

Elisha: A PROPHET TO A WAYWARD NATION

LESSONS FOR OUR DAY

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ELISHA: Man of God

And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said . . . I will follow thee. . . . then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him

God is continually seeking those who have wandered from the faith and those who are lost. He goes to great lengths to bring them home.

I can say this with confidence. God's mercy is continually portrayed in the Scriptures. This can especially be seen in the amazing ministries of the Old Testament prophets — Elijah and Elisha. They are two of the more notable prophets sent by God to the wayward northern kingdom of Israel. Their combined ministries lasted 86-years and ministered to six kings.

Often missed during this time period are the school of prophets stationed in at least three cities in the northern kingdom. They were headed by both Elijah and Elisha. Those schools resided in Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho.

The first king of the northern kingdom (Jeroboam) made it impossible for the biblical priesthood, Scribes and Levites to be faithful to their call and remain in the north. Therefore, they left Israel and moved to Judah. However, God did not abandon the people. The schools of the prophets remained in the north, ministering to the wayward nation.

Fifty-four years after Israel divided into two nations, the religious conditions in the north worsened. It became so bad under the reign of King Ahab that a man by the name of Obadiah hid 100 of the prophets in a cave in order to keep them from being killed by the king.

The nation's disregard of God led to flagrant acts of sin. Open paganism filled the country. Sexual perversion, violence and corruption erupted at every level. Justice on the whole failed.

Under King Ahab and Jezebel, the nation reached a new spiritual low. It was so bad that even the great prophet Elijah believed he was the only one left. But God revealed to him that there were 7000 who had not yet bow their knee to Baal.

God used Elijah to show Israel the powerlessness of paganism. The three year drought brought crushing blows to Israel's faith in Baal, the storm god. The water shortage brought the people to their knees. This was climaxed with the destruction of 450 prophets of Baal along with another 400 prophets of Ashteroth. This all happen in one day. It was a major defeat for paganism.

God then instructed Elijah to anoint his successor, (Elisha) and the next King of Israel, (Jehu) and the king of Syria (Hazeal). Their reigns continued to loosen the grip of persecution and violence that plagued the land. Though paganism was not abolished, there would be more room for the message of God to spread in the north.

Through these acts we can see God is continually seeking to reach those that have wandered from the faith or are lost. He goes to great lengths to bring them home.

If you are struggling with your faith, please note that God has not given up on you. If you think God has given up on your love ones, think again. God is still reaching out to them.

Today, we will look at the ministry of Elisha. He is Elijah's successor. In many ways He is strikingly different than Elisha.

Elijah dressed in camel hair clothing and lived in poor and rural areas. Whereas, Elisha was from a wealthy family and more comfortable dressed in the common apparel while dwelling in cities and towns.

Both prophets boldly confronted kings. However, Elijah was more confrontational, even challenging the prophets of Baal and Ashteroth to a showdown. He was designed to challenge and strike down paganism.

While Elisha still confronted paganism, his ministry focused on rebuilding the school of the prophets and restoring the faith of the remnant in the north. He knew that by strengthening the faithful, they in turn would be able to bring the message of life to a wayward nation.

In our lesson today, we find God remembering his own. Furthermore, we find God still reaches out to the lost and hurting, even in times of apostasy and open rebellion.

1. What do we learn of Elisha's dedication to the Lord in 1 Kings 19:19-21?

ANSWER:

Elisha, whose name means "God is salvation," was apparently from a wealthy family. Otherwise there would not have been servants behind twelve pair of oxen pulling twelve plows lined up in an echelon formation across the field. Casting the mantle on this young farmer was Elijah's ceremonial way of drafting him for the prophetic task to which God had called him. Elisha obviously knew what it meant. "He left the oxen and ran after Elijah" (v. 20).

Like the reluctant followers in Jesus' parable, Elisha asked for the privilege of first saying goodbye to his parents (cf. Matt. 8:21; Luke 9:61). It is not exactly clear whether Elijah willingly granted his petition or not. What did Elijah mean when he said, "Go back again, for what have I done to you"? Seeing it as a favorable response to Elisha's request, one commentator translates the comment: "Go (kiss your parents). Then come back, for (remember) what I have done to you (i.e. casting my mantle on you)." Elisha must have understood it this way. Not only did he go back to tell his parents farewell but he also symbolically put his entire past life behind him by sacrificing his oxen and burning them with a fire kindled from the wooden plow. The plow was probably the simple run-rig type still common among Palestinian peasants today.

2. When we read 2 Kings 2, eight years have past since we first heard of Elisha. There is only one passage that gives us any insight to those eight years. It is found in 2 Kings 3:11-12a,

"But Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD, that we may inquire of the LORD by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah. And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the LORD is with him."

What do we learn about Elisha and leadership?

ANSWER:

He is identified here as the one "who poured water on the hands of Elijah" (v. 11). This picturesque phrase was used to identify a servant who held the jar of water while his master washed his hands. It means that Elisha was known as the servant of the great prophet Elijah, and therefore, "the word of the LORD is with him" (v. 12).

3. What can we learn about the school of the prophets in the following passages. (2 Kings 2:3, 5; 4:38; 5:22).

ANSWER:

The Hebrew term "sons of the prophets" occurs eleven times. The phrase only occurs during the period of Elijah and especially Elisha, and only in the books of 1 and 2 Kings. The term is a technical one referring to the members of a prophetic order or guild, and has no reference to physical descent from a prophet.

There were several different schools or branches of the same guild located at various places: (1) at Bethel (2 Kings 2:3), (2) at Jericho (2 Kings 2:5), (3) at Gilgal (2 Kings 4:38), (4) in the hill country of Ephraim (2 Kings 5:22). Yet they were all “ruled” by the same prophet whom they called master (2 Kings 2:3, 5).

When the master died or was taken, as Elijah was, one of the school members took his place as the new master. The promotion had to be recognized by the guild members, and the test was whether the new master had the powers of the old master (2:8, 14) and whether the spirit of the old master rested on the new master (2:15).

The guild may have lived in a community. They erected community buildings (6:1ff.) and shared a common table (4:38-44). Yet some were married (4:1ff.). Some of their work was done at the command of the master (4:38; 9:1), and often they sought his approval before doing something (2:16-18; 6:1ff.). Yet they could act on their own (1 Kings 20:35).

Though the technical term $\text{בְּנֵי־הַנְּבִיאִים}$ does not occur elsewhere, there may be other indications of prophetic guilds. Such may be the case with the “band of prophets” in Saul’s and Samuel’s day (1 Sam 10:5ff.; 19:20). Likewise, where a large number of prophets is mentioned (1 Kings 18:4, 19; 22:6) this is indicative of a guild. Groups acting in concert and designated only by “prophets” are prob. also prophetic guilds (2 Kings 23:2; Jer 26:7, 8, 11). Thus prophetic guilds continued throughout the monarchy.

Finally, the phrase בֶּן־נְבִיא , “the son of a prophet” (Amos 7:14), though in the sing., should also be understood as referring to membership in a guild of prophets. Thus Amos affirms he is not a member of a prophetic guild. *The above is from R. B. Y. Scott, The Relevance of the Prophets (1942), 46-49; H. H. Rowley, The Servant of the Lord (1952), 97-134.*

God is now calling Elijah home, therefore, Elijah brings Elisha with him as he says goodbye to the various schools of the prophets. They begin at the school in **Gilgal** — **2 Kings 2:1**. Then they head to the school in **Bethel** — **2 Kings 2:3**, and finally on to the school in **Jericho** — **2 Kings 2:5**. There, 50 men from the school followed Elijah and Elisha to the Jordan River. Remember 8 years before many of these men had to flee for their lives and were living in caves. They lost everything for the sake of speaking forth the word of God. Elijah was the man God used to deliver them from their peril.

It is hard to say goodbye. I have on several occasions heard the final messages of men greatly used by the Lord. Such as the evangelist John R Rice, and the missionary-evangelist Jacob Gardenhaus. I have also heard the final message by a pastor dying from cancer, and even here at Calvary we heard two men, Bob Dowey, and Bob McKeever preach their final message before the Lord took.

In 2 Kings 2:8 we find the final miracle of Elijah. God allows Elijah to part the Jordan before he is taken in a whirlwind, and in 2 Kings 2:14 we see the first miracle performed by Elisha. The point is this: though one man may go off the scene, God will always provide for his people.

4. Elisha performed a number of unusual miracles for those associated with the sons of the prophets. He healed the polluted waters in Jericho (2 Kings 2:19-22). He provided oil to a

prophet's widow. (2 Kings 4:1-7). He healed a pot of food that was accidentally poisoned (2 Kings 4:38-41). During the feast of firstfruits, he multiplied 20 loaves of bread to feed 100 guests (2 Kings 4:42-44), and he recovered a lost ax head by having it float to the surface of the water (2 Kings 6:1-7). In Bethel (a place where a school of the prophets resided) he cursed an blasphemous mob of young men and 42 of them were mauled by two she bears (2 Kings 2:23-25). **What was the purpose of these miracles?**

ANSWER:

Elisha was rebuilding a nation that was devastated by sin. It was a nation that had almost entirely turned their backs on God. Many of the faithful few were impoverished by the economic chaos created by the drought, and by the personal persecution inflicted upon them. They were just beginning to get back on their feet. The miracles solidify the ministry of Elisha over the school of the prophets and strengthen the faithful remnant.

