

GOD WITH US

Part 6: *Israel's Unfaithfulness and God's Ridiculous Love* Kings & Prophets thru 722 B.C.

1Kings 11 – 2Kings 17; 2Chronicles 10-28
Obadiah, Joel, Amos, Jonah, Hosea

Message 1 – Divided hearts > Divided kingdoms Solomon, Rehoboam and Jeroboam I Kings 11-14 and 2Chronicles 10-12

Review and Overview:

To understand the “Divided Kingdom” period of the Old Testament, it is helpful to see where it fits in the overall scheme of things. Israel’s history in the Old Testament can be overviewed in ten major sections as follows:

- 1. Patriarchs: 2000-1800 B.C.** Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were the “patriarchs” of Israel. Jacob’s 12 sons formed the twelve “tribes” of Israel. At the end of Genesis, Jacob and his sons went into Egypt. The clan grew into a nation over the next 400 years.
- 2. Exodus: 1440 B.C.** Israel gained a distinct national identity when they “exited” (Exodus) Egypt by the mighty hand of God, under the leadership of Moses. At Mt. Sinai, God made a covenant with Israel to be His chosen nation through whom He could reveal Himself to all nations. The laws given at Sinai were intended to set apart Israel’s behavior from the pagan nations and to reveal God’s character to the world.
- 3. Conquest: 1400 B.C.** After one generation died off wandering in the desert, a new generation was led by Joshua in the conquest of the land of Canaan. God had waited 400 years for the Canaanites to turn to Him from their idols. His grace and patience gave way to His justice as He used the “rod of Israel” to remove them from their land. Now Israel had their own “promised land.”
- 4. Judges: 1400-1050 B.C.** Once in the land of Canaan, Israel repeatedly fell away from obedience to the covenant with Yahweh and was, as a result, oppressed by foreign powers. They were delivered from oppression by a series of leaders (“Judges”).
- 5. United Kingdom: 1050-930 B.C.** Israel was never supposed to have a human king. God Himself wanted to be their “King.” Yet, the Israelites demanded that God give them a human king so that

they could be like the other nations. Saul, David and Solomon were the first three kings of the “United Kingdom” of Israel.

6. Divided Kingdom: 930-722 B.C. After Solomon, the nation was split into north (“Israel” – 10 tribes) and south (“Judah” – 2 tribes). The rival kingdoms were sometimes at peace and other times at war. The northern kingdom had NO godly kings and was religiously apostate until the end (Assyrian invasion - 722 B.C.).

7. Southern Kingdom Only: 722-586 B.C. The south had numerous godly kings and wavered between periods of devotion to Yahweh and periods of apostasy. Judah survived the Assyrian invasion of 722 B.C., lasting another 140 years until the Babylonian invasion (586 B.C.).

8. Captivity: 586-536 B.C. Southern Kingdom Jews were taken in several waves into captivity in Babylon. The entire time in captivity was roughly 70 years. During those years, Persia overtook Babylon as the leading world power.

9. Post-captivity: 536-400 B.C. Cyrus king of Persia permitted a remnant of Jews to return to the land and rebuild their national life and identity. Ezra and Nehemiah were key post-captivity leaders.

10. The “Silent Years”: 400 B.C.-Christ. The Jews lived under various world powers (Persians, Greeks, Egyptians, Syrians, Romans) up to and including the time of Christ. These were very tumultuous years for the Jewish people. They are called the “silent” years because the voice of prophecy fell silent from Malachi (400 B.C.) until John the Baptist appeared as the forerunner of Jesus the Messiah.

We are currently studying the period of the **Divided Kingdom** as recorded in 1&2Kings and 2Chronicles. It was during this period that many prophets (some who wrote books included in the Bible) arose to call the nation back to covenant loyalty with Yahweh. *“The story is that of a nation passing from affluence and influence to poverty and paralysis” (G. Campbell Morgan). “We see here a nation, having rejected Yahweh from being King, attempting to govern itself and failing utterly” (Irving Jensen).*

Why do we study these old portions of the Word of God? *“All these things happened to them as examples, as object lessons to us, to warn us against doing the same things; they were written down so that we could read about them and learn from them in these last days” (1Corinthians 10:11 – Living Letters).* These ancient stories contain divinely inspired timeless truths for our lives today.

Message 1 – Divided hearts > Divided kingdoms Solomon, Rehoboam and Jeroboam I Kings 11-14 and 2Chronicles 10-12

Introduction

Solomon followed his father David as the third king over the United Kingdom of Israel. He inherited a vast, prosperous and influential kingdom at rest from war. Having no wars to fight, Solomon devoted himself to beautifying Jerusalem with glorious royal buildings, the greatest being the temple of God. People came from all over the world to hear the wisdom of Solomon and to see the glory that God had granted in his kingdom. Yet, the glory days of Solomon were short-lived as Solomon's heart drifted away from devotion to Yahweh. The story of Israel as a "divided kingdom" finds its origin in Solomon's own "divided heart."

What is a divided heart? In the New Testament, James warns against being "double-minded," telling people to "purify their hearts" (James 4:8). The term double-minded comes from the Greek word dipsuchos which describes someone with divided interests and loyalties; someone torn between two options. In the Old Testament, we read that God is looking for people whose heart is "completely His" (2Chronicles 16:9). Thus, a divided heart is the heart that is *not* completely His; the heart that allows other gods to have a place; the heart that trusts God at times, but not at other times; the heart that serves more than one Master (Matthew 6:24). As we will see in the following narratives, a divided heart comes in many different shapes and sizes.

Solomon: A heart divided by women: 1Kings 11

God had generously blessed Solomon in every conceivable way. Yet, the book of Ecclesiastes reveals that he took advantage of God's blessings to indulge himself with every worldly pleasure. Solomon was most consumed by his lust for beautiful women. He allowed these women to turn his heart away from God.

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." Solomon held fast to these in love" (1Kings 11:1,2).

He amassed a harem of 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. To please them, he filled Jerusalem with their gods, goddesses and idols that they had brought from their homelands. This led, in turn, to God's judgment and the "divided kingdom."

So the LORD said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. Nevertheless, I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen" (1Kings 11:9-13).

This passage explains why Israel became divided between north ("Israel") and south ("Judah"). The divided kingdom was a judgment from God as a result of Solomon's divided heart.

The story of Solomon ends sadly. While he had previously enjoyed peace, towards the end he was troubled by many adversaries that *God raised up*: Hadad the Edomite (11:14-22); Rezon the Aramaean (11:23-25). Finally, Jeroboam, Solomon's own official in charge of the labor force, rebelled against him (11:26-40). Jeroboam would eventually become the king over the northern portion of Israel after Solomon's death.

The phrase "his heart was turned away" occurs 4 times in the description of Solomon's fall – 1Kings 11:2,3,4,9. Whenever our heart turns away from God, some portion of God's kingdom work in us and through us is torn away. A divided heart always leads to a divided kingdom. What forces might be attempting to turn your heart away from pure devotion to God? Have you allowed God-given privileges to make you feel entitled in some way? Have you taken blessings given to you by God and allowed these blessings to become things that divide your heart, or move you away from God's commands? Have you stopped to consider what it will cost you if you allow these forces to turn your heart away from God?

Rehoboam: A heart divided by seasons: 2Chronicles 10-12

Rehoboam inherited the throne from his father Solomon. A nationwide assembly was called at Shechem, in the very center of the land of Israel. The people asked Rehoboam to lighten their workload, since they had labored hard under Solomon. Rehoboam

foolishly rejected the counsel of the elders (to grant this request) choosing instead to follow the harsher advice of his young friends.

The young men who grew up with him spoke to him, saying, “Thus you shall say to this people who spoke to you, saying, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy, now you make it lighter for us!’ But you shall speak to them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father’s loins! Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions’” (2Chr. 10:8-11).

When the people heard this harsh answer, they revolted from Rehoboam’s leadership and the divided kingdom became a reality.

“What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse; to your tents, O Israel! Now look after your own house, David!” So Israel departed to their tents. But as for the sons of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. Then King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was over the forced labor, and all Israel stoned him to death. So King Rehoboam made haste to mount his chariot to flee to Jerusalem. So Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day” (2Chronicles 10:16-19).

Jesus modeled servant leadership: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matt.20:28). He truly cared about people. The elders who advised Rehoboam understood this principle; but the younger men thought Rehoboam should “show the people who was boss” by leading with threats. Wisdom grows with age. Who do you go to for advice? If you lead others, how can you do a better job of being a “servant leader” to them?

Interestingly, Rehoboam made his wisest choices during the next 3 crisis years, resulting in stability in the new Southern Kingdom: 1. He accepted the counsel of God (through Shemaiah the prophet) against initiating a civil war (2Chr.11:1-4). 2. He fortified the southern kingdom with defenses (11:5-12). 3. He partnered with the Levites, priests and other godly people to strengthen the southern kingdom spiritually (11:13-17). 4. He distributed his sons as leaders of key cities throughout the south (11:18-23).

Most significant was his partnership with the godly people from north and south to strengthen the southern kingdom spiritually and morally. The text emphasizes this partnership:

“The priests and the Levites who were in all Israel stood with him from all their districts. For the Levites left their pasture lands and their property and came to Judah and Jerusalem . . . and those from all the tribes of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the Lord God of Israel came with them to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord God of their fathers. And they strengthened the kingdom of Judah and supported Rehoboam for three years, for they walked in the way of David and Solomon for three years” (2Chronicles 11:16-18).

Why does this section twice mention “three years” as the period of time that this partnership between Rehoboam and the godly leaders lasted? The sad answer follows:

“When the kingdom of Rehoboam was established and strong, he and all Israel with him abandoned the law of the LORD. And it came about in King Rehoboam’s fifth year, because they had been unfaithful to the LORD, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem with 1,200 chariots and 60,000 horsemen. And the people who came with him from Egypt were without number: the Lubim, the Sukkiim and the Ethiopians. He captured the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem” (12:1-4).

Rehoboam’s spiritual fervor lasted for only 3 years, and by the 5th year God was bringing judgment down upon his apostate kingdom! Shishak of Egypt would have destroyed Judah completely, were it not for the leaders’ response to God’s rebuke through the prophet:

Then Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and the princes of Judah who had gathered at Jerusalem because of Shishak, and he said to them, “Thus says the LORD, ‘You have forsaken Me, so I also have forsaken you to Shishak.’” So the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves and said, “The LORD is righteous” (12:5,6).

Rehoboam’s “dependence upon the Lord” was seasonal. He leaned “into God” during crises; but then fell “away from God” when the crises were past. His heart was not *consistently* devoted to the Lord. Nevertheless, God responded to his repentant heart:

When the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, “They have humbled themselves so I will not destroy them, but I will grant them

some measure of deliverance, and My wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by means of Shishak. But they will become his slaves so that they may learn the difference between My service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries” (12:7,8).

The kingdom of Rehoboam became subject to the rule of Egypt from that point until the end of Rehoboam’s 17-year reign. Already, the glory of the Solomonic era was fast slipping away.

We are beginning to see a pattern: Solomon’s heart was divided between God and women > His kingdom was divided and given away to Jeroboam. Rehoboam’s heart was divided between leaning into God in a crisis and leaning away from God during times of ease > His kingdom was divided and given away to Shishak. A divided heart always leads to a divided kingdom. Take time to ponder the story of Rehoboam. Do you tend to trust God more in times of trouble, and less in times of ease? Does it take a crisis to get you on your knees? What would it take for you to become the kind of person who trusts in the Lord consistently, no matter what season of life you are in?

Jeroboam: A heart divided by fear: 1Kings 11-14

As a judgment against Solomon, God appointed his servant Jeroboam to take over 10 tribes to form a separate northern kingdom (“Israel”). *Jeroboam was promised an enduring dynasty IF he would walk in God’s ways (11:38).* Solomon knew about God’s plan to give Jeroboam the northern 10 tribes, thus he sought to kill him (11:40). Jeroboam fled to Egypt where he remained in exile until the death of Solomon.

After Solomon died, Jeroboam returned to Israel. He was with the national assembly in Shechem when they asked Rehoboam to lighten their load of hard labor. When Rehoboam rejected their request, the people rejected the rule of the house of David, turning to Jeroboam as their new king.

“It came about when all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, that they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. None but the tribe of Judah followed the house of David” (1Kings 12:20).

Sadly, Jeroboam’s first move was to follow his own heart instead of trusting in God’s promise to give him an enduring kingdom; *“he said in his heart” (“he thought to himself” 12:26,33).* Jeroboam feared that the 10 northern tribes would reunite with the south

when they went to Jerusalem for the annual feasts. His solution was to invent a new religion for the north, complete with golden calves and two conveniently located worship centers at both ends of the northern kingdom. Recall that when the Israelites left Egypt, the people demanded Aaron make them a golden calf to worship (Exodus 32:3-5). Now, some 500 years later, Jeroboam had just returned from Egypt where he was again exposed to golden calf worship. He reinstated the very religion God had rescued the Israelites from 500 years before!

“Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt” (1Kings 12:28).

His sin of leading Israel back into the idolatry of calf worship set the standard for evil. The sins of future kings were measured by *“the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat”* (see 1Kgs.13:34; 14:16; 15:26,30; 16:2; 2Kgs.3:3; 10:29; 13:2; 17:21).

God had specifically promised Jeroboam his own enduring kingdom IF he would walk in God’s ways (11:38). Clearly, Jeroboam did not believe God’s promise could be trusted; thus, he took matters into his own hands in the attempt to secure his kingdom. Jeroboam’s heart was divided between trust in God and fear leading to self-preservation. How does FEAR divide your heart, pulling you away from trusting God? How does fear cause you to take matters into your own hands, instead of trusting God for the way forward?

An unnamed prophet from the south was sent to the north to pronounce judgment upon Jeroboam’s new religion. The very altar that Jeroboam had set up for worship at Bethel was split in half at the word of the prophet! Yet, even after hearing this word from God and receiving a personal miracle of the healing of his shriveled-up hand, Jeroboam still would not repent of his idolatry.

