and strength. Despite his faithfulness, however, the anger of the Lord did not turn away from Judah (23:26). God still determined in His heart to remove Judah from His presence as He had removed Israel. He would reject Jerusalem and the temple and turn His face from them (23:27). Josiah was clearly sold out to the Lord and His purposes. This, however, did not mean that his people shared that same heart.

Josiah, Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, Kings of Judah 293

Josiah would die in battle when he went to fight against Pharaoh Neco of Egypt (23:29). His body was brought to Jerusalem where it was buried in a tomb. His son Jehoahaz would become king in his place (23:30).

Jehoahaz

Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king and he reigned for three month in Jerusalem (23:31). He turned his back on the Lord God and did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Josiah's son did not share his passion for the Lord God. Pharaoh Neco put Jehoahaz in chains, stripped him of his power and took him captive into Egypt. Jehoahaz would die in Egypt. Pharaoh Neco chose Eliakim, Josiah's other son to be king in the place of Jehoahaz. He changed his name from Eliakim to Jehoiakim (23:34). Egypt imposed a tax on Judah (23:35).

Jehoiakim

Jehoiakim was twenty-five when Pharaoh made him king. He reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years (23:36). He also did evil in the eyes of the Lord (23:37)

If the sons of Josiah were any indication of the state of the nation of Judah, we can see why God refused to remove His hand of judgment from the land. The land had been cleansed, but it takes more than a change of external circumstances to move the heart of God. God saw beyond the externals to the heart of the people of the land. He saw the repentant heart of Josiah and put off His judgment for a time. God also knew, however, that the hearts of Josiah's sons and the hearts of the people as a whole remained unchanged despite the cleansing of the land. Because of this, His judgment would fall on the nation as a whole.

For Consideration:

- The Book of the Law had been lost for a whole generation. What does this tell us about the spiritual climate of Judah at the time that Josiah became king? Is it possible for the Word of God to be lost to people in our day? Explain.
- God was touched by the repentant heart of Josiah and put off the judgment of the nation for a number of years. What impact can our repentance have on God?
- How thorough was Josiah in cleansing of the land? How thorough have you been about cleansing sin from your life and church?
- Does changing our behaviour mean that the heart is also cleansed? Is it possible to get rid of sin and evil in our lives and still not have a heart that is right with God?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to give you a heart for His Word. Thank Him that He has given us His Word to guide us into His purpose.
- Ask God to search your heart and show you any evil that needs to be removed.
- Ask God to give you a repentant heart like Josiah that grieves over sin.

Josiah, Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim, Kings of Judah 295

- Josiah was a good king but His sons did not serve the Lord. If you have children, take a moment to pray for your children, asking God to give them a personal faith that honours Him.

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THE END IS COME: THE REIGNS OF JEHOIAKIM, JEHOIACHIN, ZEDEKIAH AND GEDALIAH

Read 2 Kings 24:1-25:30

Jehoiakim

During the reign of Jehoiakim, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded the land of Judah. He forced Jehoiakim into subjection for three years. After three years, however, Jehoiakim decided to rebel against Babylon (verse 1).

Because of his rebellion, the Lord sent the Arameans, Moabites and Ammonites against Judah. Verse 2 is quite clear. God sent these nations to destroy Judah. Judah's refusal to accept the punishment of God only intensified His wrath against her.

God determined to punish Judah for the sins they had committed. Reference is made in verse 3 to the sins of

Manasseh who led His people astray. The people accepted the evil of Manasseh and fell into his evil practices. In doing this, they rejected the Lord and provoked Him to anger. There was nothing Judah could do now to change the mind of God. She had been warned by the prophets but refused God's words. Now her time of judgment had come. She could fight against that judgment but she would not succeed. The Lord was not willing to forgive Manasseh and the nation for their rebellion (verse 4).

There is a limit to the patience and forgiveness of the Lord God. While He is more than willing to forgive, our persistent refusal to accept that forgiveness may cause Him to withdraw His offer. We cannot take the patience and forgiveness of God for granted. It will not be there forever.

Jehoiakim would die in rebellion against the Lord God. His son Jehoiachin would succeed him as king in this nation in subjection to Babylon (verse 6). Verse 7 shows us that Babylon had become a significant power on the earth. Even mighty Egypt did not march out to do battle anymore because the king of Babylon had taken their territory.

Jehoiachin

King Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king in Jerusalem. His reign would only last for three months (verse 8). He did not serve the Lord (verse 9).

Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon advanced against Jerusalem in the reign of Jehoiachin and laid siege to the city (verse 10). Jehoiachin surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar and was taken prisoner (verse 12). Babylon removed all the treasures from the temple and the royal palace. They took the gold articles that Solomon had made for the temple (verse 13). All this had been prophesied to Solomon in 1 Kings

9:6-8. Nebuchadnezzar also carried off the officers, fighting men, craftsmen and artisans of Judah. A total of ten thousand skilled people were taken from the city and brought back with him to Babylon to serve Nebuchadnezzar. Only the poorest people of the land were left (verse 14). Jehoiachin, his wives and his officials were also taken captive and brought to Babylon (verse 15).