5. Discuss the miracle found in 2 Kings 2:19-22 an its application.

ANSWER:

This takes place at Jericho. The school of the prophets had settled in the new city of Jericho but the water supply was polluted. It caused the women and animals to miscarry, and the fruit trees to drop their fruit early. The poor water supply made the land affordable for the struggling students at the School of the Prophets, however they could not remain there for health reasons. Elisha asks for elements used in the Mosaic Law for purification – a new bowl and salt – 2 Kings 2:20. He then pronounces the “thus saith the Lord,” meaning, this is what God directed me to do, and God heals the spring for generations to come (2 Kings 2:21).

It demonstrated the type of ministry Elisha was going to have on the nation – a healing ministry. One that ministers to the needs of the people who were broken under the tyranny of paganism. As a result of the miracle, the school was able to stay. The city was able to thrive. The land began to heal.

Insight: This is another snapshot of God's care for His people, even in hard times.

5. Discuss the miracle found in 2 Kings 2:23-25 an its application.

ANSWER

Don't think for a minute that Elisha went soft on paganism. For we have another demonstration of God's divine protection, His divine jealousy for His people, and His divine wrath against those that turn from Him.

Bethel was still a wayward city, even though one of the schools of the prophets resided in its borders. Bethel was considered the center of calf worship for many years.

1Kings 12:32-33 - “And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did **he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made:** and he placed in **Bethel**

the priests of the high places which he had made. ³³ So he offered upon the altar which he had made in **Bethel** the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense. **There was a bitter spirit against God and any true prophet of God."**

As Elisha was headed for Mt. Carmel from Jericho, he passed through Bethel. He was climbing the 2800-foot incline into the city. As he approached, a large number of children (young men) confronted him. A crowd like this could even threaten his safety.

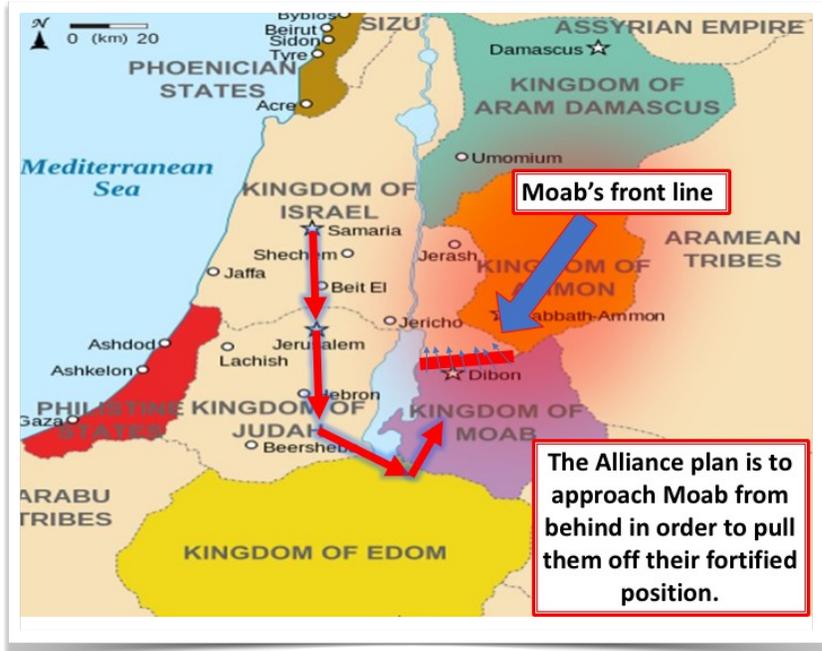
First, the King James has caused some confusion by translating the term as "children." The Hebrew word can refer to children, but rather more specifically means "young men." Second, the fact that the bears mauled 42 of the youths indicates that there were more than 42 youths involved. This was not a small group of children making fun of a bald man. Rather, it was a large demonstration of young men who assembled for the purpose of mocking a prophet of God. Third, the mocking of "go on up, you bald head," is more than making fun of baldness. The baldness of Elisha referred to here may be: 1) natural loss of hair; 2) a shaved head denoting his separation to the prophetic office; or more likely, 3) an epithet of scorn and contempt, Elisha not being literally bald. The phrase "go up" likely was a reference to Elijah, Elisha's mentor, being taken up to Heaven earlier in 2 Kings chapter 2:11-12. It was a disbelief in the story of Elijah's translation. These youths were sarcastically taunting and insulting the Lord's prophet by telling him to repeat Elijah's translation.

In summary, 2 Kings 2:23-24 is not an account of God mauling young children for making fun of a bald man. Rather, it is a record of an insulting demonstration against God's prophet by a large group of young men. Because these young people of about 20 years of age or older (the same term is used of Solomon in 1 Kings 3:7) so despised the prophet of the Lord, Elisha called upon the Lord to deal with the rebels as He saw fit. The Lord's punishment was the mauling of 42 of them by two female bears. The penalty was clearly justified, for to ridicule Elisha was to ridicule the Lord Himself. The seriousness of the crime was indicated by the seriousness of the punishment. The appalling judgment was God's warning to all who would scorn the prophets of the Lord.

WHEN WE TAKE MATTERS INTO OUR OWN HANDS

Most of us know what it is like when we take matters into our own hands without first seeking guidance from the Lord. We all know how that worked out for Abraham.

One time he left the Promised Land without asking God. He moved to Egypt because of a famine, and out of fear he ended up lying about his wife. He said she was his sister. Then the king of Egypt took Sarah with the intent of marrying her. It took a divine act of God to deliver Sarah and Abraham from the mess he created.



Another time, he attempted to fulfill the promise God made about a son. Instead of waiting on God's timing he took Sarah's servant Hagar to father a child. What a disaster that turned out to be. Sarah was plagued with envy and jealousy. Hagar was cruel to Sarah. The issue compounded itself many times over when Sarah bore Isaac. Ishmael taunted Isaac. Abraham's heart was broken when God told him to send Hagar and Ismael away. Then for centuries a conflict continued between Ishmael's descendants (Edom) and Isaac's descendants (Israel).

This all happened because someone got out of step with God. Problems like this can get really out of control, that is, unless God intercedes. Otherwise, everything will go up in smoke.

Have you ever been there? Are you in one of those death spirals of your own making? It is amazing the messes we can find ourselves — debt, bad relationships, business and family problems. It is possible for things to get so bad that lives can be lost. That is what we find in our lesson this morning. An entire army could be wiped out, and several nations crippled.

In this study, we will find people doing what seemed to be right, but they did so without first seeking God's wisdom on the matter.

1. What was King Jehoram's spiritual state? (2 Kings 3:1-3)

What does it mean when it says, "Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom."

What were the sins of Jeroboam? (see 1 Kings 12:32-33)

ANSWER:

2 Kings 3:2 says that king Jehoram was evil. He was not as bad as His father Ahab, for He removed at least one of the images of Baal his father had made, but he was still bad.

In 1 Kings 12:32-33 we find the sins of Jeroboam.

"And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar. So did **he in Bethel, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made:** and he placed in **Bethel** the priests of the high places which he had made. ³³ So he offered upon the altar which he had made in **Bethel** the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart; and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon the altar, and burnt incense."

As soon as Jeroboam took office, he faced a political crisis. Many Israelites were heartbroken that the nation was divided, and there were rumblings of reuniting. A reunion could only happen under David's rightful heir, King Rehoboam — and the result would be certain death for King Jeroboam. So naturally, he was opposed to reunion.

Fueling the longings for reunion were the annual pilgrimages; the LORD required every worshipper to attend a festival at Jerusalem, Rehoboam's capital, three times every year. Jerusalem was a splendid place, rich with meaning for all the Israelites. Solomon had built beautiful palaces, and his temple was one of the architectural wonders of the world. Not only that, but King Rehoboam himself would be presiding over the ceremonies. All this was very inviting to Jeroboam's public.

God had promised Jeroboam that his kingdom would be secure. But Jeroboam didn't trust God's promise. He decided the pilgrimages to Jerusalem were too dangerous, and he had to stop them.

To stop the pilgrimages, Jeroboam changed the national religion. He abolished worship of the LORD and in its place built two golden calf idols, modeled no doubt after the one built centuries earlier by the high priest Aaron. He placed the idols strategically — one in the extreme northern city of Dan, very convenient for the northern population; the other in the southern border town of Bethel, so any pilgrim to Jerusalem would have to pass right by it on their journeys.