“After this event Jeroboam did not return from his evil way, but again he made priests of the high places from among all the people; any who would, he ordained, to be priests of the high places. And this event became sin to the house of Jeroboam, even to blot it out and destroy it from off the face of the earth” 13:33,34).

Note: Tucked within the story of Jeroboam is the story of this unnamed prophet sent to rebuke Jeroboam. At first, the prophet was very careful to faithfully follow God’s commands concerning

his activities while up in the northern kingdom. But then he was deceived by an older prophet who came to him with a “word from the Lord” (that contradicted God’s earlier instructions). The southern prophet fell for this lie and ended up dying as a result! This story was included because it pictures the fate of the entire northern kingdom. They were deceived and led away from devotion to Yahweh, choosing instead to follow Jeroboam into the worship of other gods. As the unnamed prophet died for following the voice of deception, so also the northern kingdom would eventually die for abandoning God’s Word and following deceptive voices.

Often, we are pulled away from God’s will by deceptive voices that seem to be giving us a “word from the Lord” that points in a different direction. The apostle John wrote: “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1John 4:1). When we think we have heard something “from the Lord,” we need to measure this new message against what God has already revealed to us. God is not a God of confusion or contradiction. This is why it is so important to have godly counselors in your life who can help you measure everything by the voice of the Holy Spirit and the revealed Word of God. Are you “testing the spirits to see if they are from God”?

Ahijah the prophet, who had been the first to announce to Jeroboam that he would become king of the north, now pronounced the end of the house of Jeroboam, even going so far as to point ahead to the certainty of the END of the northern kingdom because of their fall into idolatry (1Kgs.14:15,16). The circumstance of Ahijah’s prophecy was the illness of one of Jeroboam’s sons. Jeroboam told his wife to disguise herself and go south to seek from the prophet Ahijah word as to their son’s fate. Ahijah was not fooled by Jeroboam’s wife’s disguise, immediately pronouncing judgment upon the *entire* dynasty of Jeroboam.

“I am bringing calamity on the house of Jeroboam, and will cut off from Jeroboam every male person, both bound and free in Israel, and I will make a clean sweep of the house of Jeroboam, as one sweeps away dung until it is all gone” (14:10).

What an irony is contained here. Jeroboam *would not* trust the word of the Lord through Ahijah the prophet concerning God’s promise of a lasting dynasty if he would walk in God’s ways; yet,

Jeroboam sends his wife all the way to the south to hear the word of the Lord through Ahijah the prophet concerning the fate of his sick son! Jeroboam only sought God's voice when there were no other options, or when he was backed into a corner.

Discussion Questions:

This message has focused on the theme: *A divided heart always leads to a divided kingdom.*

1. What impacted you most as you thought about these 3 leaders with "divided hearts?"
2. Have you personally experienced the truth: *A divided heart always leads to a divided kingdom?*
3. Solomon: His heart was divided by another "god" (women). What "gods" have you allowed to steal away a part of your heart?
4. Rehoboam: His heart was divided by seasons (turning to God in trouble; turning away in prosperity). Have you seen your faith in God waver in different seasons of life? How?
5. Jeroboam: His heart was divided by fear (his fear caused him to doubt God's promises and take matters into his own hands). How has fear captured part of your heart, causing you to try to control situations rather than relying upon the Lord?
6. Are there other observations or applications that you drew out of this part of the Bible?

Note: There are further thought/discussion questions in each of the boxes in the commentary.

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Part 6: *Israel's Unfaithfulness and God's Ridiculous Love* Kings & Prophets thru 722 B.C.

Message 2 – The Heart God is Looking For Asa, Azariah and Hanani 2Chronicles 14-16; 1Kings 15:9-24

Introduction

In the southern kingdom (Judah), Rehoboam was succeeded by his son Abijah (or Abijam) for 3 years. While Abijah's reign was short, it was eventful in that he defeated Jeroboam in a massive war (2Chronicles 13). *"The sons of Judah conquered Israel because they trusted in the Lord, the God of their fathers"* (13:18). Then Asa followed his father Abijah, reigning for 41 years. Asa was one of the longest reigning, most influential kings in the Southern Kingdom. Since 3 full chapters of the Bible are devoted to his story, we will focus our attention on him.

Asa was *the model* of devotion to the Lord for most of his reign, removing vestiges of idolatry and leading the people to walk in God's ways. Yet, near the end of his life he faltered in his faith and became *the* prime example of a man who did not finish well. The famous verse grows out of the story of Asa's final years: *"For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His"* (16:9). Sadly, Asa's heart was *not* completely His during his final years. In Asa, we receive an important warning about our hearts: ***It's the hidden stuff that can take us down.***

Asa's initial reforms: 14:1-8

Asa started off so well, beginning with a *spiritual reformation* of Judah. He knew that faithfulness to the covenant with Yahweh was key to the success of his reign and the peace/prosperity of the kingdom. He had to overturn many of the idolatrous practices instituted by his father Abijah and grandfather Rehoboam.

"Asa did good and right in the sight of the LORD his God, for he removed the foreign altars and high places, tore down the sacred pillars, cut down the Asherim, and commanded Judah to seek the LORD God of their fathers and to observe the law and

the commandment. He also removed the high places and the incense altars from all the cities of Judah. And the kingdom was undisturbed under him” (14:2-5).

He also led the people to build walls around their cities because . . .

“. . . the land is still ours, because we have sought the Lord, and He has given us rest on every side” (14:7).

Asa declared to the people that honoring God had resulted in God’s protection and blessing.

Asa’s victory over the Ethiopians: 14:9-15

The hallmark of his early years came in year 10 of his reign. He was attacked by a massive million-man Ethiopian army. Yet, he did not trust in his own strength, nor did he turn to foreign allies for help. He placed his trust in the Lord and was granted a tremendous victory.

Then Asa called to the LORD his God and said, “LORD, there is no one besides You to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength; so help us, O LORD our God, for we trust in You, and in Your name have come against this multitude. O LORD, You are our God; let not man prevail against You.” So the LORD routed the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled (2Chr.14:11,12).

Notice Asa’s words: *“There is no one besides You to help in the battle between the powerful and those who have no strength.”* He had an army of half a million men; but he was still humbly dependent on the Lord. This was his declaration of absolute dependence. We are weak . . . but YOU are strong! Yes, Asa and his men fought hard; but their *hope, trust and dependence* were ultimately in the Lord, not themselves. The Ethiopian army was completely routed by Asa, with God’s strong hand of help. *“They were shattered before the Lord, and before His army” (14:13).*

God often sends a “test” as a way of examining our dependence upon Him and to strengthen our resolve to trust in Him more fully. “Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands” (Deuteronomy 8:2). Has God allowed a trial or a test to come into your life recently? Have you considered that this is God’s invitation to you to trust Him more?

A warning to Asa from God: 15:1-7

In year 15 of his reign, Azariah the prophet was sent to Asa with a special message. The message had the tone of a warning. The essence of God's word to Asa was that there would be *great reward* IF they *continued* in the path of seeking the Lord with complete dependence. But there would be great loss IF they stopped depending on God.

“Listen to me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: the LORD is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. For many days Israel was without the true God and without a teaching priest and without law. But in their distress they turned to the LORD God of Israel, and they sought Him, and He let them find Him. In those times there was no peace to him who went out or to him who came in, for many disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. Nation was crushed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every kind of distress. But you, be strong and do not lose courage, for there is reward for your work.”

Why this message to such a faithful, godly king? Was Asa losing courage in his attempts to bring spiritual reform to Judah? Was he doubting the effectiveness of his efforts? It is likely that God saw *something* in Asa's heart that could, potentially, compromise his faith and devotion. Remember the principle: ***It's the hidden stuff that can take us down.*** Thus, God sent Azariah to tell Asa: *Be strong and DO NOT LOSE COURAGE!* (The Hebrew reads: “do not let your hands drop.”)

*Note: God says in the New Testament: “*I will never leave you, nor will I ever forsake you*” (Hebrews 13:5). So, why does God say that IF Asa and the people turn away, He will “forsake them” (2Chron.15:2)? God was speaking to Asa about the possibility of withdrawing His blessing, favor and protection upon *Asa's kingship* and upon *Israel's life* as a nation. As we saw with King Saul, God's “anointing” upon a king could be withdrawn due to unfaithfulness. And, God blessings upon the nation Israel could be withdrawn due to disloyalty to the covenant (Deut.28). But on the *personal level*, in terms of our *relationship with God*, He will never leave us or forsake us. In New Testament terms: Our *relationship* with God is always secure; but our *fellowship* with God (our experience of the blessings that come from the relationship) can change over time.

In Azariah's message to Asa we hear the reciprocal principle of Scripture: God will draw near to us IF we draw near to Him (see James 4:8; Zechariah 1:3; Malachi 3:7; 2Chronicles 15:2). A.W. Tozer put it this way: "God waits to be wanted." It is true. God waits to see if our hearts will turn toward Him. When our hearts do turn toward Him, He makes Himself known to us and comes to strongly support us (2Chronicles 16:9). On the other hand, when our hearts forsake Him, it is almost as if He hides His face from us. How about you? Are you seeking Him in your current season of life? Are you seeing God show up for you?

Asa's response to the message: 15:8-19

Asa "took courage" (15:8) after hearing this message from the Lord. He undertook further reforms, removing idol altars and restoring the Lord's altar at the temple. He even removed his own grandmother from her position as Queen. He publicly crushed her favorite idol, burning it and throwing the ashes in to the Kidron brook! To commemorate these reforms, he called for a national assembly to renew covenant loyalty with the Lord.

"So they assembled at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa's reign" (15:10).

After making a massive sacrifice to the Lord, all the people took a solemn oath to seek God with their whole hearts:

"Moreover, they made an oath to the LORD with a loud voice, with shouting, with trumpets and with horns. All Judah rejoiced concerning the oath, for they had sworn with their whole heart and had sought Him earnestly, and He let them find Him. So the LORD gave them rest on every side" (15:14,15).

The final line speaks of God's favor, bestowed upon Asa and the kingdom of Judah for seeking Him with their whole heart:

"And there was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign" (15:19).

The "best" years of our lives will always be those where we have been walking with Lord. Those years will contain wonderful experiences, but will certainly also contain suffering and trials. Yet, they will be blessed years – blessed by God's presence and favor over us. The experience of these "blessed years" depends upon our attitude toward the Lord. Remember . . . all of this happened to Asa and the people "because they had sought Him with their whole desire" (15:15).

Asa's fall: 16:1-14

It is incredibly difficult to reconcile the first 35 years of Asa's reign with the last 6 years. For 35 years he was a model of faith and dependence upon the Lord (*"There is no one besides You to help in the battle ..."*). Yet, in the last 6 years of his life he turned to everyone and everything *except God* to help him win his battles and overcome his challenges.

- He trusted in the Syrians for protection: 16:1-4

Judah was threatened by Baasha and the northern army of Israel. They came to within 5 miles of Jerusalem. Instead of turning to God, as he had in the past, he turned to the Syrians, sending them a great deal of silver and gold out of the Lord's temple and his own palace. He paid them to break their treaty with Baasha and come over to his side.

- He trusted in the failed weapons of Baasha: 16:5,6

When Baasha and his northern kingdom saw the Syrians helping Asa, they withdrew, leaving behind many weapons of defense. Asa gathered the very stones and timbers that had been used by the now defeated northern invaders and he constructed his own defenses out of them!

- He trusted in his own power and anger: 16:7-10

When the prophet Hanani came and rebuked Asa for relying on the king of Syria and failing to trust in the Lord, Asa responded with rage, imprisoning the prophet and oppressing his own people (who, presumably, agreed with the prophet). While earlier his heart had been responsive to God's word (recall 15:8-19), he now had no room for any "word from God" that countered his choices.

It takes courage to speak the truth in a difficult situation. God sent Hanani to approach king Asa with a rebuke. Only God knew whether Asa would respond with humility or anger. Hanani had to choose to walk in faith and obedience to God, regardless of Asa's reaction. He paid a high price for his faith and obedience to God – he was put in prison by Asa! Speaking the truth in a difficult situation can be costly; but God celebrates over His children whom He can count on to be faithful representing His truth. Is God calling you to speak truth in a difficult situation?

- He trusted in the physicians: 16:11-13

Near the end of his life, he incurred a very severe foot disease. Even in this, he would not turn to the Lord and humble himself, asking God for forgiveness and help. He turned *only to the physicians*. (Not that seeking physicians was wrong; but the point is that he did not combine dependence upon God with his dependence upon his doctors' help.) This ailment could have been God's invitation to once again walk with Him.

- He trusted in his own legacy: 16:14

When Asa died, he was buried in a very extravagant tomb that he had prepared for himself in Jerusalem. He had filled his own tomb with special spices. They also had a very great fire ceremony at the time of his burial. It seems that he was preparing ahead of time to protect and preserve his own legacy as a "great king" in Judah.

Sadly, a very famous verse of the Bible grows out of the context of Asa's failure to trust God, rather than his earlier track record of depending entirely upon Him:

"For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars" (2Chronicles 16:9).

Summary: *It's the hidden stuff that can take us down.*

The story of Asa reveals a pattern that repeats in the lives of many biblical characters: They start off strong in faith and may even continue strong for many years; but in the end, they have some kind of faith decline or blowout. Solomon was weakened when he became old, and he allowed women to pull his heart away from God. David fell into the sin of pride and numbered his troops when he was old. Moses grew weary and impatient with the Israelites when he was old. Asa stopped trusting God when he was old. This raises some important issues we each must face:

1. There are "blind spots," "secrets" or "hidden things" that could take you down. There are issues that you are not facing that could, at some point, threaten your faith and wreck God's work in and through your life. Can you identify any at this time? (See the Johari Window diagram below.)

2. Ask the Lord to reveal to you the unseen things that He sees. Commit to an openness to invite and receive that awareness through other people. (1John 1:5-10).