Nebuchadnezzar made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place. He changed his name from Mattaniah to Zedekiah. It is unclear why Nebuchadnezzar changed Mattaniah's name. His name meant "gift of God." Zedekiah means "righteousness of God." It may be possible that Nebuchadnezzar wanted the people to know that he was God's instrument in bringing righteous judgment against His people.

Zedekiah

Mattaniah (or Zedekiah) was twenty-one years old when he became king. He reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years (verse 18). He did not serve the Lord (verse 19). Zedekiah even rebelled against the king of Babylon.

Because of Zedekiah's rebellion, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem. He camped outside the city and built siege ramps against it (25:1). Five months later, the famine inside the city had become very severe. There was no food for the people to eat (25:3).

Knowing that there was no hope in the city, the people broke a hole in the wall and fled through it at night. The whole army escaped through the hole in the wall and headed toward the region of the Arabah (25:4). The escape was discovered and Babylon overtook them in the plains of Jericho (25:5). Zedekiah was captured and taken

to the king of Babylon. For his rebellion, Zedekiah's sons were killed before his eyes and then his eyes were gouged out. This was done so that the last thing Zedekiah would ever see was the death of his sons. He was bound in bronze shackles and taken to Babylon.

Nebuzaradan, Nebuchadnezzar's commander came into the city of Jerusalem and set fire to the temple of the Lord, the royal palace and every important building (25:9). The Babylonian army broke down the wall that protected the city (25:10). The people who remained in the city were taken into exile to Babylon (25:11). Only the poorest people were left to work the vineyards and the fields (25:12).

The bronze pillars, the movable stands and the bronze basin that were in the temple were broken up and carried away to Babylon (25:13). They also took the pots, shovels, wick trimmers, dishes, censers, and sprinkling bowls used in the worship of the Lord (25:14-15). It was not an easy task to take all these articles back to Babylon. The weight of the bronze pillars, stands and basin was so much that it could not be weighed. Each of the pillars was twenty-seven feet high (8.1 meters). The capital on top of one pillar was four and a half feet high (1.3 meters) decorated with carved pomegranates of bronze all around.

Nebuzaradan took Seraiah, the chief priest and Zephaniah, the priest next in rank as well as the three doorkeepers as prisoners (25:18). He also took the officer in charge of the fighting men, five royal advisers, the secretary in charge of conscription and sixty of his men. He brought them to Babylon with him where they were executed (25:19-20).

Gedaliah

Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah as governor over the people who remained in the land (25:22). When the people who remained heard that Gedaliah had been appointed as governor they came to him at Mizpah (25:23). Included among those who gathered around Gedaliah were military officers by the names of Ishmael, Johanan, Seraiah, Jaazaniah, as well as their men. Gedaliah took an oath and reassured them that they did not need to be afraid of Babylon. As long as they served the king of Babylon, everything would go well with them (25:24).

In Gedaliah's seventh month, however, Ishmael came with ten of his men and assassinated Gedaliah, some of the men of Judah, as well as the Babylonians who were with him at Mizpah (25:25). This caused great panic among the people who feared the reaction of Babylon. Those who remained in the land decided to flee to Egypt for protection against Babylon (25:26).

What is strange is that many years prior to this, God's people had been rescued from Egypt. They had been held there as slaves. Now they return to Egypt. This shows that their trust was not in the Lord God, but in Egypt.

In Babylon, after thirty-seven years of exile, Evil-Merodach became king. He released Jehoiachin from prison (25:27). Evil-Merodach and Jehoiachin enjoyed a good relationship. Jehoiachin was honoured higher than the other kings who were in Babylon. His prison clothes were removed and he ate regularly at Evil-Merodach's table (25:29). Evil-Merodach even gave him a regular allowance for as long as he lived.

God's people brought His wrath on themselves by their consistent refusal to honour Him and obey His command. They paid the price for their rebellion and lost all God had given them. Their land, their temple, their homes all were now in enemy hands. They were servants of a foreign king. God would not forsake them forever. Even in exile they would have signs of His presence and blessing.

For Consideration:

- Some of the kings and leaders of this period of Judah's history had a hard time accepting their discipline from God and rebelled against Babylon. Have you ever had a hard time accepting the discipline of the Lord?
- What do we learn here about the limit to God's patience and His offer of forgiveness? Will that offer always be there for us?
- Sin and rebellion brought the loss of all of Judah's blessings. What evidence is there of this in your society or personal life?
- How is the blessing of Jehoiachin evidence of God's presence with His people in their exile? What encouragement do you receive from this as you face your trial?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be willing to submit to His discipline in your life. Thank Him that His discipline is always for our good.
- Thank the Lord for His patience and His offer of forgiveness.
- Thank the Lord that He is with us even when He must punish or discipline us.
- Ask the Lord to restore those things that have been taken from you because of sin.
- Ask the Lord to help you to learn the lessons He has for you to learn before it is too late.

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