Jeroboam also fired all the Levitical priests, who were established according to the LORD's instructions, were familiar with the LORD's regulations, and would influence the people against Jeroboam's new religion. He established a priesthood of his own, designed to take their orders from him. Many Levites and others faithful to the LORD emigrated to Judah.

The golden calf cult, and the sexually immoral practices historically associated with their worship, became an ongoing snare to the people of Israel.

Therefore, we find Jehoram's spiritual state was not much better than his father or his brother. As the text states, Jehoram perpetuated the practice of calf-worship which was promoted 72 years earlier by king Jeroboam.

2. What did Jehoram's brother (the previous king of Israel) try to do to Elijah? – 2 Kings 1:2-4, 9-15.

Discuss how Ahaziah's actions against Elijah might effect Elisha's relation to King Jehoram – (2 Kings 3:14).

King Jehoram had a problem. After his father, Ahab died, his brother, Ahaziah, ruled for two years. Ahaziah made poor decisions and allowed the nation to drift. When his brother suddenly died, Jehoram became king and inherited a number of problems.

He and his family disdained the prophets of God. An example of this is found in 2 Kings 1. There we find King Jehoram's brother sending troops to violently take Elijah, but God twice struck the captains of fifty and their fifty as they came to take him.

3. What problem was king Jehoram trying to solve? – 2 Kings 3:4-6

The Problem:

Jehoram's first problem as king was to deal with Moab. They were a vassal nation to Israel. They were supposed to supply Israel with 100,000 lambs and 100,000 rams with the wool. But Moab fortified their border and rebelled against Israel – 2 Kings 3:4-5.

This created many serious problems for the new king and the nation. First, it made Jehoram and the nation look weak. Second, Moab could become a lethal threat to Israel by joining up with Damascus and attacking Israel's southern border. Third, economically, Moab's rebellion would have negative impact on Israel's textile and agricultural industry. It would be like Taiwan, Thailand or Japan shutting down business with us. The economic impact from this would bring shortages and high prices.

Notice the census taken in 2 Kings 3:6. Apparently, Israel did not feel confident enough to take Moab in a head-on battle. So Jehoram sought to make a league with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah.

4. What was the battle plan? – 2 Kings 3:7-8. Why does this plan make a lot of sense from a human standpoint?

Jehoram made a league with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, who in turn invited their vassal state, Edom to join them – 2 Kings 3:7-8. They determined to either cross the land bridge through the Dead Sea into Moab. Or they would cut through Edom and head north into Moab. This set the stage for Israel and Judah's trouble. Now what is so wrong with this plan. It makes perfect sense. Three armies against one. A surprise move by Israel and Judah

would force Moab away from her defenses drawing the enemy into the open. It made sense for the nation of Judah to work with Israel. It would cement their relationships with the new king of Israel. It could open up new economic ventures. Maybe King Jehoram even sweetened the alliance by giving his sister Athaliah, to Jehoshaphat's son. Therefore, the promise of peace, victory, spoils of war and future trade agreements looked like a win, win scenario for all involved. How can something that looked so good fail?

5. What is wrong with the Alliance's plan? — 2 Kings 3:7-8; 1 Kings 19:2

The Real Drawbacks:

First, they did not ask God. Second, it was wrong for Jehoshaphat to make this type of an agreement with Jehoram. This is not Jehoshaphat's first time around making alliances with Israel. Three years before he made a similar alliance with King Ahab. They united to go against Syria. It ended up badly. Jehoshaphat nearly lost his life and King Ahab was killed. Afterwards, God sent a prophet to sternly rebuke Jehoshaphat for his alliance.

“And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD” – 1 Chron 19:2.

It defies imagination why Jehoshaphat would ever make another alliance with Israel, BUT he did!!! Maybe this time it will be different. Isn't that what we think. So Jehoshaphat thought this time it would be different, but it wasn't.

6. Discuss the disaster that followed — 2 Kings 3:9-10. Why did Jehoram blame the Lord for their predicament?

2 Kings 3:9 – The armies entered Moab and soon found themselves without water. They were on the verge of death. If Moab had attacked at that time it might have been possible for them to defeat the three kings. In 2 Kings 3:10 – Jehoram blames the Lord for their predicament.

7. Discuss God's deliverance — 2 Kings 3:11-18, 20-27.

2 Kings 3:11-12 — Jehoshaphat wisely calls for a prophet.

2 Kings 3:13 – Elisha rebukes the king of Israel — Jehoram. Remember, there was no love lost between them. One year earlier Jehoram's brother tried to kill Elisha's master, Elijah.

2 Kings 3:14 – Elisha stays because of Jehoshaphat, is a believer, however he is a wayward one at this point. In 2 Kings 3:16-17, Elisha tells them to dig ditches and in 2 Kings 3:18, Elisha says the water is a light thing for the Lord to do. Furthermore, the Lord will deliver Moab into their hand.

2 Kings 3:19 – They were to cut down the trees and stop up wells and mar the land. This would weaken Moab for years. 2 Kings 3:20-27 – It happened as Elisha predicted.

7. Discuss the following insights:

First, Jehoshaphat should have known better. How does this relate to us?

It nearly cost him his life. Think of all the things we do without asking God. Changing jobs, getting married, buying a house, and so many other things. Humanly speaking, our moves may seem good. The potential benefits may appear off the charts. We reason that God in no way would say no to our brilliant plan, or suggest another way.

What should we do? ... Seek God first.

Second, what was Elisha doing in Moab? What can we learn from this?

Elisha was a prophet to Israel. But in this passage, we find him 100 miles away from home. Here we get an insight to the sovereignty of God. God is all knowing. He knew the foolish plans of Judah and was moving on the basis of His covenant. Fortunately for Israel, it was not time for that nation to fall. Israel will go another 132 years before God will have enough of her apostate conduct. In this we find God's mercy. There were many people in Israel that still needed to hear the message of life. God is always near. He knows our plans and is always ahead of us.

Third: What would have happened if Jehoshaphat had not called for a prophet? How can this be applied to us?

Elisha did not march into the camp and say to the kings, "I am here." He waited quietly outside of the camp. I wonder what would have happened if they had not called for a prophet. Here we find God always nearby; waiting for us to call on Him. He does not interfere until we invite Him. Perhaps the situation would have been much worse if they had not called for a prophet.

Fourth, God delivered them from a disaster, but He called the kings to step out on faith first. Does this act relate to what God may do in our lives?

"Make this valley full of ditches" – 2 Kings 3:16. Do you know how hard it is to dig trenches in the hot arid lands of Moab? It is filled with rocks. The troops were already suffer from thirst. This was not just a few holes. God said, make "this valley full of ditches." God often asks us to step out on faith before there are any results. He may be calling you to do something that is very difficult. He promises you that it will get you out of your predicament, but from your stand point it will take a miracle.

Fifth, God is revealing Himself to a wayward people. What can we learn from this?

He cares for them. He is not finished. He desires them to turn to Him. By Elisha being outside the camp, He shows the nations that He is ever present and all-knowing. He uses Elisha to demonstrate that He is always near. God knew what would happen ahead of time and sent Elisha to Moab. He shows His power by bringing water without wind or rain. He shows that He never changes when Elisha rebuked the king of Israel for chasing after the false gods of his father and mother. And God showed His mercy based on the covenant made with Abraham.

BEHOLD, I Thought

He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.



Where did Naaman ever get the idea that Elisha would dramatically call on the name of the LORD and strike his hand over the place of his leprosy to recover him from his disease?

In every age there have been false prophets, and teachers. Scripture says, “there were **false** prophets also among the people, even as there shall be **false teachers** among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction” — 2 Peter 2:1. No doubt Naaman had seen his share of false prophets within the ranks of Dagon, Baal and Astaroth. He may have even heard of those within the ranks of Judaism and expected the same from Elisha.

The Scriptures have much to say about false prophets. We are told that “many shall follow their pernicious ways . . . and through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: . . . beguiling unstable souls . . . *speaking* great swelling words of vanity. They promise . . . liberty, *but* they themselves are the

servants of corruption. . . . for such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works” (2 Peter 2; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

This lesson will examine Naaman’s healing. He is a Syrian general; an enemy of Israel, but God heals him. In this miracle we find a portrait of grace. That is, we are saved by God’s grace through faith *in Christ*; and that not of ourselves: “it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Yet Satan sought to mar this amazing portrait of grace by using another prophet’s greed to corrupt the work of God.

1. List and discuss the six features given about Naaman in 2 Kings 5:1, 6.

ANSWER:

- a. He was Captain of the Host of the King of Syria – 2 Kings 5:1a

He was a general - a man who had been successful in life. He was disciplined. He was a trained leader. He had risen to the top of his profession.

- b. He was also a servant – 2 Kings 5:6

In verse 6, He is referred to as a servant. A person can never learn to lead unless he knows how to follow. The one true and great mark of a leader is they are a person who has learned to be a follower.

- c. He was a great man with his Master – 2 Kings 5:1b

He was trustworthy, honest. a person that could be depended on.