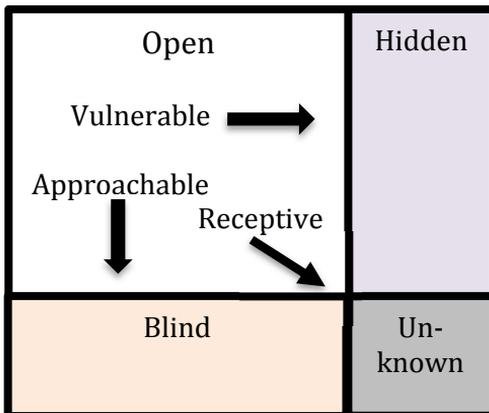
3. What factors could lead to us weakening in faith even after many decades of faithfulness? Lethargy? Pride? Counting our victories? Protecting our legacies? A desire to grab for a little bit of “life” before it’s over? Temptation from Satan? A divided heart?

4. What guards can we place around us so that we are less likely to wander away from the path of faith? Accountability partners? Spiritual practices that we will not slack on? Having people who can help us become aware of our blind spots?

The Johari Window Model of Self-awareness

Open: Known to self and to others	Hidden: Known to self but not to others
Blind: Known to others but not to self	Unknown: Not known to self or others

As we become more *vulnerable* about our secrets, more *approachable* about our blind spots, and more *receptive* to the light of God’s Spirit in our unknown areas, we increase the “open” area of our life. We are, as time goes on, more authentic people.



Discussion Questions:

This message has focused on the theme: *It's the hidden stuff that can take us down.*

1. What impacted you most from the story of King Asa? (His early years of passion for God and strong influence? His subtle decline and taking matters into his own hands? His huge reaction of rage and vengeance toward Hanani? His unwillingness to repent at the end? Other?)

2. In 2Chronicles 16:8,9, Hanani reminded Asa of when he had fully trusted in the Lord with his whole heart and God had strongly supported him. Have you experienced times where God strongly supported you in impossible situations? If so, write down a few and take encouragement. Give thanks to God for His strong support in these situations.

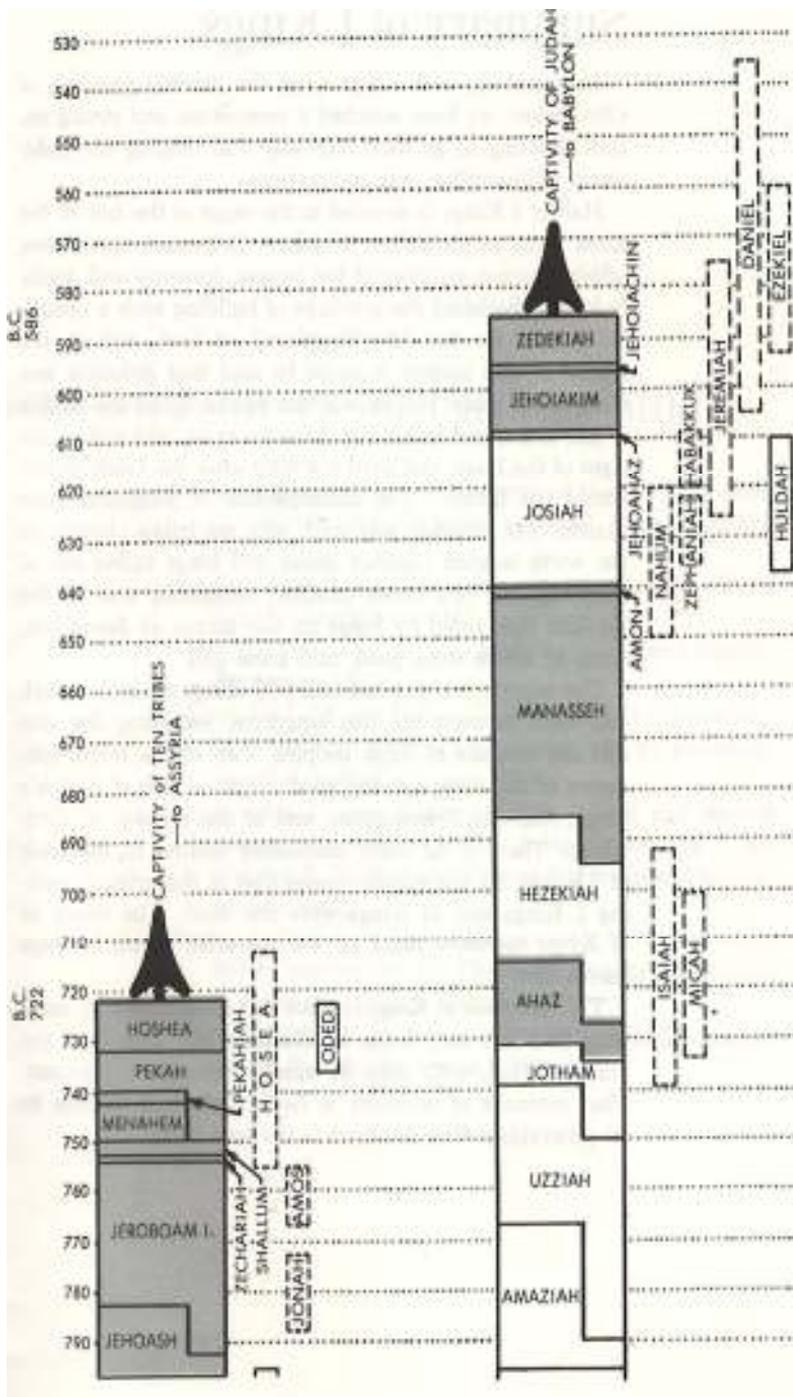
3. As the Johari Window illustrates, the more you invite God and others to speak into your life, the more you will “walk in the light” (1John 1:5-10). Who have you invited to speak truth to you? How have you reacted when people have attempted to speak into your life in the past? God is faithful and loving to give you plenty of “taps on the shoulder.” What is He currently revealing to you? Be still and ask Him to bring hidden things into the light.

4. What have you learned from the prophet Hanani's courage in speaking God's truth to the king? And the consequences he faced? How was John the Baptist's experience similar (Matthew 14:3-5).

Note: There are further thought/discussion questions in each of the boxes in the commentary.

FALL SCHEDULE OVERVIEW
KINGS AND PROPHETS DATES/TITLES/SCRIPTURES
OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2017, PART 6

1. Oct.7/8 Divided hearts – Divided kingdom
Solomon, Rehoboam and Jeroboam
(1 Kings 11-14 and 2Chronicles 10-12)
2. Oct.14/15 The Heart God is Looking For
Asa, Prophets: Azariah and Hanani
(1Kings 15:9-24; 2Chronicles 14-16)
- + Oct.21/22 *How to determine God's Will.* Charlie Koopman
(1Kings 12:1-20, 25-33; 13:1-30; 14:1-18; 2Chron 16:7-10)
3. Oct.28/29 The Wicked Power Couple (*and God's amazing grace*)
Ahab and Jezebel
(1Kings 16:29-34; chs.17-21; 22:1-40; 2Chronicles 18)
4. Nov 4/5 Standing against the Tide
Elijah the Prophet
(1Kings 17,18,19, 21:17-29; 2Kgs 1:1-2:12; 2Chron 21:12-15)
5. Nov 11/12 The 'Come-Back' King
Jehoshaphat, Prophets: Jehu and Eliezer
(2 Chron. 17-20; 1Kings 22:1-33, 41-50; 2 Chron. 22:9)
6. Nov 18/19 'All In' – Faithful Disciple, Faithful God
Elisha the Prophet
(1Kings 19:16, 19-21; 2Kings 2 - 8:15; 9:1-3)
- + Nov 25/26 Is Thanksgiving Over? Kurt Alber
7. Dec 2/3 The Godly Power Couple (*and the king of little faith*)
Jehoiada, Jehosheba, Joash and Zechariah
(2 Chron. 22:10-12; 23; 24; 2Kings 11; 12)
8. Dec. 9/10 Minor Prophets – Major Messages
Obadiah: *Brotherhood*, Amos: *Social Justice*,
Joel: *Repentance*, Jonah: *Compassion*
9. Dec 16/17 God's Ridiculous Love (*inspite of betrayal*)
Hosea and Gomer



(Irving L. Jensen Study Guide on Kings and Prophets)

GOD WITH US

Part 6: *Israel's Unfaithfulness and God's Ridiculous Love* Kings & Prophets thru 722 B.C.

Message 3 – The Wicked Power Couple Ahab and Jezebel (*and God's amazing grace*) 1Kings 16:29-34; chs.17-21; 22:1-40; 2Chronicles 18

Introduction

While the Southern Kingdom (Judah) had both good and evil kings, the Northern Kingdom (Israel) had *only* evil kings. After the first king, Jeroboam, there was a string of evil kings that receive only minor attention in the narrative: Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri and Omri (1Kings 15:25 – 1Kings 16:28). “*But Omri did evil in the eyes of the Lord and sinned more than all those before him*” (16:25). Then we come to his son Ahab, whose wife was Jezebel. Only *this queen* is highlighted throughout the reign of her husband because of her extreme evil impact on her husband and, thus, upon Israel. Abraham Lincoln said: ***If you want to test someone's character, give them power.*** Ahab and Jezebel's use of power showed them to be *the most wicked power-couple* of all the kings and queens in Israel's long history. Jezebel was so wicked that her name became a synonym for evil (see Revelation 2:20)!

Summary of Ahab's reign: 1Kings 16:29-34

“Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD more than all who were before him. It came about, as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went to serve Baal and worshiped him. So he erected an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal which he built in Samaria. Ahab also made the Asherah. Thus Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him” (16:30-33).

In this introductory summary of Ahab's reign, our attention is immediately drawn to his sinful decision to marry Jezebel. This is a signal to the reader that *her role as queen* will be significant in the upcoming narrative. Jezebel was the daughter of Ethbaal, meaning ‘*man of Baal,*’ the king of Sidon (north of Israel) *and the priest of Baal.* She was a *religious fanatic* Baal-worshipper who hated Yahweh and any religious prophet or leader who proclaimed

Him. She resolutely campaigned to institute Baal worship throughout Israel, affirming the crude practice of child-sacrifices, and to destroy hundreds of the Lord's prophets and other committed followers of Yahweh. She fed 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah daily at her royal table (1Kings 18:19), proving her extreme dedication to institute Baal worship throughout Israel.

Elijah announces a 3-1/2 year drought: 1Kings 17

Elijah the prophet was the major prophet in the period of Ahab and Jezebel. (Our next message will focus on Elijah, so we will only touch briefly on his activities here.) Baal worshippers believed Baal had the power to bring *rain* upon the earth, resulting in productive harvests. Elijah came in the name of Yahweh and announced to Ahab that there would be *no rain* for 3-1/2 years.

Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word" (17:1,2).

Identity and Courage- *Elijah announced that the God of ISRAEL was alive and well, and he declared that he was standing before HIM. The more we learn about our identity 'in Christ' in our day, the more we will have eyes to see our invisible God standing with us when we need courage to say things that we know will invoke a reaction that could be retaliatory.*

The main issue in the Ahab/Jezebel narrative is already surfacing: *Who is REALLY God? Is it Baal (as Jezebel insists), or is it Yahweh (as Elijah insists)? Which God should Israel serve?*

Elijah sent to meet Ahab: 1Kings 18:1,2

Now it happened after many days that the word of the LORD came to Elijah in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain on the face of the earth." So Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. Now the famine was severe in Samaria (18:1,2).

The 3-1/2 year drought had a devastating impact on the northern kingdom. During these years, Ahab sought to arrest Elijah ("the troubler of Israel"), believing that the lack of rain was Elijah's fault. God was intimately involved in Elijah's hiding places which prevented Ahab from finding him. Now the two would meet.

Elijah meets Obadiah, Ahab's chief of staff: 18:3-16

Before Elijah met Ahab, he met Obadiah, the man in charge of Ahab's entire household and palace, 'his chief of staff'. Obadiah was a devout believer and secret worshipper of Yahweh. His reverence for God was shown by his courage in hiding God's prophets from Jezebel's executioners.

“Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly; for when Jezebel destroyed the prophets of the LORD, Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave, and provided them with bread and water” (18:3,4).

When Obadiah met Elijah, his response tells us that his great faith and courage (in hiding God's prophets from Jezebel) was mingled with some legitimate fears.

“What have I done wrong, that you are handing me over to Ahab to be put to death? As surely as the Lord your God lives, there is not a nation or kingdom where my master has not sent someone to look for you . . . I have worshiped the LORD since my youth. If I go and tell Ahab and he doesn't find you, he will kill me!” (18:10,12,14).

Elijah assured Obadiah that he would meet with Ahab, so Obadiah arranged for the meeting.

Obadiah is a person we can relate to with real fears and yet a real faith. He mentioned his terror of being killed by Ahab 3 times in his discussion with Elijah. He is an inspiring example of the tension we live in between fear and faith, especially around people who think they can intimidate us and control our destiny. Obadiah had been a devout believer in Yahweh since his youth. As a skilled administrator, God placed him in a strategic position at a crucial time in history. Obadiah honored his God above his fears and used his place of authority in the palace to secretly take food and feed the 100 prophets he had hidden, at the risk of his own life. Obadiah inspires us to devote ourselves to both growing in our relationship with God, but also in our skills to be used for God's glory. If we are willing to daily walk by faith and courage in our places of influence, we can be used for God's purposes. Ask God to push through your fears!

Contest with the Baal prophets: 18:18-40

The meeting between Ahab and Elijah was brief and to the point.

Ahab called Elijah “*the troubler of Israel.*” Elijah responded that it was Ahab who was bringing trouble on Israel because he had forsaken Yahweh and followed Baal. Elijah proposed a showdown between Baal and Yahweh. Ahab agreed and called for the 450 Baal prophets to gather at Mt. Carmel. On the appointed day, Elijah boldly proclaimed the point of the contest to all Israel:

Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people did not answer him a word (18:21).

Jezebel chose not to attend the contest between her prophets and Elijah. Perhaps she was confused and angry that her own prophets were not able to convince Baal to send rain to water the land for over 3 years. In fact, there was the severe drought had impacted her own country of Sidon as well. Baal could not bring rain in Sidon either! YAHWEH was completely in charge of the rain, and only when He commanded, would the skies open up again.

Baal and his prophets were thoroughly defeated before Yahweh and His lone prophet. (More on this contest in the next lesson.) When the people saw Baal’s powerlessness in contrast to Yahweh’s great power, they quickly came over to Elijah’s side.

When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God.” Then Elijah said to them, “Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape.” So they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon, and slew them there (18:39-40).

At the event of the incredible miracle, the people who went to watch certainly claimed that Elijah’s God was the true God. But an intellectual assent does not necessarily mean a true conversion of the heart. There is no indication that this show of God’s power really caused people to repent and change their beliefs and worship Yahweh. Had they genuinely turned from their idols to the living God, they could have stood against Ahab and Jezebel in a united community and God would have assuredly shown up to support them. How firm is your faith? Is it only an intellectual assent because you have seen God at work in others? Or have you personally and fully embraced Him and received His Son (John 1:12), and are turning from false beliefs you have previously had?

Elijah announces the end of the drought: 18:41-46

After Yahweh's victory over Baal, Elijah announced to Ahab that the rain would now fall again on Israel. In fact, the rain would fall so heavily that Ahab should make haste to ride in his chariot back home, otherwise the deluge from heaven would stop him!

Jezebel threatens to kill Elijah: 19:1-3

When Ahab arrived home, he had to report to his wife that *all of her Baal prophets had been defeated and then killed!* This enraged Jezebel and caused her to put a death sentence upon Elijah.

Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." Elijah was afraid and arose and ran for his life (19:1-3).

While Elijah had been faithful and fearless to this point, Jezebel's threat struck terror in him. He fled for his life, believing she surely would follow through. God met Elijah during his flight from Jezebel, strengthening and encouraging him. (More on this section of Elijah's life in the next lesson.)

Ahab's victory over the Syrians: 20:1-43

Although Ahab was an evil king, there are signs of God's great grace and mercy toward him. 1Kings 20 is devoted to the story of Ahab's opportunity to experience his own miracle with God. Twice an unnamed prophet was sent to Ahab to bring God's word to him assuring victory over Benhadad, king of Syria and his massive army.

Now behold, a prophet approached Ahab king of Israel and said, "Thus says the LORD, 'Have you seen all this vast army? Behold, I will deliver them into your hand today, and you shall know that I am the LORD'" (20:13).

But God was after something more. As with each of us God wants to partner with us in our battles. Also, He wanted to give Ahab the opportunity to man-up and step out in faith, and THEN God would move to strongly support him. God wants to see us take the 1st step.

"But who will do this?" asked Ahab... 'Who will start the battle?' he asked. The prophet answered, 'You will'" (20:14).

Sure enough, Ahab defeated Benhadad soundly. Then Benhadad regrouped and attacked again, hoping that Israel's God was only powerful in the mountains, not in the plains. The prophet of God appeared again and promised Ahab another victory.

Then a man of God came near and spoke to the king of Israel and said, "Thus says the LORD, 'Because the Arameans have said, "The LORD is a god of the mountains, but He is not a god of the valleys," therefore I will give all this vast army into your hand, and you shall know that I am the LORD'" (20:28).

Ahab was granted a second decisive victory over Benhadad, even though the battle was fought in the lowlands instead of the mountains.

Finally, the prophet of God appeared a third time to announce a judgment upon Ahab. This was because Ahab spared the life of Benhadad after capturing him when it had been God's purpose to destroy the evil Syrian king for his wickedness.

He said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Because you have let go out of your hand the man whom I had determined should die, therefore your life shall go for his life, and your people for his people.'" So the king of Israel went to his house sullen and vexed, and came to Samaria (20:42,43).

The narrative seems to imply that Ahab knew (through the prophet's word) that it was God's will for Benhadad to be destroyed. Thus, Ahab's display of leniency toward Benhadad was an act of disobedience contrary to God's revealed will.

In this chapter of Ahab's life we see both the mercy and the justice of God on display. We see God's mercy in His repeated willingness to speak to Ahab through His unnamed prophet, to give Ahab a chance to act in faith, and to grant victory to Ahab in keeping with Ahab's obedience to God's commands. At the same time, we see the justice of God at work when Ahab went his own way, turning aside from God's will. How has God been merciful and also just at different times in your life? As a child of God, He is committed to us in loving us with mercy, and with discipline.

Jezebel plots to steal Naboth's vineyard: 21:1-24

While Jezebel brought about great evil in her lifetime, it was her plot to kill the righteous man Naboth and to steal his vineyard that is highlighted. Ahab wanted to expand his palace, but he needed

additional property to do so. Naboth's field was right next door. Ahab offered Naboth land or money; but Naboth refused since this plot of land was his God-given inheritance. (In Israel, you were not allowed to give away your God-given land inheritance.)

So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my ancestors." He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat. His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, "Why are you so sullen? Why won't you eat?" He answered her, "Because I said to Naboth the Jezreelite, 'Sell me your vineyard; or if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard in its place.' But he said, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" Jezebel his wife said, "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" (1Kgs.21:4-7 NIV).

Jezebel arranged for false witnesses to accuse Naboth of "cursing God and the king" before the elders of the city. They took Naboth out and stoned him to death, after which Jezebel took possession of his vineyard and gave it to her husband, Ahab. Yet, this act of wickedness did not escape the Lord's notice. Elijah the prophet of God showed up *in Naboth's vineyard* with a final pronouncement of judgement upon Ahab and Jezebel:

Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" And he answered, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD. Behold, I will bring evil upon you, and will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, both bond and free in Israel . . . because of the provocation with which you have provoked Me to anger, and because you have made Israel sin. Of Jezebel also has the LORD spoken, saying, 'The dogs will eat Jezebel in the district of Jezreel.' The one belonging to Ahab, who dies in the city, the dogs will eat, and the one who dies in the field the birds of heaven will eat" (21:20-24).

Naboth was innocent, following God's law regarding his family's land inheritance (Lev. 25:23). Often we suffer at the hands of self-centered willful people. Jesus suffered crucifixion for speaking and acting uprightly. When you suffer for your right behavior, remember that God has suffered rejection and abandonment throughout human history. He does not waste suffering, and He will reward those who suffer well. He even suffers with us, and comforts us.

Summary of Ahab's evil: 21:25,26

The closing summary of Ahab's reign, like the opening one (16:29-34), highlights the impact *Jezebel* had on his life.

“Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife incited him. He acted very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the sons of Israel” (21:5,2).

Why was Ahab easily powered-over by Jezebel? Why was he moody and angry? The Bible does not answer these questions, but we can speculate. Perhaps there were family-of-origin issues for both husband and wife. We learned that Ahab's father Omri, 'was more evil than all the kings before him'. Was Omri a power-over father? Was Ahab intimidated and kept from reaching mature manhood? Did Jezebel get whatever she wanted growing up as a princess? Whatever the family dynamics, Ahab allowed Jezebel to rule him and his nation. How are you relating in your marriage? Ask God to reveal what He sees in the dynamics of your relationship and choose to grow and mature.

Ahab humbles himself before God: 21:27-29

Having read the story of Ahab and seen how he allowed his wife to execute such violence against God's chosen servants, it is beyond amazing to see the *mercy of God* being extended toward Ahab:

It came about when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about meekly. Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, “Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son's days” (21:27-29).

GRACE = God giving us what we DON'T deserve. MERCY = God with-holding from us what we DO deserve. Part 6 continually highlights “Israel's Unfaithfulness and God's Ridiculous Love.” Who is this amazing God? He longs to be gracious and merciful to us. Keep musing about these people in Scripture, and how God kept reaching toward them, and pray that you will grow more to know and love this God who LOVES YOU.

Ahab's death in battle with the Syrians: 22:1-40

Ahab allied himself with the good king Jehoshaphat, from the

Southern Kingdom of Judah, to make war against the Syrians. Jehoshaphat asked to consult a prophet concerning the potential outcome of the battle; but Ahab produced only false prophets. When Jehoshaphat demanded “*a prophet of Yahweh,*” Ahab responded with indignation:

The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. He is Micaiah son of Imlah” (21:8).

Jehoshaphat insisted and Micaiah was brought forward. As Ahab feared, Micaiah prophesied a defeat for the Ahab-Jehoshaphat coalition, the exact opposite of what Ahab’s other prophets had predicted. When Ahab protested his words, Micaiah told Ahab that all of his “prophets” were inspired by deceiving spirits.

Micaiah said, “Therefore, hear the word of the LORD. I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left. The LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one said this while another said that. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD and said, ‘I will entice him.’ The LORD said to him, ‘How?’ And he said, ‘I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.’ Then He said, ‘You are to entice him and also prevail. Go and do so.’ Now therefore, behold, the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and the LORD has proclaimed disaster against you” (22:19-23).

Ahab threw Micaiah into prison and headed off into battle with Jehoshaphat against the Syrians. As predicted, he was slain in the battle. They washed his blood out of his chariot at the very spot where Naboth had been stoned to death. The dogs were there to fulfill Elijah’s prophecy: ***“In the place where the dogs licked up the blood of Naboth the dogs will lick up your blood” (21:19).***

Satan is the ‘deceiver, the Father of Lies’ (John 8:44). His main powerful strategy is *deception*. We must learn to discern God’s truth from error by abiding in His Word, desiring to know His truth, even if it hurts. If God has spoken in His Word concerning an issue, we must believe that He still remains faithful to bring about what He has promised- either blessing or justice.

Jezebel slain by Jehu: 2Kings 9:30-36

After Ahab's death, Jezebel continued as queen during the successive reigns of her two sons, Ahaziah and Joram. The latter was slain by a rival named Jehu, who then became king and *eradicated every living survivor from Ahab's line*. Jehu also had Jezebel killed. As Elijah had prophesied (21:23), her body was devoured by dogs leaving only a few bones (2Kgs.9:36,37).

Thus, the woman who sought to eradicate Yahweh from Israel was herself eradicated in the most despicable way. Furthermore, the god Baal that she sought to enshrine in Israel was also thoroughly eradicated by Jehu.

“They brought out the sacred pillars of the temple of Baal and burned them. They also broke down the sacred pillar of Baal and broke down the temple of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day. Thus Jehu eradicated Baal out of Israel” (2Kgs.10:26-28).

“If you want to test someone's character, give them power.” What a sad account of a wicked couple who used their power for evil. God has given many details for our warning. Read the different scenarios asking yourself 'What would I be like if I were...?' The fact is God affirms that we all have potential for evil and for good. What will it take in your life to grow in God's character so that you handle other people and opportunities with faith, courage and respect- like the prophets Elijah and Micaiah? And like Ahab's chief officer Obadiah and Naboth?

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you relate to the attitudes and actions of Ahab and Jezebel- either from your own mistakes or having an experience like their victims (or both!)?
2. Jezebel had many great strengths that she used for her self-willed desires. She also used them to 'emasculate' men, stripping them of dignity. As a woman, what do you learn from her example?
3. Ahab's father Omri was an evil man who set a bad example for his son and the nation. As a man, what do you learn from Ahab's pattern of passivity?
4. How are you impacted by God's unbelievable perseverance and forbearance with Ahab and Jezebel? His grace, mercy and justice?
5. How have you been warned and/or inspired?

(See the boxes for further discussion questions.)

GOD WITH US

Part 6: *Israel's Unfaithfulness and God's Ridiculous Love* Kings & Prophets thru 722 B.C.

Message 4 – Standing against the tide

Elijah the prophet

(1Kgs. 17-19, 21:17-29; 2Kgs. 1:1-2:12; 2Chr. 21:12-15)

Introduction

Elijah was called as a prophet by God to confront Ahab, Jezebel and the Baal-movement. He was used mightily in the confrontation between Yahweh and Baal (1Kings 18); but he faltered when it came to facing Jezebel. In the Elijah, we meet a normal human-being with a very stressful calling. He was bold with great authority and power, and yet experienced great fear and discouragement at other times. The N.T. says, “*Elijah was a man with a nature like ours . . .*” (James 5:17). We can gain comfort and courage as we study Elijah. Elijah PRAYED to God about everything. He prayed about his opponents, and his desire to glorify God, needing God’s power. Through prayer and God’s power he stopped and started the rain, brought down fire from heaven and raised a son from the dead! He also prayed about his own thoughts and emotions and was very honest with God. His relationship with God was very personal. Most of all, in Elijah we learn the spiritual principle: **Courage is found in the cave.**

Jesus and others in the New Testament refer to Elijah more than any other O.T. prophet. In fact, Elijah is called an O.T. forerunner of John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus, ministering to the masses and calling the nation back to God. Elijah prepared the way for Elisha, who like Jesus did more miracles and cared for individuals. Elijah was chosen as one of the 2 people, Moses as the other, to meet with Jesus on the Mt. of Transfiguration before His week of suffering (Luke 9:28-31).

Elijah’s Preparation: Ch.17

Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word” (17:1).

Elijah’s calling was to dismantle Ahab and Jezebel’s campaign to

make Baal the god of Israel. The 3-1/2 year drought showed that Yahweh, not Baal, was in charge of the rain. Calling an entire nation back to the worship of Yahweh was a big mission for Elijah's life. So, God did what He always does: He took His servant through a period of preparation. While the nation suffered a 3-1/2 year drought, Elijah's faith was being nurtured by God.

Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. You will drink from the brook, and I have directed the ravens to supply you with food there" (17:2-4).

His first stop was the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. This was FAR from Ahab and Jezebel in Samaria, and CLOSE to Elijah's home in Tishbe. It was safe and it was familiar.



Elijah experienced God's divine protection and personalized detailed provision of meat and bread a.m. and p.m. as ravens brought food to him daily. He remained there until the drought dried up the Brook Kerith (perhaps a year or so.)

God often changes things up on us when He's preparing us for service. He wants us to experience His power and provision in a variety of ways, and learn deeper lessons of dependence on Him. So, God let the Kerith Brook dry up and sent Elijah to a different and unlikely place for provision and protection. Sometimes it is really hard to understand God's ways. They don't really make sense at the time. This is often the way that God grows our faith!

Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. Then the word of the LORD came to him: "Go at once to Zarephath in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food." So he went to Zarephath (17:7-10).