- d. He was an honorable man – 2 Kings 5:1c

He had a sense of fairness with the people. People liked him. They respected Him. He was a hero among his people. His name means, "pleasant." He probably had a pleasing charismatic personality. You would have liked this man and had no problem following him. He was popular. He is one of the remarkable characters on the page of Scripture.

- e. He was a mighty man of valor – 2 Kings 5:1d

He was brave, a man of battle, a man of action. He was not a pencil pushing general. He was the Douglas MacArthur, George S. Patton, or Norman Schwarzkopf of his day. He was not afraid to get in the trenches. He was a true leader of men.

- f. ". . .but he was a leper. – 2 Kings 5:1e

2. **Discuss this phrase**, "that by him (Naaman) the LORD had given deliverance to Syria" (2 Kings 5:1c). Syria was a neighbor and enemy of Israel. Even Naaman's wife's servant was an Israelite, captured in a Syrian raid, and sold into slavery. **How could the LORD give deliverance to Syria and at the same time be LORD of Israel?**

ANSWER:

Note, that it says, "that by him (Naaman) the LORD had given deliverance to Syria."

God is not just the God of Israel or the God of America. God takes no sides. He is the God of righteousness and justice and the ruler of all nations. He raises up leaders and nations and He brings them down (See Isaiah 40:15-26).

3. Discuss Naaman's disease and its physical and spiritual relevance to what God is conveying in this account.

ANSWER:

Naaman was the Captain of the Host of the King of Syria, a faithful servant and a great man with his master. He was honorable and a mighty man of valor. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the Scriptures had stopped and not said anything else? If we didn't have to put that last "BUT" on the end of the sentence. If it were a fairy tale we could say, "And He lived happily ever after." But this is not a fairy tale, it is a true-life story of a real man, so it records the "BUT, he was a leper."

His condition is a parallel picture of the human race. The Bible gives leprosy as an exact picture of sin. What leprosy does to the physical body - sin does to the spiritual body. You can list all the fine qualities of a person today but you have to add . . . the "BUT." But he/she is a sinner. The wages of sin is death. We live in a day that historians delight in digging up dirt on all the great men — Washington, Lincoln, Jackson. etc. If the truth be told, every politician, every leader, every person has some skeleton in their closet. After studying history all his life, James Truslow Adams, the Pulitzer Prize winning historian from Connecticut wrote . . .

There is so much good in the worst of us,
and so much bad in the best of us,
That it behooves the most of us,
not to talk about the rest of us.

We are all sinner saved by God's wonderful grace. "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" — Isa 64:6. So, amid all the good we can say about Naaman, we must add – BUT HE WAS A LEPER.

4. Read 2 Kings 5:2, 4 and discuss the role of Naaman's wife's servant and how her example is helpful to us.

This is a story about a young lady who was taken into slavery due to Israel's disobedience, but remained a faithful witness for God. The Syrians took her from her family – Her people – her nation. She was made to serve in a foreign land, but the one thing they could not take from her was her God. She was a true believer. Even in physical captivity she never forgot her God. She faithfully witnessed of His power to save.

We are not even told her name but make no mistake – She is the real heroine of this entire story. She would seem to be an insignificant part of this story but without her faithful witness – this story would not have taken place.

Naaman's conduct was greatly influenced by his wife and her young servant. She was a Jewish woman taken captive during a Syrian raid (2 Kings 5:2a) and became God's faithful witness in a foreign land. She could have been disillusioned with God: blamed Him for her captivity; blamed God for all the bad things that ever happened to her, but she didn't. She understood God's sovereignty and the hope that lay ahead.

She was a missionary in bondage. She was the only preacher that Naaman would ever hear. Her master was under the death penalty and without her brave testimony he would perish. Yes, he was Israel's enemy, but he was a creature made in the image of God. He, like most people in this world was lost in a world of paganism and superstition.

All she did was tell Naaman's wife about Elisha, the prophet of God. I am sure she told her about all she knew about the prophets, Elijah and Elisha. This was her generation. The amazing stories happened in her lifetime. Elijah and the fire of God from heaven. How God used both Elijah and Elisha to part the Jordan River. Then, maybe she told Naaman's wife about Elisha being used by God to raise a child from the dead and much more. "If only my Lord were with the Prophet who is in Israel" – 2 Kings 5:2b.

Naaman's wife told her husband. Maybe she even requested that the girl repeat the stories to Naaman. Then Naaman went to the King. – 2 Kings 5:4. Had Naaman not been sick, I doubt he would have given the stories a second thought, but God uses the circumstances of life to bring people to the end of their strength.

5. **Read 2 Kings 5:5-6 and discuss how Naaman planned on using the supplies he gathered. Besides silver and gold, what other items did Naaman bring with him?**

Calculate the monetary value of Naaman's silver and gold at today's market value. Silver today sells at \$18 an ounce. Gold sells today at \$1200 an ounce. Naaman brought ten talents of silver, which weighs approximately 750 lbs and 6,000 pieces of gold weighing approximately 150 lbs. How much money did he bring with him?

ANSWER:

The four items Naaman brought to Elisha: a note from the king of Syria; 10 talents of silver; 6000 pieces of gold and 10 changes of clothing – 2 Kings 5:5-6.

10 talents of silver weighs approximately 750 lbs. or 12,000 ounces. That is equivalent to \$216,000 on today's market – 2 Kings 5:5. (That is one talent = 75 lbs. Silver today is valued at approximately \$18/oz. $750\text{lbs} = 12,000\text{ oz} \times \$18 = \$216,000$. In 2 Kings 5:23, Gehazi, Elisha's servant sell out for 2 talents of silver which = 150 lbs. That is 2400 oz. $2400\text{ oz} \times 18 = \$43,200$ and 2 changes of garments.)

6,000 pieces of gold weight approximately 150 lbs. Today gold sells at \$1200 per ounce, valued today around \$1,440,000. Each piece of Naaman's gold weighed 2 oz.

He was all out to purchase his healing.

6. **Read 2 Kings 5:8-11 and discuss Naaman's reasoning, "Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." How does this point to the fact that salvation is not of works?"**

ANSWER:

Naaman finally arrives at Elisha's house in 2 Kings 5:8-11 and exclaims, "SURELY I THOUGHT." Is not this the reason many end up in hell? They imagine they can get to God through many means.

7. **Read 2 Kings 5:19-27. How does Gehazi's actions mar God's portrait of salvation?**

SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS

Besides the physical state called blindness, that is the condition of being unable to see because of injury, disease, or a congenital condition. There are other effects we call blindness which are due to the lack of perception, awareness, or judgment; ignorance.

In the case of perceptual blindness our minds are usually darkened because we fill it with wrong information. We call it being deceived. Men can be blinded by science, tradition and even religion, when the information they come to trust is flawed. Scripture confirms this when it says,

We are not to walk “as other Gentiles walk, **in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened**, being alienated from the life of God **through the ignorance that is in them**, because of **the blindness of their heart**: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all

uncleanness with greediness” — Ephesians 4:17-19.

In Jesus’s day the Pharisees were blinded by their traditions. Because of them many could not grasp the fact that Jesus was the Messiah. Scripture tells us that

“*even though he (Jesus) had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him*” — John 12:37

The people hardened their heart to truth. They could not let go of what they believed to be true, even after it was proven to be flawed. Therefore, when Jesus continued to perform miracles in their presence, instead of their hearts softening to the gospel, their hearts hardened. The more Jesus did, the more resistant they became.

Scripture repeatedly speaks of this hardening process. First men resist the truth. The more often they resist, the harder they become. At a certain point it is no longer men who are hardening their hearts, it is God. The more



revelation God provides, the angrier and more stubborn men become.

John 12:40 speaks of this fact when it says,

“He (*God*) hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted.”

In this account, we will find human minds filled with tainted information. As a result, their minds are darkened and their heart hardened.

It is staggering to think of just how many souls have missed coming to Christ, or missed heaven or missed finding peace because their minds were filled with misleading information that darkened their understanding regarding the truth.

To further complicate man's frail condition, we must add a few other features that compound the darkening of our souls — our depraved nature, sin and Satan.

Scripture makes it clear that we are all born with a sin nature. It says, “by one man sin

entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” — Romans 5:12.

No one is exempt. Apart from God “there is none righteous, no, not one.” Apart from God, “there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

Therefore, the natural man is blind to spiritual things. Apart from God in Christ we would remain dead in trespasses and sins, alienated from God. For “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” — Cor. 2:14.

In our lesson, we will encounter spiritual blindness on three levels: natural man's blindness — 2 Kings 6:8-15; 21-23; supernatural blindness — 2 Kings 6:18-20 and the believers blindness – 2 Kings 6:15-17.

1. Look up the following verses and discuss the different ways men's minds are blinded from finding the Truth.

ANSWER:

- a. **Sin** _____ **blinds the mind and darkens the human heart to truth** — 1 John 2:11; Revelation 3:17.

1 John 2:11 -- “But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.”

Revelation 3:17 – The church at Laodicea was spiritual blinded by their sin.

“Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and **blind**, and naked:

- b. **Resisting the truth** _____ **hardens the heart** — Romans 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:14-15

Romans 11:25 -- For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

2 Corinthians 3:14-15 -- But the minds of the Jewish people were darkened.

“But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart.”

c. **Satan** _____ **can blind the mind** — 2 Corinthians 4:4

2 Corinthians 4:4 – “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

2. In what ways did king Ben-hadad of Syria demonstrate his blindness to God's power?
— 2 Kings 6:8-14.

How does this apply to us?

ANSWER:

“Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel? And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.” — 2 Kings 6:11-12

Apparently Syria's CIA had an inside man in Israel. He was able to report that there was no breach in Syria's leadership, but that Elisha, the prophet of God was telling the king of Israel the words of Ben-hadad. It was Elisha, a prophet of God who was tipping off the king of Israel.

This same unnamed source was giving king Ben-hadad's cabinet the travel arrangements of Israel's king. In those days, king Jehoram would go on hunting trips or travel to Judah to visit his sister who married the king of Judah.

On the basis of this intel, the king of Syria would send out raiding parties in the attempt to kidnap or kill the king of Israel. It would be a quick and easy way for Syria to subdue Israel. But every time this information was relayed, Elisha would send notice to the king of Israel. Therefore, Syria's plot was foiled numerous times.

Elisha's knowledge was supernaturally revealed, but note the slowness of Ben-hadad to grasp the power of Israel's God (2 Kings 6:13). Scouts were sent deep into Israel to discover Elisha's location. The report came back that Elisha was at Dothan, 12 miles north of Samaria. It was the city of twin wells, the place where Joseph was thrown into a well and sold into Egyptian slavery.

But wait! if God was truly revealing Ben-hadad's every move to Elisha, doesn't it make sense that God would continue to reveal this information to the prophet?

3. Why did Ben-hadad send a great army to take Elisha, why not an elite group of warriors, like our Navy Seals? - 2 Kings 6:14-15 ; 2 Kings 1:9-13.

How does this event help us?

ANSWER:

2 Kings 6:14-15 -- So the king sends a great host to capture Elisha.

Perhaps the Syrian king had learned what happened when the Israeli king Amaziah attempted to take Elijah, Elisha's mentor, by force. In that instant, God twice struck a cohort of 50 men with fire from heaven, destroying them (2 Kings 1:9-13).

Maybe King Ben-hadad thought a large army would counter this move. Here is the blindness and folly of man. You cannot fight against God and win.

Insights:

Ben-hadad was a pagan, he knew little about Jehovah. He was an unsaved man. A "natural man;" a man without spiritual life. On the other hand, the nation of Israel became spiritually blind. They had the covenants; the promises of God and the Word of God, but they refused to follow the Lord. In time, they experienced another type of spiritual blindness — a judgmental blindness due to their unbelief. In Israel's case Scriptures says:

"The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and **blindness**, and astonishment of heart: ²⁹ And thou shalt grope at noonday, as the **blind** gropeth in darkness, and thou shalt not prosper in thy ways: and thou shalt be only oppressed and spoiled evermore, and no man shall save thee" — Deuteronomy 28:28.

The point is, God's grace and mercy has a limit. He will not tarry with us forever. At some point, we either believe the truth about Him, or become hardened and blinded to the truth.

4. Discuss four cases where God supernaturally blinded people to their surroundings. How do these events help us? Genesis 19:5-11; Luke 4:28-31; Acts 5:17-20; 12:3-19; 2 Kings 6:18-20

ANSWER:

"And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. And Elisha said unto them, This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria. And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria" — 2 Kings 6:18-20.

This is not the first time this miracle has happened. In Genesis 19:11 two angels blinded an angry mob outside Lot's door.

“And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door.”

A similar event happened with Jesus, in Luke 4:28-31

“And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, ²⁹ And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. ³⁰ **But he passing through the midst of them went his way,** ³¹ And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days.”

Twice prison guards were supernaturally blinded. They were unaware as an angel released Peter from prison in Acts 5:17-20; 12:3-19.

In the 2 Kings 6 passage, God blinds an entire Syrian army. In the next chapter God scares this same army with noise and the wind so they scatter. The army became like lambs to the slaughter. It must have been an amazing sight to watch the Syrian army led up the slopes of Samaria and into the city's gate. It was a 12-mile trip from Dothan to Israel's capital. The army was blind the whole way.

We have a God who can do amazing things. There is no limit to His power.

5. **Discuss the blindness of Elisha's servant found in 2 Kings 6:15-17. Why couldn't he see the heavenly host at first, as Elisha did? What spiritual application does this have for the believer?**

Answers may vary, i.e. lack of faith, young and inexperienced in the faith etc. Today, we may not physically see the host of God's army surrounding our enemies, but by faith God can comfort us through His Holy Word and He also provides us confidence through the Holy Spirit that dwells within us.

6. It is interesting to note that these miracles did not change the King of Syria. Instead of raiding parties, he attacked Israel head on — 2 Kings 6:24. Nor did it make the king of Israel a faithful follower. In 2 Kings 6:31 we find the king of Israel sending a messenger to behead Elisha. **What can we learn from this?**

ANSWER:

It strengthen the faith of Elisha's servant – 2 Kings 6:16-17. We find in this context, the school of the prophets was expanding – 2 Kings 6:1-2. Hence, the work of Elisha was fortifying the faith of the remnant. And finally, the nation of Israel was in a period of decision. After Elisha, the nation of Israel steadily drifted further from the Lord.

SPIRITUAL HARDNESS

2 Kings 6:24-7:20

If you have been a Christian for a while you have watched people make a profession of faith in Christ followed by dramatic changes in his or hers life. It's exciting to see their new joy. But then a difficult trial hits. Their faith is shaken. They stop coming to church. They begin to avoid other Christians. Soon they are back into their old ways. And you wonder, "What happened? Was their conversion genuine?"



Jesus explains what I just described in the parable of the sower. He says the seeds of the gospel fall on four kinds of soil: the hard road; the thin soil over a hard-rocky layer; the soil infested with thorns; and, the good soil.

What I just described is the seed that fell on rocky soil. In Jesus' own words He says, "And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended." (Mark 4:16-17). Sadly, neither they, nor the

thorny ground appear to bear fruit unto eternal life.

When we look at the book of Hebrews, we find the author is concerned with the same thing. He is troubled that his readers may be on the rocky soil on which the seed of the gospel was sown. When affliction or persecution arises in their life the truth about God withers. It never finds any root in their heart.

They were in danger of going back to a more comfortable life in their old Jewish religion because of the imminent threat of persecution in their newfound Christian faith. So, as he concludes his comparison showing Jesus' superiority over Moses, he says that we are God's

house, but then adds, "if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope" (3:6).

He illustrates his point with a story from Jewish history that all of his readers knew well, the story of Israel in the wilderness. He quotes the latter half of Psalm 95, which in its entirety was the call to worship in the Jewish synagogues. It tells about a people who had been redeemed from Egypt by applying the blood of the Passover lamb to their homes.

They had been "baptized" into Moses through the cloud that enveloped them through the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:2). They had eaten the heavenly manna and drank water from the rock. Seemingly, they were a "redeemed" people. Yet, as Paul states, "with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness" (1 Cor. 10:5). As he goes on to say, "these things happened as examples," so that we would not fall into their same sins.

The author of Hebrews uses this story to make the same point. He is warning us against the soul-damaging sin of hardness of heart. He is saying, "to avoid hardness of heart, we must submit our selves to God's Word and God's ways, especially in times of trial."

Such is the situation we find in 2 Kings 6:24f. The King of Israel, along with the entire nation of Israel had been privileged to see and/or to hear of the amazing power of God. Elijah demonstrated God's power by performing nine miracles, and Elisha had at this point in history performed fourteen recorded miracles.

Elisha divided the Jordan River (2 Kings 2:14); he floated an ax head (2 Kings 6:1-7); he healed Naaman, the Syrian general from leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-14); he healed the waters of Jericho (2 Kings 2:19-22); he sent two female bears to maul irreverent youths (2 Kings 2:23-25); he multiplied a widow supply of oil (2 Kings 4:1-7); he prayed that a barren woman would conceive and give birth (2 Kings 4:8-17); he raised a child from the dead (2 Kings 4:18-37); he struck Gehazi, his disobedient servant with leprosy (2 Kings 5:15-27); he multiplied loaves of bread (2 Kings 4:41-44); he purified a poisoned stew (2 Kings 4:38-40); he delivered Israel, Judah and Edom from Moab (2 Kings 3:12-27); he prayed special sight would be given his servant in order to see the spiritual realms (2 Kings 6:16-17); he prayed the Lord would blind the Syrian army, and he then led them into the very midst of Israel's capital (2 Kings 6:8-23).

How much more revelation does the King of Israel need in order to believe? How much more revelation does the nation of Israel need to believe that the LORD is on the throne? How much more revelation does the enemies of Christ need before they turn away from their false gods to the true and living God?