Ironically, Zarephath of Sidon was in *the very region of Jezebel's family*. Elijah's location went from the safe and familiar to the *unsafe*. This was such a great hiding place for Elijah. Jezebel would NEVER think that Elijah was actually hiding in her home region and under the leadership of her father who was King and the high priest of Baal. That was brilliant!



When Elijah arrived at the city gate and spoke to the woman, he must have been a bit surprised that she initially said to him, *“As surely as the LORD your God lives, I don’t have any bread”* (v.12). This woman knew that he was a holy man and that Elijah’s God was alive and well. She was willing to take a risk to help him.

While at Zarephath, Elijah’s personal faith as a believer and man in ministry grew right alongside the faith of the widow. 1Kings 17:7-24 is a beautiful story of this courageous younger widow (a single mom) who through her obedience to Elijah’s requests and God’s word, came to her own profession of faith in Yahweh. She might have fed him and concealed him for as long as 2 years! God was faithful to provide flour and oil that she could bake into bread as long as the drought continued even in Sidon. He learned to trust God every day; that his prayers could unleash God’s power; that he *was* a powerful instrument for God’s purposes in that time period of Israel’s history. He learned to trust God when the unforeseeable and unbelievable happened – the death of the widow’s young son. Why would God keep them from starving, to then allow her son to become ill and die? But he learned to trust God for the impossible; the first resurrection from the dead in the whole Bible! After the crisis of her young son dying, and being brought back to life, she finally declared: *“Now I know that you are a man of God and the Word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth”* (v.24). How encouraging for Elijah to experience two women from Sidon –

Jezebel who hated Yahweh and Elijah, and this sweet widow, who took small steps of faith in God and Elijah. They were opposite in every way, yet both initially followers of Baal. Elijah experienced another huge lesson of faith, that God was willing to use a Sidonian woman to protect him from the other Sidonian woman!

What do we take from this period of Elijah's preparation? This is a pattern with God. God trains His servants privately before He deploys them publicly. He trained Moses on the back side of the desert for 40 years, before He used Him as the leader over Israel. He trained David for 15 years running from Saul and hiding in caves, before He installed him as king over Israel. He let the convert Paul spend more than a decade in Arabia before calling him to be the apostle to the Gentiles. Jesus spent 30 years in obscurity before He began His ministry. Don't be discouraged if you find yourself on the back side of some desert right now, or in some strange Zarephath. Don't run from God's training ground. He's developing you right there, right now, for something later.

Elijah's Victory: Ch.18

Elijah was now ready for the greatest battle of his life – the day of confrontation with Ahab and the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. The nation was also ready for a decisive day, having suffered through the long drought. At the end of the 3-1/2 years, Elijah met Ahab and challenged him to a contest between Yahweh and Baal.

When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is this you, you troubler of Israel?" He said, "I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, because you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD and you have followed the Baals. Now then send and gather to me all Israel at Mount Carmel, together with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table" (18:17-19).

At Ahab's command the entire nation assembled at Mt. Carmel, where Elijah announced the purpose of the gathering:

Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." But the people did not answer him a word (18:21).

The Baal prophets prepared their offering and then called upon their god to send fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice. They

cried out to Baal from morning until evening, but nothing happened. In turn, Elijah prepared his offering, soaking it first and then calling upon Yahweh to send fire from heaven:

At the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again.” Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He is God” (18:36-39).

It was a tremendous victory for Yahweh and Elijah. The nation acknowledged Yahweh on that day. Ahab and Jezebel’s campaign to make Baal the god of Israel was over. The prophets of Baal were destroyed. And the drought ended when Elijah prayed and it started to rain. It truly was a “mountain top experience” for Elijah.

There is no indication that the Israelites truly repented of their rebellion against God after they acknowledged Him as the true God. True belief involves taking Christ as your Savior (in our day), and a sincere desire to follow Him. This takes courage to go against the culture and beliefs of others, as it did in Elijah’s day.

But that scene from his life is not the one that makes him a *beloved character* in the Bible. The reason Elijah is described as “*a man with a nature like ours*” (James 5:17) is because of the next scene.

Elijah’s Despair and Restoration: Ch.19

After Elijah’s mountaintop victory came his valley of despair. It so often happens like this in life: One minute we’re on top of the world; the next minute we are in a valley of discouragement.

Now Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and even more, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.” And he was afraid and arose and ran for his life . . . (19:1-3).

He ran roughly 125 miles south to escape from Jezebel. Then he sat down and prayed that God would let him die!

He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a broom tree and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died.”

He literally asked God to end his life. Instead, God restored his physical strength for the next leg of his journey.

He lay down and slept under the broom tree. But as he was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him, “Get up and eat!” He looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again. Then the angel of the LORD came again and touched him and said, “Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you.”

He slept, he ate, he slept, he ate. God ministered first to his *physical needs* for sleep and food. Elijah had become physically exhausted after the long confrontation with Ahab, Jezebel and the prophets of Baal.

We should never underestimate the impact of our physical health upon our emotional, mental and spiritual health. We are whole beings, and we cannot neglect one part of our being without impacting the other parts. Someone has wisely said: “Often, the difference between hope and despair is a nap.” This is shown to be true by the way God allowed Elijah to sleep and eat before moving on to deal with the prophet’s spiritual and emotional condition. How are you caring for your body? Are you getting proper rest, nourishment and exercise? Is God trying to tell you that your physical exhaustion is at the root of much of your spiritual and/or emotional discouragement or despair?

The last leg of Elijah’s long journey outward was to Mt. Sinai (also called Mt. Horeb) at the very base of the Arabian Peninsula – an additional 200 miles beyond what he had already travelled.

So he got up and ate and drank, and the food gave him enough strength to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. There he came to a cave, where he spent the night” (19:3-8).

In total, Elijah travelled roughly 325 miles trying to get as far away from Jezebel as possible. He came to Mt. Sinai, where Moses had received the 10 commandments; the very mountain where it all started for the nation Israel 500 years before Elijah. There, God met Elijah in a very personal way. God began with a question:

The LORD said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

God was exploring Elijah’s heart; reaching into the hidden places to force Elijah to face the deep things that were causing his despair. Elijah’s response was filled with strong emotions.

Elijah replied, “I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”

He *felt* that he had expended his zeal with no effect (defeat); that the people were successfully rejecting the rule of God over their lives (hopelessness); that he was the only one left that had a heart for God (isolation); and that Jezebel would be successful in tracking him down and killing him (fear).

You can't heal what you don't allow yourself to feel. God helped Elijah to name his painful emotions before He set about providing remedies. We so often try to bury our painful emotions of grief, sadness, anger, despair, etc. But burying painful emotions is not the answer. Instead, we should bring our true emotions into the light of God's presence and love. The Scriptures reveal over and over again that even God has painful emotions. He understands feelings like rejection, abandonment, fear and sadness. Jesus personally experienced all these emotions, and many more. “Our High Priest understands our weaknesses, for He faced all of the same testings we do, yet He did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive His mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most” (Heb. 4:15,16 – NLT).

God had answered Elijah’s bold prayer at Mt. Carmel in front of all the prophets of Baal and Israelites with fire. He took Elijah to heaven in a chariot of fire. But, in this scene we see the tenderness of God who knew what Elijah’s frazzled and anxious spirit needed most. God knows what each of us need. We enjoy Him most when we pay attention to the ways He creatively touches us from heaven.

“Go out and stand before me on the mountain,” the LORD told him. And as Elijah stood there, the LORD passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave (19:11-13).

When the gentle whisper came, God asked Elijah the exact same question a second time, and Elijah gave the exact same reply.

A voice said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” He replied again, “I have zealously served the LORD God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”

Surely God did not *need* to hear Elijah’s lament a second time; so we must assume that Elijah needed to express it a second time. God pointed the way forward for His servant, and in doing so He addressed every one of Elijah’s deepest needs.

- Return to Damascus of Syria, the very region he had fled from.
- Anoint Hazael the next king over Syria.
- Anoint Jehu as the future king over Israel.
- Anoint Elisha the prophet as his own successor.
- Rest assured that the house of Ahab and Jezebel would be judged.
- Know that 7,000 others were true worshippers of Yahweh.

God met Elijah’s *physical* needs by giving him rest and food. He met Elijah’s *emotional* needs by letting him vent his true feelings, then gently whispering to him in response. He met Elijah’s *spiritual* needs by assuring him that He was in complete control of the destiny of men and nations. He met Elijah’s *relational* needs by awakening him to the fact that there were 7,000 kindred spirits in the nation Israel, and most importantly by giving Elijah a disciple named Elisha, to do the rest of the journey alongside him.

F. B. Meyer wrote: “The acquisition of spiritual power is impossible, unless we can hide ourselves from men and from ourselves in some deep gorge where we may absorb the power of the eternal God.” If your tank is empty, take time to get alone with God. Only He can fill your life with the power you need to go on.

Elijah calls Elisha to follow him: 19:19-21

As instructed, Elijah found Elisha and invited him to be his special follower, disciple and successor. (We will devote a future lesson to the life of Elisha.) The call of Elisha looks very similar to the call of the 12 disciples by Jesus (compare Matthew 4:18-22).

So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, while he was plowing with twelve pairs of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth. And Elijah passed over to him and threw his mantle on him. He left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" So he returned from following him, and took the pair of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the implements of the oxen, and gave it to the people and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah and ministered to him (19:19-21).

Elijah announces the end of Ahab's dynasty: 12:17-24

In the previous study we saw how Ahab and Jezebel conspired to kill Naboth and acquire his vineyard for themselves. Elijah boldly confronted Ahab and announced the complete end of his regime and the future destruction of all his descendants (pp.655-656).

Elijah announces the death of Ahaziah: 2Kings 1:1-16

Ahab's son, Ahaziah succeeded Ahab as king over Israel. When he suffered a crippling fall, he sent messengers to the Philistine city of Ekron to inquire of Baal if he would recover. (Recall that Baal worship had been eradicated from the Northern Kingdom of Israel; thus, Ahaziah had to reach out to Philistia to find a Baal prophet.) God told Elijah to intercept Ahaziah's messengers and give them this message:

"Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebul, the god of Ekron?" Now therefore thus says the LORD, "You shall not come down from the bed where you have gone up, but you shall surely die." Then Elijah departed (2Kgs.1:3,4).

Ahaziah sent 50 soldiers with their captain to arrest Elijah and bring him to Samaria; but the soldiers were consumed by fire at Elijah's word. This happened again a second time. The third captain of 50 came with a humble disposition toward Elijah and his

God, and their lives were spared. Elijah accompanied them to Ahaziah, where he announced that the king would surely die.

Elijah taken up to heaven: 2Kings 2:1-14

The narrative does not give a detailed account as to how long Elijah and Elisha ministered together. It's clear that after Ahaziah's death in the north, and Jehoshaphat's death in the south, Elijah was still speaking with authority. He wrote a letter of rebuke to the southern king Jehoram, who was not walking in the ways of his father (2Chronicles 21:12-15). But when it was time for Elijah to pass the prophetic responsibility to Elisha, and leave this life, Elijah did not die, rather, he was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. The important issue in his departure was the way that he transferred his power and authority to Elisha, his successor.

Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." He said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." As they were going along and talking, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven. Elisha saw it and cried out, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw Elijah no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. He also took up the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and returned and stood by the bank of the Jordan. He took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and struck the waters and said, "Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" And when he also had struck the waters, they were divided here and there; and Elisha crossed over (2:9-14).

The "double portion" of the inheritance was always given to the first-born son (see Deut.21:17). Thus, it is clear that Elisha had come to regard Elijah as his 'spiritual father,' and Elijah had accepted him as his 'spiritual son.'

Like Elijah and Elisha, you may not be married or have biological children of your own. But this is a beautiful example of a 'spiritual father and son.' Discipleship and companionship is the best way to stay encouraged and strong. Who are you in spiritual community with? Who do you consider your 'spiritual father or mother' or 'spiritual son or daughter?'

Summary: Elijah is prophet that is referred to most in the New Testament (29 times). Just as Elijah was the forerunner for Elisha, so he is compared to John the Baptist as the forerunner for Jesus. It was Elijah who appeared with Moses when Jesus went up to a mountain and was transfigured before the eyes of Peter, James and John. They were privileged to discuss Jesus' departure from this world, which would soon happen through His death, resurrection and ascension in Jerusalem. And it was Elijah that James referred to as an example of faith-filled prayer.

“The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit” (James 5:16,17).

Discussion Questions

1. Elijah was used of God, yet he was an ordinary man with many lessons of his own to learn along his journey. Some were in the 3-1/2 yr preparation phase, in the ministry phase (Baal contest, flight in fear to meet with God), and some were in his mentoring phase with Elisha. Which ones do you identify with?
2. How does the story of Elijah being sent to the widow in Zarephath of Sidon (1Kings 17) impact you? If you are a woman, what did you see in her feminine strength that inspired you?
3. What did you learn about God and His dealings with the different people in this section? (Elijah, the widow, Ahab, Jezebel)
4. Prayer: What inspired you from Elijah's personal conversations with God, but also his huge faith prayers?
5. Why do you think Jesus made a big deal about Elijah being sent to Zarephath rather than to widows in Israel? (Luke 4)
6. **Courage is found in the cave.** How does this principle challenge the way you are spending time alone with God?

GOD WITH US

Part 6: *Israel's Unfaithfulness and God's Ridiculous Love* Kings & Prophets thru 722 B.C.

Message 5 – The ‘Come-Back’ King Jehoshaphat, Prophets: Jehu and Eliezer (2 Chron. 17-20; 1Kings 22:1-33, 41-50; 2 Chron. 22:9)

Introduction

Among the kings in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, Jehoshaphat was one of the greatest. He was very committed to the Lord and initiated two major national reform movements – a spiritual reform and a judicial reform – to call the people to walk in God’s ways. He was also the leader at one of the greatest moments in the nation’s history when they faced an ominous opponent in battle and saw God miraculously deliver them. The story of Jehoshaphat contains several of the shining moments in Judah’s checkered history. Yet, for all of his great qualities, he was a man who made significant compromises that impacted his life and legacy and, sadly, set his son up for failure. In Jehoshaphat we see an important warning about life: *Our potential is always reduced by our compromises.*

Introductory summary of his reign: 17:3-6

At the very outset, we are introduced to a king with great potential because of his deep devotion to the Lord.

“The LORD was with Jehoshaphat because he followed the example of his father David’s earlier days and did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father, followed His commandments, and did not act as Israel did. So the LORD established the kingdom in his control, and all Judah brought tribute to Jehoshaphat, and he had great riches and honor. He took great pride in the ways of the LORD and again removed the high places and the Asherim from Judah” (17:3-6).

From the life of Asa his father, we learned that: *“The Lord is with those who are with Him” (2Chronicles 15:2).* Truly, the Lord was with Jehoshaphat in a powerful way, because his heart was deeply devoted to God.

His Spiritual Reform Movement: 17:7-9

Very few kings attempted to bring spiritual reform to the entire nation as Jehoshaphat did. In the 3rd year of his reign he sent teachers throughout the land to remind people of their covenant with Yahweh and to call them to walk in the ways of the Lord.

“They taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the LORD with them; and they went throughout all the cities of Judah and taught among the people” (17:9).

The “*book of the law of the LORD*” refers to the first five books of the Bible (the “Pentateuch” or the “Law”). The emphasis of their teaching would have been the laws given to Moses to govern Israel’s life as a nation (Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy). Jehoshaphat knew that these laws had been given not only to guide Israel’s life, but also that they might be blessed and, in turn, be a blessing to other nations. After Moses gave God’s laws to Israel, his final words to the nation were these: “*Take to your heart all the words with which I am warning you today, which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, even all the words of this law. For it is not an idle word for you; indeed, it is your life. And by this word you will prolong your days in the land, which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess*” (Deut.32:46,47). Thus, Jehoshaphat was not just calling the nation to obedience; he was calling them to true LIFE.

So often, we look at God’s “commandments” and see them as mere “moral restrictions.” Do this . . . Don’t do this . . . etc. When viewed this way, we can feel as if God is boxing us in and keeping us from experiencing true freedom. Yet, when viewed as mere restrictions, we miss the real purpose behind God’s commandments. He loves us and wants to give us LIFE. The lies of the Evil One are always disguised as “life”, but really they lead us only to death. God’s moral code for our lives is like a set of rails for a train to run on. You could look at the rails and conclude that the rails keep the train from going anywhere it wants. True. But a train that goes wherever it wants is a disaster. The beauty and power of a train is released through those very rails so that it moves swiftly and effectively where it is designed to go. Jesus said it this way: “The truth will make you free” (John 8:32).

The Lord’s favor over Jehoshaphat’s rule: 17:10-19

Significant detail is given to the tangible blessings that Judah

enjoyed during the early years of Jehoshaphat's rule. Foreign nations dared not make war with Judah, and they even brought tribute-gifts to Jehoshaphat as a sign of their respect for his rule. Not since Solomon did a Jewish king have such esteem among the rulers of the world.

“Now the dread of the LORD was on all the kingdoms of the lands which were around Judah, so that they did not make war against Jehoshaphat . . . So Jehoshaphat grew greater and greater . . .” (17:10,12).

His marriage compromise: 18:1

Our potential is always reduced by our compromises. Now we come to the first, and most impactful, compromise made by the great king Jehoshaphat.

“Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honor; and he allied himself by marriage with Ahab” (18:1).

Jehoshaphat formed a marriage alliance with the *evil* king Ahab from the north; the same Ahab who, along with his wife Jezebel, was seeking to turn the entire Northern Kingdom into a Baal-worshipping country! They were also killing all the prophets and people of Yahweh. Yet, Jehoshaphat formed a marriage alliance with these wicked people by inviting Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, to marry his son, **Jehoram**. Why would such a godly king as Jehoshaphat marry his son to the daughter of *Jezebel*? He may have been motivated by a desire to reunite north and south. Or, he may have thought that somehow the godliness and goodness of his family would rub off on the north. In any case, this was a disastrous compromise, as Athaliah eventually became *“the Jezebel of the South!”* This is what we later read of Jehoram's reign (Jehoshaphat's son) in Judah:

“He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab did (for Ahab's daughter was his wife), and he did evil in the sight of the LORD.” ***“He caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the harlot and led Judah astray.”*** (2Chronicles 21:6,11).

Jehoram's heart was turned *completely* away from Yahweh. His 8-year reign was a reign of terror. He murdered all of his brothers (the other sons of Jehoshaphat). The Philistines and the Arabs invaded Judah and carried off and killed all his sons and wives (except his youngest son Ahaziah), and all the palace treasures.

Jehoram died of a very painful disease. Athaliah his wicked wife, eventually reigned as Queen for several years in the South. Like her deceased husband, she also sought to exterminate all the godly descendants of Jehoshaphat's line in order to bring "Northern Kingdom" ways into the Southern Kingdom. What a *disastrous compromise* this was for Jehoshaphat in allowing his son to marry Ahab and Jezebel's daughter. If he could only have played the tape forward and seen the long term consequences, he *never* would have married his son Jehoram to Athaliah! His potential (and the potential of his son) was *seriously reduced* by his compromises.

Be careful of the compromises that you make in the attempt to let your "good" rub off on people who are not so good. The apostle Paul gave this warning to the Christians at Corinth, some of whom were attempting this same strategy: "Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals" (1Corinthians 15:33). King Jehoshaphat seems to have thought that: "Good company changes bad morals." It rarely works that way. Yes, as followers of Christ, we are to be salt and light in a world of contrary standards. But it does not mean that we need to "marry" or make alliances with those who don't share the same beliefs and values. Be very cautious when you form alliances of any kind. Seek wise counsel. You could be stepping into a compromise that will hurt you in the long run.

His 1st war compromise: 18:2-27

Compromise usually leads us to become more entangled in further compromise. Once Jehoshaphat was allied by marriage to Ahab, he soon found himself being invited into the wars of Ahab as well.

Some years later he went down to visit Ahab at Samaria. And Ahab slaughtered many sheep and oxen for him and the people who were with him, and induced him to go up against Ramoth-gilead. Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Judah, "Will you go with me against Ramoth-gilead?" And he said to him, "I am as you are, and my people as your people, and we will be with you in the battle" (18:2-3).

Notice that Ahab "slaughtered many sheep and oxen" for Jehoshaphat. Ahab was a sly and devious character. He was setting his new "in law" up for a huge ask – that Jehoshaphat might use his great military might to help him in a battle. How could Jehoshaphat say NO to the father of his son's wife? He felt obligated by the *marriage alliance* to now make a *war alliance*.

Before going into battle, Jehoshaphat insisted that he and Ahab seek the Lord's voice through a prophet. Ahab brought in his false prophets and they all said that there would be a great victory. Yet, Jehoshaphat wanted to hear from a prophet of Yahweh. Thus, Micaiah the prophet was brought in (much to Ahab's dismay, since he never gave Ahab a positive message). True to form, Micaiah saw the Ahab-Jehoshaphat coalition being severely defeated in the coming battle:

“I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep which have no shepherd; and the LORD said, ‘These have no master. Let each of them return to his house in peace’” (18:16).

Ahab threw Micaiah into prison with instructions to feed him sparingly until he and Jehoshaphat returned in victory. Micaiah gave one last warning before being taken away:

Micaiah said, “If you indeed return safely, the LORD has not spoken by me.” And he said, “Listen, all you people” (18:27).

Jehoshaphat had asked for a word from the Lord and received a clear message: DEFEAT AWAITS YOU. Why, then, did he not heed these words of warning and remove himself from the alliance with Ahab? Because his compromise in marriage had put him in a situation where he felt obligated to go forward, even though he knew the outcome would not be good. *Our potential is always reduced by our compromises* because one compromise leads to another . . . and another:

His protection compromise: 18:28-34

Ahab knew from Micaiah's prophecy that he would face grave danger in the battle. So, he came up with a brilliant, self-serving strategy. Since the enemy always focused their efforts on killing the opposing *king*, he asked Jehoshaphat to dress in his royal robes while *he* would disguise himself as an ordinary soldier. It is almost astonishing to read that Jehoshaphat *agreed* to go into a defeat-certain battle with a bullseye on his own chest!

So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah went up against Ramoth-gilead. The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you put on your robes.” So the king of Israel disguised himself, and they went into battle (18:28,29).

Sure enough, the enemy nearly killed Jehoshaphat, thinking that he

was Ahab king of Israel! It was only by God’s mercy that he made it out of this battle alive.

“So when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, ‘It is the king of Israel,’ and they turned aside to fight against him. But Jehoshaphat cried out, and the LORD helped him, and God diverted them from him. When the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. A certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel in a joint of the armor. So he said to the driver of the chariot, “Turn around and take me out of the fight, for I am severely wounded.” The battle raged that day, and the king of Israel propped himself up in his chariot in front of the Arameans until the evening; and at sunset he died” (18:31-34).

God spared Jehoshaphat’s life, while a “random” arrow found its way to Ahab, resulting in his death. When Jehoshaphat returned to Jerusalem, he was met by a stern rebuke from the prophet Jehu, who challenged the king on his alliance with Ahab.

Then Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned in safety to his house in Jerusalem. Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him and said to King Jehoshaphat, “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD and so bring wrath on yourself from the LORD? But there is some good in you, for you have removed the Asheroth from the land and you have set your heart to seek God” (19:1-3).

Here we find a key to understanding Jehoshaphat’s heart. He was a man with “some good” in him (in fact, much good); but he was also a man prone to make foolish compromises. He thought that the most “loving” thing he could do for Ahab was to say “Yes” to his requests. In fact, the most loving thing he could have done was to say “No” to Ahab at many points.

When we allow our love for another person to eclipse our love for and devotion to the Lord, we will make many costly compromises. We will end up serving that person’s agenda, rather than God’s agenda. We may even make sacrifices that God has not called us to make; or take on risks that God has not called us to take. We may think we are “loving” the other person well. But quite often, the most loving thing we can do for others is to say “No” to their agenda and “Yes” to God’s. In this way, we will testify of our own undivided devotion to God AND point others to God as the only true source of life.

Note: The prophet **Jehu** who rebuked Jehoshaphat was the son of the prophet **Hanani**. Ponder the courage it must have taken for Jehu to rebuke Jehoshaphat. Hanani his father had done the EXACT same thing when God had sent him to rebuke King Asa, Jehoshaphat's father (2Chron16:7,10). Asa was so enraged that he threw Hanani into prison. Jehu had to **count the cost of obeying God**, not knowing the outcome of his similar assignment. Fortunately for Jehu, his rebuke fell upon the more tender heart of king Jehoshaphat rather than a hardened heart like king Asa's.

His Judicial Reform Movement: 19:4-11

To his credit, Jehoshaphat was a true "comeback king." When he made mistakes, he accepted responsibility, humbled himself before the Lord and reset his heart to walk in the Lord's ways. His nationwide judicial reform movement followed immediately upon the heels of his foolish choice to go to war with Ahab.

So Jehoshaphat lived in Jerusalem and went out again among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim and brought them back to the LORD, the God of their fathers. He appointed judges in the land in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city. He said to the judges, "Consider what you are doing, for you do not judge for man but for the LORD who is with you when you render judgment. Now then let the fear of the LORD be upon you; be very careful what you do, for the LORD our God will have no part in unrighteousness or partiality or the taking of a bribe" (19:4-7).

He "brought them back to the LORD." In other words, he taught the nation how to live according to the civil laws given to them by God on Mt. Sinai. Perhaps Jehoshaphat knew the principle from Proverbs: "Righteousness exalts a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people" (Proverbs 14:34).

The judges were to realize that they were judging "not for man, but for the LORD." Similarly, the apostle Paul said that whatever kind of work we do, we should realize that we are serving God, not men, in our work. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Colossians 3:23,24). Do you perform your work as "for the Lord?" From God's perspective, your "work" is your "ministry" IF you do your work for HIS glory.

Jehoshaphat's greatest victory: 20:1-30

A report came to Jehoshaphat that a massive coalition had formed to attack against his kingdom.

Then some came and reported to Jehoshaphat, saying, "A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea ..." (20:2).

In one of the greatest displays of humility and dependence, the king called for a national assembly to seek the Lord's protection. His prayer before all the people stands as one of the great model prayers in all of the Bible. It is quoted in full below:

Then Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of the LORD before the new court, and he said, "O LORD, the God of our fathers, are You not God in the heavens? And are You not ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand so that no one can stand against You. Did You not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel and give it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever? They have lived in it, and have built You a sanctuary there for Your name, saying, 'Should evil come upon us, the sword, or judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before You (for Your name is in this house) and cry to You in our distress, and You will hear and deliver us.' Now behold, the sons of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom You did not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt (they turned aside from them and did not destroy them), see how they are rewarding us by coming to drive us out from Your possession which You have given us as an inheritance. O our God, will You not judge them? For we are powerless before this great multitude who are coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are on You." All Judah was standing before the LORD, with their infants, their wives and their children (20:5-13).

The heart of this prayer is found in the closing words: ***"We do not know what to do . . . but our eyes are upon You."*** In response to this cry for protection, God sent word through Jahaziel the prophet:

"You need not fight in this battle; station yourselves, stand and see the salvation of the LORD on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem. Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out to face them, for the LORD is with you" (20:7).

On the next day, the Lord brought about one of the greatest victories recorded in the Bible, and *Jehoshaphat's army did not even lift a sword!* Instead, *the worship team "fought the battle."*

Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, put your trust in the LORD your God and you will be established. Put your trust in His prophets and succeed." When he had consulted with the people, he appointed those who sang to the LORD and those who praised Him in holy attire, as they went out before the army and said, "Give thanks to the LORD, for His lovingkindness is everlasting." When they began singing and praising, the LORD set ambushes against the sons of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; so they were routed. For the sons of Ammon and Moab rose up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir destroying them completely; and when they had finished with the inhabitants of Seir, they helped to destroy one another. When Judah came to the lookout of the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude, and behold, they were corpses lying on the ground, and no one had escaped (20:20-24).