This lesson will examine 2 Kings 6:24-7:20 and show the spiritual hardness of men. First the hardness of Ben-hadad king of Syria, the enemy of Israel — (2 Kings 6:24), second, the hardness of the people of Israel — (2 Kings 6:28f) and finally, the hardness of Israel's leaders — (2 Kings 6:26, 30-31; 7:2).

- 1. List and then discuss the various forms of revelation granted the Syrian kings (2 Kings 5:1, 4-6, 14; 2 Kings 6:12, 18-20).**

ANSWER:

You would expect the enemies of God to be hardened to divine truth. Such was true with the kings of Syria. They had a number of opportunities to hear the truth about God, but it fell on deaf ears. First, with the healing of their general, Naaman. Remember, he was sent by the king of Syria to Israel to be healed of leprosy, and he was (2 Kings 5:1, 4-6, 14). Second, in our context a Syrian king tried to kidnap and/or kill the king of Israel. He later attacked Israel with a frontal assault. However, in both cases, we see that God intervened (2 Kings 6:12, 18-20).

- 2. Why did the King of Syria continue to attack Israel (2 Kings 6:24) with his entire army when he knew the God of Israel through the prophet Elisha was able to blind and ensnare an army brigade. (see 2 Kings 7:6-7, 15)**

Why did Elisha's actions seem to have little impact?

What do we learn from this?

ANSWER:

The Syrians hardness toward God is found in 2 Kings 6:24. In this passage, the king of Syria sends an entire army to besiege Samaria. He does this immediately after Israel graciously released a Syrian brigade unharmed from an awkward situation in that same city. What do we learn from this?

First, in some cases no amount a revelation will ever be enough to convince the unsaved of the power of God.

Second, as powerful as the enemy maybe, they are no match for God. In this affair, God scared them silly with a little wind and the sound of chariots and horses – 2 Kings 7:6-7, 15. As powerful and as deadly as the Syrian army was, God terrified them with loud noises causing them to flee for their lives. As deadly and as powerful as Satan and his entire demonic host maybe, they will flee at the name of Jesus. To be Christ's, sin and death no longer has hold over us.

Note, God did not kill the Syrian army as He later killed 185,000 Assyrians (2 Kings. 19:35-36). God had a purpose in revealing His power to Syria, while at the same time He was protecting Israel from Syria's aggression. God also kept Syria's army in tact so they would form a protective border between Israel and Assyria. God sometimes uses our enemies in ways we could never imagine. In this case, He used Syria to protect Israel from a greater evil.

3. What did Israel's trial with Syria's aggression reveal about the heart of the people? (2 Kings 6:24-25, 28-29, 2 Kings 7:16-17).

ANSWER:

At the height of Syria's siege against Samaria, food became very scarce. It was so bad that the head of an unclean animal sold for (80 pieces of silver) or 32 ounces. That is \$576 on today's market. A pint of dove's dung was sold for 5 pieces of silver (or 2 ounces) equaling \$32 on today's market. Even more disgusting were the mothers who were willing to eat their children — 2 Kings 6:28-29.

In hard times, it is amazing the depths that humanity can fall. It is revealing what is really in our hearts and the lows at which we are willing to go. At what point will our value system and trust in God break down?

In view of all the revelation afforded Israel, you would think the people would have fared better. In 2 Kings 7:16-17, when food was available, people stampeded the city gate. It resulted in a soldier being trampled to death at the entryway. A people out for themselves. Sin hardens people. When placed under pressure, a people without spiritual depth can plunge to new and unimaginable lows.

4. Review the special revelation granted King Jehoram (2 Kings 3:1, 10-19; 2 Kings 5:1-4; 2 Kings 6:8-11).

After all Elisha did in the past, why did King Jehoram seek to decapitate Elisha (2 Kings 6:31)?

ANSWER:

King Jehoram should have known better. Elisha rescued him on numerous occasions. When Jehoram went to war with Moab — God delivered (2 Kings 3:1, 10-19). When Naaman needed healing — God delivered, avoiding a war with Syria (2 Kings 5:1-4). When Syria sought to kidnap or kill Jehoram — God delivered him (2 Kings 6:8-11).

In 2 Kings 6:26-27, 31 we find Ben-hadad attacking Samaria and the king of Israel is comes unglued. **But why seek to decapitate Elisha?** In my opinion, it was for advising the king to show mercy to the Syrian brigade. Apparently, in Jehoram's mind, he would have been better off killing the Syrians when he had the chance — 2 Kings 6:21-23. Elisha's counsel to be merciful kept the Syrian's army strong and granted the enemy intel on Samaria.

What Jehoram failed to see was the sovereign working of God.

5. What insights can we learn from God allowing the calamity to befall Israel?

ANSWER:

Several things are going on. First, God is merciful to the unsaved, not willing that any perish. That is why God was merciful to Syria. God shows Himself as a merciful God, and not just the God of Israel, but the God over all nations.

Second, God does not always remove obstacles of life from us. He leaves some in place in order to find out what we have learned, and where our heart really is.

Third, notice the hardness of the king's cabinet – 2 Kings 7:2, 17-19.

6. What can we do to avoid hardening our heart to spiritual things?

ANSWER:

To avoid hardness of heart, we must submit to God's authority through His inspired Word.

We should learn from the biblical stories how to avoid the sins of those who lived before us. God's Word speaks directly to us today.

God Says in the present tense. "Today, if you hear His voice..." This very day, God speaks to us through His Word! *Today* lends a sense of urgency to this message. It says, "Don't put off obedience to a more convenient time. *Now* is the day of salvation! Now is the time God is speaking to you. Don't ignore Him! You may not get another opportunity!"

To avoid hardness of heart, we must make sure that our hearts are in a proper relationship to God.

In Hebrews 3:8, "Do not harden your *hearts*," and, 3:10, "They always go astray in their *hearts*."

In the Bible, the heart refers to our total inner being—the mind, the emotions, and the will. As Proverbs 4:23 warns us, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life."

All sin begins in the heart. Our hardness of heart stirs up God's anger and incurs His severe judgment or discipline. God says that He was angry with the generation in the wilderness (3:8). This word has the nuance of being disgusted with, or loathing someone. He swore in His wrath (3:11).

If we are truly His children through faith in Christ, then Jesus bore God's wrath for us on the cross, so that we do not need to fear His eternal punishment. But we should fear His discipline, which is never pleasant (Heb. 12:6, 11). He disciplines His children in love, that we may share His holiness. But He can get pretty rough if He has to! If we judge our own hearts, we will avoid God's discipline (1 Cor. 11:27-32).

To avoid hardness of heart, we must recognize and submit to God's ways.

God says of Israel in the wilderness, "They did not know My ways" (3:10). He says (Isa. 55:8-9), "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.'" The only way that we can know God's ways are as He has revealed them to us in the Scriptures.

We are responsible to learn and submit to God's ways. God's ways sometimes reveal His mighty power, but miracles alone will not change a stubborn heart.

Those who went astray had seen some of the greatest miracles that God has ever done. They saw the ten plagues in Egypt. They witnessed the Red Sea part for them and close up again on Pharaoh's army. They had seen God provide water and manna already in the barren Sinai desert. God emphasizes that *for forty years* they saw His works (3:9). If miracles alone could soften hard hearts, these people should have been mighty in faith! But they weren't.

You hear people say, "If I just saw a miracle, I'd believe." Sometimes God uses miracles to bring people to saving faith. But often, those words are just a smokescreen. The skeptic is just making an excuse so that he can continue in his sin. The rich man in Hades pled with Abraham to send someone to his brothers and warn them, so that they would not come to that place of torment. Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." The rich man replied, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!" Just let them see a miracle! But Abraham answered, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:27-31).

God's ways often involve situations of extreme trial for His people.

Remember, His ways are *not* our ways. He often works in an upside down sort of way that seems strange to us. Again, His Word reveals His different ways to us so that we will recognize them when they actually happen to us.

Consider God's ways in delivering Israel from 400 years of slavery in Egypt. To pull this off, He needs a strong Jewish leader.

When we submit to God's Word and His ways, we enter into His rest.

WHERE IS GOD

God's divine dealings with human government, nations and men

On the surface of everyday life, whether in ancient Israel or our modern world, there are news stories of nations firing weapons at each other. The Scriptures are filled with reports of aggressive acts made by world leaders who threaten the stability of nations. The annals of history are filled with accounts of conflicts, escalation and death.



Today's headlines speak of Iranian fast boats intimidating naval vessels in the Persian Gulf; North Korea firing Ballistic missiles over Japan's airspace; or Hamas sending suicide bombers into Tel Aviv. They are no different than the 9th Century BC Syrian king Ben-hadad sending raiding parties into Israel, or the Assyrian empire breaking treaties in order to subdue the middle east.

Do we not hear of nations breaking binding treaties in our day? We are told if their actions are left unchecked, an entire region of the world would be turned upside down. It wasn't any different in Elisha's day.