After collecting the spoils of victory for *three days*, the people went back to Jerusalem with Jehoshaphat and had a massive victory celebration before the Lord. Truly, this was the highpoint of Jehoshaphat's 25-year reign over the Kingdom of Judah.

His economic-alliance compromise: 20:35-37

Sadly, as the narrative of Jehoshaphat's life nears the end, we read of yet another compromise. This time, he formed an economic alliance with the northern king Ahaziah, the son of Ahab.

After this Jehoshaphat king of Judah allied himself with Ahaziah king of Israel. He acted wickedly in so doing. So he allied himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish, and they made the ships in Ezion-geber. Then Eliezer the son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat saying, "Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, the LORD has destroyed your works." So the ships were broken and could not go to Tarshish (20:35-37).

They "*made ships to go to Tarshish.*" We note first that it would have taken considerable time and money to construct large ships for the purpose of international trade. Second, Tarshish was known for its precious metals (and many other fine goods) with

which ancient empires built their strength. The motive for this economic alliance was so that both the kingdoms of Jehoshaphat and Ahaziah could prosper through the acquisition of these goods from far off lands. How ironic: At the outset of his reign, Jehoshaphat enjoyed unparalleled prosperity as he “allied” himself with the LORD. At the end of his reign, he experienced economic loss and trouble as he allied himself with evil Ahaziah. *Even our economic potential is reduced by our compromises.*

His 2nd war compromise: 2 Kings 3

There is yet one more post-script compromise in the story of Jehoshaphat. Before his death, he made another war-alliance with Jehoram, a son of Ahab. The Northern Kingdom was being attacked again, and, just as Ahab had done, Jehoram appealed to the southern king Jehoshaphat to accompany him in battle:

He (Jehoram) sent this message to Jehoshaphat king of Judah: “The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me to fight against Moab?” “I will go with you,” he replied. “I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses” (2Kings 3:7).

Just as in the war-alliance with Ahab, Jehoshaphat requested that “a prophet of the LORD” be consulted. This time, Elisha the prophet was brought in and he announced that God would graciously grant the coalition a victory.

Yet, even this victory ended on a tragic note. As the Moabites were being defeated in battle, the king of Moab decided to sacrifice his firstborn son to his god in order to obtain help.

“When the king of Moab saw that the battle was too fierce for him, he took with him 700 men who drew swords, to break through to the king of Edom; but they could not. Then he took his oldest son who was to reign in his place, and offered him as a burnt offering on the wall. And there came great wrath against Israel, and they departed from him and returned to their own land” (3:26-27).

There is uncertainty as to the meaning of the phrase, “*there came great wrath against Israel, and they departed.*” Was this great wrath from Yahweh, as a judgment upon Israel for an excessive destruction of the Moabites? Was the wrath from an evil spirit-power associated with the god that Mesha, the king of Edom,

called upon? Or was the great wrath from the people who saw the sacrifice of the king's son causing them to be enraged against the people of Israel? We do not know. But we do know that *the battle ended badly for Israel, even though they won!* They returned to their own land with a cloud hanging over their heads. Thus, Jehoshaphat's final "victory" was tinged with sadness. *Our potential (even in victory) is ALWAYS reduced by our compromises!*

Discussion Questions

1. There were many good parts to Jehoshaphat's story (spiritual strength, reform movements, major victories, repentant heart, etc.). Which of the good parts of Jehoshaphat's life were most encouraging to you? Why?
2. The compromises of Jehoshaphat were many: The marriage compromise, the protection compromise, the 2 war-alliance compromises, and the economic-alliance compromise.
 - Behind every such act, there is a deeper *motive*. What strikes you about the motives of Jehoshaphat that might have moved him to make these different compromises?
 - Which of these compromises do you feel that you can best relate to from your own life experience? Have you made a similar compromise at some point?
3. Jehoshaphat's greatest victory was stunning (2Chronicles 20). How are you encouraged by his prayer (20:5-13)? Is there some area of your life where you can truly say: ***“Lord, I don't know what to do; but my eyes are on You.”***

**Part 6: Israel's Unfaithfulness and God's Ridiculous Love
Kings & Prophets thru 722 B.C.**

**Message 6 – Elisha: Faithful Disciple, Faithful God
(1Kings 19:16, 19-21; 2Kings 2 - 8:15; 9:1-3)**

Introduction

The two great non-writing prophets of the Old Testament were **Elijah** and **Elisha**. Both ministered in Northern Kingdom of Israel during the reigns of numerous evil kings. Elisha, the God-appointed successor to Elijah, was not a “prophet of fire” like his predecessor, rather, a “prophet of compassion.” He ministered to *many* individuals. Elijah and Elisha, by both their personalities and their ministries, foreshadowed John the Baptist and Jesus. John came with a fiery prophetic message of repentance and coming judgment, as he prepared the way for Jesus. In contrast, Jesus came with a more personal and comforting approach, ministering to individuals and performing countless miracles. Jewish people in the days of Jesus would have recognized the parallel: John came as **Elijah** to call the nation back to God with a focus on a call to righteousness and repentance (Matt. 3:1-8); Jesus came as **Elisha** showing God’s tender mercy to individuals in the context of truth (Jn. 1:14,17).

The Elisha narrative is long and complex, yet there is an emphasis on three things: 1) His faithfulness as a disciple who also mentored younger disciples; 2) His power as a leader to kings, younger prophets, and individuals; 3) His ministry aimed at the Syrians – including the captain of the Syrian army, Naaman. Unlike Elijah who felt alone, Elisha spent most of his ministry in community. Perhaps this is why he had steady strength in desperate situations.

1. Transition from Elijah to Elisha: 1Kgs. 19:19 – 2Kgs. 3:27

His calling: Elijah the prophet was told that his successor would be Elisha. When he left the cave on Mt. Horeb, he found Elisha and called him to be his disciple.

So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah.

“Let me kiss my father and mother goodbye,” he said, “and then I will come with you.” “Go back,” Elijah replied. “What have I done to you?” So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant (1Kgs19:19-21).

In Luke 9:57-62, Jesus was approached by men who wanted to follow Him. His answers were challenging. 1) If you follow Me, there are no guarantees that you will have a predictable life. 2) You want to wait until your father has died sometime in the future and you bury him. Ie: you don't want to follow Me just yet but rather take your time. The time is now! 3) If you commit to following Me, but then look back with regret at leaving your occupation, you are not worthy to be my disciple.

The fact that Elisha sacrificed his oxen and burned his plows indicates that he *literally* “burned his bridges” and would not turn back from his new calling. He was like the 12 disciples who left everything to become Jesus’ disciples (learners) and later apostles (messengers) – see Matthew 4:18-22.

A ‘disciple’ is ‘a learner, or a follower’. When Jesus challenged people to follow Him, what He meant was: ‘Believe in Me, remain in Me, learn My ways and obey them’. He doesn’t call everyone to quit their occupation to be in full-time ministry. However, He does call each believer to learn about who He is and choose to walk with Him in the context of our life. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, I should be growing into maturity. Then I will bear much fruit in my life, 1) by being conformed into His likeness (Rom 8:29), and 2) by bearing fruit in others’ lives as they choose to become followers of Christ through my example (John 15:1-8). What have you done with Jesus’ challenge to follow Him as a disciple? How are you bearing fruit both personally and through your influence?

His empowering: Elisha was present to see Elijah taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire. He was unwilling to be separated from Elijah for even a moment, knowing that his spiritual father would be snatched away at any time. In fact, Elisha had stayed close to Elijah’s side for 7-10 of his final years of ministry, observing and experiencing Elijah’s deep intimacy with God. When Elijah was about to be taken, he asked Elisha what one request could grant him as a reward.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?” “Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,” Elisha replied. “You have asked a difficult thing,” Elijah said, “yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours—otherwise, it will not . . . And Elisha saw it and cried out, “My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen!” (2Kgs. 2:9,10,12).

The double portion was, in Israel, the special right of the firstborn son (Deut. 21:17). Thus, Elisha was asking his spiritual “father” for a special spiritual inheritance – a double experience of the living God, as Elijah’s “firstborn son.”

After Elijah was taken up, God granted the double portion to Elisha. He immediately began performing miracles that proved he was the Spirit-empowered successor to Elijah. He parted the Jordan River (as Elijah had done) so that he could cross back over. He then purified the bad water for the inhabitants of Jericho.

The company of the prophets from Jericho, who were watching, said, “The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha” (2:15).

His retreat: Elisha took time to go to Mt. Carmel (2:25), the very place that his beloved Elijah had experienced his greatest victory of faith. No doubt, Elisha would be confronting similar challenges as he ministered in Israel which was so antagonistic to Yahweh. He would return to Mt. Carmel throughout his ministry (4:25).

Jesus spent mornings in a quiet place alone with His Father. When the disciples were weary, He invited them to go away for a retreat. Elijah ran to Mt. Horeb. Elisha returned to Mt. Carmel. King David let God “lead him by quiet waters” (Ps.23). Where do you go to renew your spiritual strength? We must find times and places where we can turn off the noise of this world and tune in to the Spirit of our living God. Otherwise we will grow weary and lose heart. Where is your Mt. Carmel?

2. His ministry to many individuals: 2 Kgs. 4:1 – 6:7

Elisha’s ministry to various individuals shows *God’s care for all kinds of people in all kinds of situations*. Whether someone lost a child or lost a borrowed tool, God saw and cared *through Elisha*. Each of the 6 miracles in this section bears witness to Elisha’s faith in God. Further, we see individuals exercising *their own faith in God and Elisha His prophet*. The prophet’s widow had to trust Elisha to supply her need; the Shunammite woman had to trust

Elisha for a miraculous resurrection of her son; the school of the prophets had to turn to Elisha in faith when they lacked food; Naaman had to come to the point where he trusted Elisha's word and go wash in the Jordan River 7 times; the prophet who lost the borrowed axe head had to turn to Elisha for help, believing that he *could* help.

Another thing to notice about Elisha's miracles is the **many parallels with the miracles of Jesus:**

- Elisha raised the dead son of the Shunammite (2Kgs. 4:33).
- *Jesus raised the dead daughter of a certain ruler (Matt 9:24).*
- Elisha multiplied oil in many vessels (2Kgs. 4:1-7).
- *Jesus turned water into wine in their pots (John 2:1-10).*
- Elisha multiplied bread for the prophets (2Kgs. 4:42-43).
- *Jesus multiplied bread for the multitudes (Matt.14:15-20).*
- Elisha cured Naaman of leprosy (2Kgs. 5:1-14).
- *Jesus cured 10 lepers in Samaria (Luke 17:11-19).*
- Elisha made an iron axe head float on water (2Kgs. 6:5-7).
- *Jesus walked on water (Matt.14:25-29).*
- When Elisha's body was in the tomb, his own bones caused a dead man to be raised back to life (2Kgs.13:20,21).
- *By Jesus' own death and resurrection, He raises us back to life.*

Clearly, Elisha was one of the great "types" of Christ in the Old Testament. The Jewish people in Jesus' day, familiar as they were with the Old Testament stories, would have interpreted Jesus' words and actions through this lens of 'a second Elisha.'

Three Women of Faith in the Elisha miracles

Of the 6 personal miracles in this section, 3 involve women of great faith. It is interesting to see how these 3 very different women exercised faith in God *from* their unique positions and challenging circumstances in life.

- The Prophet's Widow: 2 Kings 4:1-7

The widow of a godly prophet was left with debts she couldn't repay and 2 sons who were too young to work. The creditor was coming to take her sons to be his slaves. This widow had the courage to approach Elisha boldly, believing he could help her. When Elisha asked her what she had in her possession, she replied that she had only a little oil left. He told her to borrow as many empty jars as possible. She was willing to step out in faith and follow his instructions.

Then, Elisha miraculously multiplied her little oil in the many borrowed empty jars. She sold the oil, paid her debts and had enough money to support herself and sons in the days ahead.

When JESUS taught His disciples to *'Pray and not give up'* (Luke 18:1-8), He used a story of a widow who boldly and persistently claimed her rights before a judge. Maybe Jesus had this widow in mind when He told that story of bold, faith-filled prayer.

- The Shunammite Woman: 2 Kings 4:8-37; 8:1-6

Elisha's second personal miracle was performed for a wealthy (literally, "great") woman in the town of Shunem. Her compassion and wealth led her to care for people, even for Elisha since he often traveled through Shunem. She suggested to her husband (who trusted her greatly) to build a room for him to stay in.

This woman had learned contentment though she lacked a child. Elisha saw her loss yet peace, and prayed that God would give her a child, which He did. When her son was young, he suddenly died. She hurried to Elisha at Mt. Carmel urging him to come help. God used Elisha to raise her son from the dead – the 2nd resurrection!

This same woman appears again later in the story. Elisha told her to leave her land during the 7-year famine. When she later returned, she went to the king to beg for her land back. Elisha's servant 'just happened' to be in the king's court that very day, telling the king about how Elisha had raised a young boy from the dead! The king immediately granted her request, and the 7 past years of profit as well! This woman was blessed in many ways through her faith and obedience to God's word and Elisha.

- The young servant-girl: 2Kings 5

Naaman was the captain of the Syrian army. During one of their many raids into Israel, the Syrians captured a young Jewish girl, who was taken to be a servant to Naaman's wife. When she heard of Naaman's crisis of leprosy, she courageously spoke to her mistress of God's power through the prophet Elisha in Israel. Because of her faith and boldness (and her reputation as a faithful servant in their home), Naaman heeded her word and went to seek healing from Elisha. He was not only cured of his leprosy, but he was also converted to belief in Yahweh! This young woman had a profound impact on one of the most powerful people in Syria . . . all because of her faithfulness witness to the

power of her God. Naaman declared:

“Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel” (5:15).

From these 3 women, we learn that it does not matter so much what our position/circumstance in life looks like. We can all glorify God and serve Him from our unique position and set of circumstances. Ask God: What do you have in mind for me in my current position in life? How can I glorify You and point others to you from my current set of circumstances?