Today, we turn to our local or national news reports and hear of unrest, political wrangling, economic crisis, natural disasters and suffering. Yet these headlines were just as real in Elisha's day as it is in our day. In fact, our lesson this morning describes two coup d'état's set in motion by the Prophet

Elisha. They result in the assassination of three kings, the annihilation of two dynasties and the Middle East turned upside down.

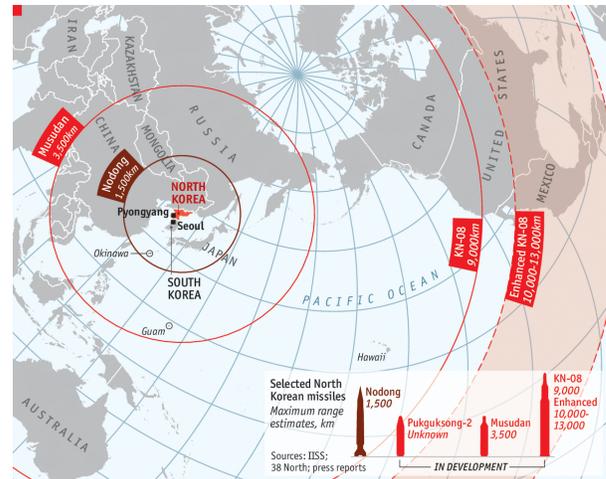
The Arab spring of 2011 through 2013 was child's play in comparison to the political transformation that took place in Elisha's day. The names may be different, the playing field may be larger, but the global intrigue and violence has not changed.

However, in this lesson, I want to go beyond the report of another day in the turbulent history of the Middle East. God has given us these accounts for a reason. He wants us to understand Him better. In fact, we will learn a lot about the depravity of man and God's sovereign control over His creation.

There are three features we will discover in today's lesson. First, God is in control and is sovereign over all nations and governments. Despite the evil we see unfolding in the

world, God still has His hand on the steering wheel of history. Second, God is faithful to His Word, even if a great deal of time passes. He does not forget His promises. Third, God will reward the righteous and punish the wicked. Don't ever think for one minute that the wicked acts of the unrighteous will go unpunished. Though time may pass, God does not forget. They will meet their end, and it will not be pleasant.

Let's visit the headlines of the past so we might understand the workings of God today.



1. In 2 Kings 8:7 and in 2 Kings 9:1 we find the prophet Elisha setting in motion two coup d'état's resulting in the assassination of three kings and the end of two dynasties. **Discuss Elisha's dealings with Syria in 2 Kings 8:7-15 and with Israel in 2 Kings 9:1-3.**

ANSWER:

First, in regards to Syria – 2 Kings 8:7.

It was not that King Ben-hadad had any revelation of the true God. He had numerous encounters. His general (Naaman) was healed of leprosy by God (2 Kings 5:1-14), and his army was blinded by God (2 Kings 6:8-23) and later frightened by God (2 Kings 7:6-7, 14-15). He knew of God's power.

Perhaps this is the reason Ben-hadad treated Elisha with respect (2 Kings 8:7-9) and offered him a gift of forty camels loaded with every good thing in Damascus. He knew Elisha was a prophet of God and knew the word Elisha spoke would be so.

But note, it was Elisha who went to Damascus. He was not invited. It was God who sent him. The king of Syria probably recognized him because he thought he came with a message regarding his sickness. But Elisha came for another reason. Hazael, Ben-hadad's servant, was to become king. Hazael was to be used as an instrument of judgment against Israel -- 2 Kings 8:10-15.

Second, in regards to Israel – 2 Kings 9:1. For 12 years Jehoram ruled Israel. In that time, he had numerous encounters with Elisha. Each time Elisha provided the king of Israel with another glimpse of God's power. Like the healing of Naaman, the Syrian General of leprosy, or the deliverance of the Israeli-Judean-Edomite confederacy from death in the desert of Moab, or rendering a Syrian brigade helpless by leading them into Samaria.

There was plenty of divine revelation, there was plenty of time and numerous opportunities for King Jehoram to repent and turn to God, but he did not turn.

In 2 Kings 9:1-3 we find Elisha appointed by God to anoint the next king of Israel and bring judgment on the house of Ahab.

2. What insights can we gain from the above events? (see Isaiah 40:15, 17, 22-24; Romans 13:1-5).

ANSWER:

God raises up leaders and He brings them down — Isaiah 40:15, 17, 22-24

“Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. . . . ¹⁷ All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.

²² It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: ²³ That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. ²⁴ Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble.”

God calls civic leaders His ministers — Romans 13:1-5.

“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. ² Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: ⁴ For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. ⁵ Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

God holds all men accountable for their deeds.

God is Sovereign over both good and bad leaders. He has his purpose with each. They will only be able to go so far in their evil ways before God will hinder them as he did with Ben-hadad, or kill them, as he eventually did with King Jehoram.

They will be held accountable for their actions. They will not escape.

If God is in control of all nations and raises up leaders and puts them down while holding them accountable for all their deeds. Will He not hold us accountable in how we conduct ourselves?

Therefore, we ought to be careful before our leaders, regardless of their political bent. Good or bad, they are servants in the hands of God. The reckless disrespect we see towards our leaders is wrong. We do not have to agree with their language or their policies to regard their office with respect. The issues are much bigger than the personalities in government and their political views. We need to see that it is God who allowed the placement of our leaders — i.e. the Clinton's, the Bush's the

Obama's and the Trumps. It is He who groomed them, and then moved the hearts of the people to place them in office.

3. **Twenty years before we get to our passage, God spoke to a discouraged prophet and commanded him to execute three things — 1 Kings 19:15-18. What was Elijah to do?**

ANSWER:

1 Kings 19:15-18

“And the LORD said unto him (Elijah), Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, **anoint Hazael to be king over Syria:** ¹⁶ And **Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel:** and **Elisha** the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. ¹⁷ And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. ¹⁸ Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.”

4. **Elijah executed only one of the three items commanded in 1 Kings 19:15-18. Why? What can we learn from this?**

ANSWER:

God is going to bring justice. But He is going to do it in His time. So Elijah finds Elisha and trains him for eight years before the Lord takes Elijah home in a whirlwind.

But wait, what about Hazael in Syria and Jehu in Israel? At the time of Elijah's commission Jehu and Hazael were probably not public figures. It took 20 years for Jehu to become the leader of the Israeli army and Hazael to become second to the King of Syria. Neither were in position to bring about a coup d'état at the time God spoke to Elijah.

So what do we learn:

1. God knows the future.
2. He has a plan
3. He does not forget.

It took 20 years for this prophecy to take place, but God was behind it all. He was behind the development of Jehu and Hazael, just as He is behind others who have come into power in our day.

The interval between the command and the execution of God's command was a period of grace. He provided 20 years for Jehoram and Ben-hadad to repent. In this we learn that we have a long-suffering heavenly Father, not wanting any to perish, but His patience should never be mistaken as forgetfulness.

So what does this mean to me? God had a plan then, He has a plan now. He was in control then, He is in control today. He even knows the names of the future leaders. We can rest in the fact that God is in control and in the end, His agenda for mankind will come to pass.

5. Discuss 2 Kings 9:4-10 and compare it with 1 Kings 19:15-16; 1 Kings 21:21-24. What do we learn about God from these accounts?

Don't ever think for a minute that evil will go unpunished. It will have its day in God's court. Justice will be poured out.

In 2 Kings 9:4-10, we see God's justice by sending a prophet to anoint Jehu king of Israel. It fulfills God's promise to deal with the wicked deeds of the Ahab/Jezebel dynasty. The prophet's words are an exact quote of the prophecy spoken in 1 Kings 19:15-16; and Ahab in 1 Kings 21:21-24.

What does this mean to us.

- a. God does not forget. Even when time passes and we think God will not deal with the issue, He does. God deals with injustices in His way and at the right time in history.

Knowing what He would do, God gave King Jehoram enough divine revelation and opportunity to repent. Yes, God would still pour out his judgment on the house of Ahab, but Jehoram could have escaped God's wrath. He saw the power of God and had opportunity after opportunity to repent and turn to God and escape the wrath to come, but he did not.

Jehoram was killed by Jehu. An arrow through the heart and an eternity in hell. King Ahaziah of Judah was also killed. He was the grandson of Ahab and nephew of Jehoram. Jehu then killed Jezebel (2 Kings 9:32-37). After this, he had the entire dynasty of Ahab destroyed by decapitating the 70 sons of Ahab (2 Kings 10:1-10).

- b. God is faithful to His word. He was faithful then, as He is faithful today. Those in Christ will escape judgment, because their sins have been nailed to the cross and they bear them no more. Those without Christ will perish.

MISSEID

OPPORTUNITIES



Today we are going to examine a man who needed help. He was over his head with troubles. Part of the problem came from the poor choices his father and grandfather made. The other part of the problem came from his weak secular faith.

His life was entangled with worldly pursuits. He was nominally religious. He sometimes prayed. He knew the rituals associated with worship. He occasionally attended services.

He knew some of the stories of the faith, but that was it. He claimed to belong to the Lord, but the Scriptures report, “he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord and followed the sins” (*of those who went before him*) — 2 Kings 13:3.

How many “Christians” fall into this camp. People who are nominally religious, following the steps of their worldly parents or friends, instead of following the steps of their Lord.

Such was the life of Joash, king of Israel. He was better than the previous dynasty of Ahab and Jezebel, but he was still religiously secular and evil. His acts stirred the wrath of the Lord.

Amazingly, God still had mercy on this new King. 2 Kings 13:23-25 says, "the LORD was gracious unto them (*Israel*), and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet. . . . And Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again out of the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael the cities, which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war. Three times did Joash beat him, and recovered the cities of Israel."

In our lesson we will find Jehoash (*sometimes called, Joash*) overwhelmed with personal, political and national troubles. Even though God was gracious unto him, he could of had more, but he lacked faith. God offered to help him, but it required simple faith on his part.

All he had to do was comply with God's simple instructions. They were not hard. In fact, it was downright simple. So simple that a four year old could accomplish what was asked. But that was the problem. He must have thought the command to be foolish. So he half-heartedly obeyed. Sadly, he failed to receive all that God would have done for him.

This is the point of today's lesson. God often works in conjunction with our willingness to step out in faith. God asks us to do simple things, and He does the rest. God asked Moses to raise his rod over the Red Sea. This took faith on Moses' part to stand before the people and raise his rod. What if God did nothing? Moses would have looked foolish. But Moses had faith that God would perform that which He promised. Moses raised his rod in faith and God divided the Red Sea.

God asked Moses to strike the rock, and God promised that when he did, water would flow from the rock. This took faith on Moses' part. He had to stand before the people and strike the rock. Moses would have looked foolish if God did nothing. But Moses had faith that God would perform that which He promised. So in faith, Moses struck the rock, and God did the rest. The same was true when God asked Moses to throw a tree into the bitter waters of Marah to purify it. Moses had to step out in faith, and God healed the water.

God works in conjunction with our willingness to step out in faith. He asks that we have the faith the size of a mustard seed. Therefore, He asks us to do simple things in order to strengthen our faith, and He does the rest.

Such was the case with Joash. He was asked to do a simple thing but he failed to grasp the opportunities that God literally placed in his hands. His lack of faith cost him and his nation dearly.

1. Examine the following passages and discuss Joash's problem.

- a. What was happening to Elisha? — 2 Kings 13:14
- b. Discuss what happened to the kingdom under Joash's father's rule — 2 Kings 13:4-7, 9.
- c. As the new king of Israel, what kind of problems was Joash facing?

ANSWER:

In 2 Kings 13:14 we discover Elisha was very sick and about to die.

“Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the king of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.”

To grasp the significance of what is happening, Joash is the new king of Israel. He inherited the northern kingdom from his father, Jehoahaz. In 2 Kings 13:4, we find the nation had suffered severe oppression under the hand of Hazael, King of Syria, during his father's reign.

We also find that the problems grew so bad, that Joash's father finally sought the Lord in prayer, and the Lord provided a deliverer. Perhaps some unnamed general provided the nation with temporary relief (2 Kings 13:4-5). Even with this break in oppression we learn the kingdom of Israel was significantly weakened (2 Kings 13:7). By the time Syria withdrew their forces, they left the Israeli army with only 50 horsemen, 10 Chariots and only 10,000 footmen. Then Jehoahaz dies and his son begins his reign (2 Kings 13:9).

To further complicate Joash's problem, we learn the great prophet Elisha fell ill, and he is about to die (2 Kings 13:14). Our passage finds Joash rushing to Elisha's bedside exclaiming, “O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.”

Joash is a troubled man. He is the new king of Israel. He has a decimated army and there are growing threats from his enemies. His father is dead, and now the great prophet Elisha is about to die. He needs help.

2. What does Joash mean when he said, “O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof?” — 2 Kings 13:14. (see 2 Kings 6:8-11).

ANSWER:

Joash considered Elisha to be Israel's most powerful instrument of war. The chariot was the ancient world's tank. It was considered the mightiest military weapon. Elisha was considered to be mightier than 100 Chariots. Remember the power of God displayed through Elisha in 2 Kings 6:8-8:15.

For example, Elisha was able to foil many plots designed by Syria. He supernaturally revealed Syria's maneuvers before they took place. He even blinded an entire brigade — (2 Kings 6:8-11.) Joash understood the value and power behind Elisha. And Elisha understood the issues that troubled Joash's heart. Greater than that, God understood Joash's troubles and was willing to help him.

3. What did Elisha ask Joash to do? — 2 Kings 13:15-19. Why do you think the king only struck the ground with the arrows three times? Were Elisha's instructions clear?

ANSWER:

2 Kings 13:15-17 — Let me illustrate what happened here. Elisha made it clear that the the arrow represented the deliverance of the Lord from Syria. When the king shot the arrow Elisha declared, "you shall smite the Syrians in Aphek, till you have consumed them."

In 2 Kings 13:18-19, Joash was instructed to take his quiver of arrows (*12 arrows make a quiver*) and strike them on the ground. The first arrow was called "**the arrow of the Lord's deliverance.**" What might the remaining arrows be? They were the same as the first arrow . . . arrows of deliverance.

Joash understood the problem facing his nation. He experienced first hand the Syrian oppression. He knew the threat. He knew the power and viciousness of King Hazael and he understood that his son, Benhadad would be just as vicious. He should have struck the floor with the arrows endless times. But somehow he missed the point. More importantly he missed the opportunity that was handed to him.

I personally believe it was a weakness of faith. It seems to be the point of this narrative. Though he understood what Elisha asked, he could not imagine how God could bring such deliverance with only 50 horsemen, 10 Chariots and only 10,000 footmen.

Perhaps he was just humoring the old prophet who was days from death. Not really believing the power that was placed into his hands. The power to deliver his people. The power to overcome. The power to have victory and freedom. He failed to recognize the opportunity.

4. How can we apply this lesson? — Rom. 5:1-2, Matt. 21:22; Mark 11:24; Hebrews 4:16; 10:16; 1 John 5:14-15

ANSWER?

How many of us fail to see the opportunities God places before us? Every opportunity starts as a small thing. Moses had to have faith to raise his rod over the Nile and later the Red Sea. It took very little physical strength to raise the rod over his head, but it took faith to believe God would honor His word and bloody the Nile or divide the Red Sea. The same faith was needed when Moses struck the Rock to bring forth water, or when he threw the tree into the bitter water, to purify the spring.

Elisha needed the same type of faith to pour salted water into a polluted spring in order for God to heal it. He had to believe God would and could purify the spring. Faith was required when Elisha told Israel to dig trenches in the desert. He believed God would do as He said.

For us, we are asked to pray believing (Matt. 21:22; Mark 11:24) and to pray with boldness (Hebrews 4:16). As Christians we are justified (*by our faith in Christ*) and have peace with God. Because of this we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand (Romans

5:1-2). Furthermore, we are entreated to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. (Hebrews 10:19).

It is simple to do. Even a four-year-old can do it. But it takes faith. We are asked to bring our petitions before Him in FAITH, and then act accordingly. And how do we know what is His will? "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." — 1 John 5:14-15.

5. How does 2 Kings 13:20-21, 23-25 fit into our context? Is this revival/resurrection a random event or is it pointing to something more significant? How does this account help us in our spiritual walk?

ANSWER:

We then come to the story of the "runaway corpse," in which a dead body that is being buried providentially comes into contact with the bones of Elisha the prophet. The dead body comes to life. Remember that Joash is not a godly king. He is the king who is the recipient of the prophecy given through Elisha *while he is dying*. The context seems to make it clear that Joash was afraid of what would happen to his kingdom after Elisha died. Now that Elisha is dead, Joash may very well have reasoned that this prophecy was no longer valid. I believe this bizarre miracle was divinely designed to give Joash and the nation courage and hope, so that they would engage Syria in battle, and thus experience the victories that God had promised.

Did the king fear that a dead man's (Elisha's) prophecies were now lifeless as well? News of this miracle certainly reached the city and the ears of the king. If Elisha's bones still had power in the tomb, then surely his words were also to be trusted. I therefore believe that this miracle was specifically aimed at Joash. I am sure that the dead man appreciated the miracle as well, but I believe that this great manifestation of God's power through the prophet spoke volumes to the king.

This is the reason this chapter in 2 Kings ends as it does. Syria oppressed Israel, we are told, throughout the reign of Jehoahaz and was likewise trying to do the same in the reign of Joash. But God felt sorry for His people as He looked upon their suffering. In addition, God was committed to keep His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And so it was that God gave Israel victory over the king of Syria at the hand of Joash. It is no coincidence that the last sentence of 2 Kings 13 informs us that Joash defeated Ben Hadad of Syria three times.