3. Elisha’s ministry toward Syria: 2Kgs. 6:8 – 13:21

While Elisha had a unique focus on *individuals*, he also ministered on a *national level*, primarily to the *kingdom of Syria*, (also known as the Arameans), *the northern enemy of Israel*. This reveals God’s concern for *all nations*, not just Israel.

- The Syrian army tries to capture Elisha: 6:8-23

The Syrians were often at war with Israel. The Syrian king (“the king of Aram”) was frustrated because the Israelites *always knew his next move*. He thought he had an information-leaker.

This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, “Tell me! Which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?” “None of us, my lord the king,” said one of his officers, “but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom” (6:11,12).

His solution was to send soldiers to capture Elisha. When they tried to do so, they were *captured by Elisha!* Elisha asked God to strike the Syrian soldiers with blindness, and then he led them on a 12-mile walk right into the court of the king of Israel! But instead of killing the enemy, Elisha counseled the king of Israel to treat the Syrian force with kindness and send them back to their Syrian lord.

“So, he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So, the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel’s territory” (6:23).

Jesus taught that we should ‘*love our enemies, and pray for those who mistreat us*’ (Matt. 5:44). Again, we see Elisha foreshadowing the ministry and message of Jesus.

- Israel miraculously delivered from the Syrians: 6:24 - 7:20

Shortly after the above acts of mercy toward the Syrians, the king of Syria attacked Israel again! They laid siege to Samaria during a vulnerable time for Israel (during a 7-year famine.) The Syrians nearly starved the Israelites to death (6:24-7:2).

Elisha bore the rage of Israel's king for causing the 7-year famine. Just as Jezebel had threatened to kill Elijah for the 3 ½ year famine, now the king went with his men to cut off Elisha's head!

Unlike Elijah who was alone and depleted, Elisha was sitting in his house, in community with the elders of the city. God revealed to him that they were coming to murder him. He handled it with complete calmness and gave a prophecy that the very next day the city would miraculously have food again. And so it happened:

Four lepers were starving and decided to go over to the Syrian camp and surrender themselves hoping they would be fed. But ...

“... when they came to the outskirts of the camp of the Arameans, behold, there was no one there. For the Lord had caused the army of the Arameans to hear a sound of chariots and a sound of horses, even the sound of a great army, so that they said to one another, “Behold, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us.” Therefore, they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents and their horses and their donkeys, even the camp just as it was, and fled for their life. When these lepers came to the outskirts of the camp, they entered one tent and ate and drank... (7:5-8)

God routed the Syrian army in one night! The 4 lepers returned to the city with the unbelievable news. As Elisha had prophesied, by the next day there was more than enough food in Samaria.

- Elisha weeps over Hazael, the future king of Syria: 8:7-15

One of Elisha's most painful moments was when he met Hazael, a servant of Ben-hadad the king of Syria. God revealed to Elisha that Hazael would become the next king of Syria and, sadly, that Hazael would inflict tremendous harm upon Israel in the future.

(Elisha) the man of God wept. Hazael said, “Why does my lord weep?” Then he answered, “Because I know the evil that you will do to the sons of Israel: their strongholds you will set on fire, and their young men you will kill with the sword, and their little

ones you will dash in pieces, and their women with child you will rip up” (8:11,12).

Sure enough, Hazael returned to Syria, assassinated Ben-hadad and launched his reign of terror, inflicting great harm and taking away much territory from Israel.

- Elisha pronounces a triple victory over Syria: 13:14-21

As Elisha was nearing death, he had one last message concerning the Syrians. King Joash of Israel came to visit the ailing prophet.

When Elisha became sick with the illness of which he was to die, Joash the king of Israel came down to him and wept over him and said, “My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen” (13:14).

This tender encounter shows that while many of the evil kings of Israel despised God’s servant(s), those who had any sensitivity to God loved men like Elisha and saw the value of their ministry to the nation. In this final encounter between prophet and king, Elisha gave Joash assurances of future victories over the Syrians. He did this in two symbolic acts involving a bow and arrows. First:

Elisha said to him, “Take a bow and arrows.” So he took a bow and arrows. Then he said to the king of Israel, “Put your hand on the bow.” And he put his hand on it, then Elisha laid his hands on the king’s hands. He said, “Open the window toward the east,” and he opened it. Then Elisha said, “Shoot!” and he shot. And he said, “The LORD’S arrow of victory, even the arrow of victory over Aram; for you will defeat the Arameans at Aphek until you have destroyed them” (13:15-17).

What a beautiful picture of the *prophet’s hands on the king’s hands* holding the bow together. This was the way it was *supposed to work* in Israel – the prophetic office supporting, guiding and correcting the royal office. Then came the second symbolic act:

Then he said, “Take the arrows,” and he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, “Strike the ground,” and he struck it three times and stopped. So the man of God was angry with him and said, “You should have struck five or six times, then you would have struck Aram until you would have destroyed it. But now you shall strike Aram only three times” (13:18-19).

Given the context, it seems that Joash should have understood the symbolism behind the striking of arrows on the ground (that this

symbolized repeated victories over the Syrians). Elisha's stern rebuke implies that Joash did not exercise strong enough faith in laying hold of God's promises of victory, thus, he limited what God would do for Israel.

Is there some area in your life where you may be "limiting" what God desires to do? Has God been nudging you to "step out in faith" and invite Him to unleash many more victories over the enemies that assail you? Ask God to speak clearly to you about these issues. Ask Him to lead you in HIS path of victories.

- God's faithful witness to the Syrians through the Jewish slave-maid's witness, and Captain Naaman (2Kings 5)

We end these notes by reflecting back on the story of Elisha healing Naaman, the captain of the Syrian army. While this miracle story occurs in the context of Elisha's *ministry to individuals* (above) it also has some bearing on his *ministry to the nation of Syria*. Naaman was a national hero in Syria.

Even though Naaman had led many of the raids and had threatened Israel as captain of the Syrian army, *God was still relentless in pursuing his heart*. He was a 'great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded due to many victories as a valiant soldier' (5:1). Yet, when he contracted leprosy, there was no human cure. *It often takes being in situations beyond our control to be willing to hear about God, and then let go of our own solutions.*

His story reveals his *pride and expectations* as to the "proper" way that Elisha should heal him. He had to learn that God's ways are not our ways. He resisted and complained about Elisha's instructions to wash in the dirty Jordan River. Finally, his servants respectfully urged him to 'follow orders.' Naaman had to humble his pride before his own servants, and obey Elisha's word. *God was after much more than just a miracle of healing for Naaman. God was after his heart! And even more, through Naaman God was after the hearts of the people in Syria.*

So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean. When he returned to the man of God with all his company, and came and stood before him, he said, "Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; so please take a present from

your servant now... But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will take nothing..." Naaman said, "If you will not, please let me, your servant be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will no longer offer burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god, but the LORD" (5:14-17).*

*See Exodus 20:24 to understand Naaman's sincere desire to take earth from Israel back to Syria.

This story sounds a familiar theme that God has been declaring from the beginning – that forgiveness and salvation are not able to be earned. Further these divine gifts are often not sought or valued until a crisis occurs. The human heart is self-willed and stubborn!

Forgiveness and cleansing from our sin of rebellion against God is a FREE GIFT for US, and yet a COSTLY GIFT for our Savior Jesus Christ, God's Son. He took upon Himself all the sin of humanity, and experienced judgment and separation from His Father, so that we could be cleansed from sin and have an eternal relationship with the God through Christ. Amazing GRACE.

Discussion Questions

1. In Elisha, we meet a *faithful disciple* who, in turn, helped other people become *faithful disciples*. Who is influencing you to become a faithful disciple? Who is God using you to influence to become a faithful follower of Jesus?
2. Elisha left everything to follow Elijah. Are there things that God is calling you to "leave" so that you can more fully follow after Jesus?
3. What most impacted you from the stories of the 3 women of faith who were included in the Elisha narrative (the prophet's widow, the wealthy woman of Shunem, the young servant-girl)?
4. Is there some way that God is currently inviting you to be part of His greater story in your life and world?
5. There is a great deal of emphasis on God's care for the Syrians, the arch enemies of Israel. How does this impact you? Are there people in your world that God is challenging you to move toward with His impartial love and grace?

GOD WITH US

Part 6: *Israel's Unfaithfulness and God's Ridiculous Love* Kings & Prophets thru 722 B.C.

Message 7 – The Godly Power Couple (2Chron. 22:10-24:27; 2Kings 11,12)

Introduction

It has been said, “*God has no grandchildren, only children.*” We must have a *personal* faith in God that is truly our own. Thus, Paul wrote to young Timothy: “*I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, that first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and in your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well*” (2Timothy 1:4).

The issue of spiritual heritage is at the center of the story of the husband-wife team Jehoida and Jehosheba, and their nephew Joash. At a time when devotion to Yahweh was waning in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, Jehoida and Jehosheba arose to display courageous faith. The primary beneficiary of their faith was the child Joash who, with their help, became king over Judah at the early age of 7. While king Joash was faithful to the Lord all the days that his godly uncle and aunt were there to encourage and inspire him, he turned away from God after they died. As a result, his kingdom was destroyed and his life ended in disgrace.

The courage of Jehosheba: 2Chr.22:10-12

Courageous faith shines in difficult times. In the southern kingdom of Judah, the difficult times came because of Athaliah, the daughter of the wicked Ahab and Jezebel. (*See more detailed notes on Athaliah at end of this lesson.*) She had been given in marriage to Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat. Like her mother Jezebel in the north, Athaliah used her power and position to turn the southern kingdom of Judah into a Baal-worshipping nation. After the deaths of her husband (Jehoram) and her son (Ahaziah), Athaliah took control of the throne of Judah and sought to eradicate any remaining godly offspring of Jehoshaphat. It was only because of the courage of her step-daughter, Jehosheba, that the Davidic line of kings was kept alive. Jehosheba rescued one child from Athaliah's wrath. (*Notes on Jehosheba at end.*)

“Now when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she rose and destroyed all the royal offspring of the

house of Judah. But Jehosheba the king's daughter took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons who were being put to death, and placed him and his nurse in the bedroom. So Jehosheba, the daughter of King Jehoram, the wife of Jehoiada the priest (for she was the sister of Ahaziah), hid him from Athaliah so that she would not put him to death. He was hidden with them in the house of God six years while Athaliah reigned over the land" (22:10-12).

Jehosheba is called "*the daughter of King Jehoram.*" She was likely his daughter by a wife other than Athaliah (assuming that Jehoram had several wives). Still, all during her formative years, Jehosheba would have been exposed to the wickedness of her father Jehoram and his wife Athaliah. Nevertheless, she chose not to walk in their evil ways; rather, to follow in the footsteps of her godly grandfather, Jehoshaphat. She courageously stole away the infant Joash when all the other heirs to the throne were being killed by Athaliah. With the help of her husband, Jehoiada the priest, she hid the child in their room in the temple for six full years. (Note: 2Kings 11:3 highlights Jehosheba's role with these words: "*So he was hid with her in the house of the Lord six years.*") While Jehoiada and Jehosheba acted as a couple, clearly Jehosheba's courageous faith was key in this effort to save the child Joash.

Jehosheba chose to follow a godly tradition; but she had to look back two generations, to the faith of her grandfather Jehoshaphat, to learn of that tradition. This explains why she married a godly man, Jehoiada the priest, and why she acted with such courageous faith in a crisis. When you look at your family tree, do you see godly people who have gone before you, living wholeheartedly for the Lord? Who are you choosing to emulate? Perhaps you are the first one in your family tree (that you are aware of) that is choosing to follow the Lord faithfully. Do you sense the importance of establishing a God-honoring tradition so that those who come after you will look back and see your footsteps of faith?

Jehoiada crowns Joash king of Judah: 2Chr.23:1-15

Jehosheba's husband was the godly priest Jehoiada. Like his wife, he also exercised faith, courage *and skill* as he arranged for the inauguration of 7-year old Joash as the true king of Judah.

Then Jehoiada the priest gave to the captains of hundreds the spears and the large and small shields which had been King

David's, which were in the house of God. He stationed all the people, each man with his weapon in his hand, from the right side of the house to the left side of the house, by the altar and by the house, around the king. Then they brought out the king's son and put the crown on him, and gave him the testimony and made him king. And Jehoiada and his sons anointed him and said, "Long live the king!" (23:9-11).

When Athaliah heard the celebratory noise coming from the temple, she ran in crying, "Treason!" She was immediately taken out and executed for her own treachery and wickedness – such as her murder of all the royal offspring, except for Joash.

Jehoiada's covenant with the people: 2Chr.23:16-21

Jehoiada the priest acted like a king (necessarily since "king" Joash was only 7 years old). One of Jehoiada's first acts was to invite the people to renew their covenant faithfulness with Yahweh.

Then Jehoiada made a covenant between himself and all the people and the king, that they would be the LORD's people" (23:16).

This covenant was more than just words; it involved action. The people torn down the temple of Baal and reinstated the worship of Yahweh. Priests, singers and servants of the Lord were all restored to their role in the temple. Not only was Joash put on his throne; but Yahweh was put on *His* throne as Lord of all in Judah.

"They placed the king upon the royal throne. So all of the people of the land rejoiced and the city was quiet" (23:20,21).

It is easy to say with our lips that we love the Lord. Yet, it is another thing to show our love through our actions. Jesus said: "If anyone lives Me, he will keep My word" (John 14:23). Faith and obedience go together. Faith is the disposition of the heart toward God. Obedience is the outward expression of the heart of faith. What step(s) of obedience is God inviting you to take right now. Is there something in your life that does not honor God that needs to be "torn down," or put aside? Is there something that does honor God that needs to be "rebuilt," or put back in its proper place? Take some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you about the steps of obedience that He wants you to take.

Summary of Joash' reign: 24:1-3

Often, we find in the summaries of the kings' reigns clues to the key theme of their lives. So it is with the summary of Joash:

“Joash was seven years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem; and his mother’s name was Zibiah from Beersheba. Joash did what was right in the sight of the LORD all the days of Jehoiada the priest” (24:1,2).

He followed the Lord *“all the days of Jehoiada the priest.”* While there was godly supervision and influence over his life, Joash appeared to be faithful to God. Yet, as we will see, the moment the godly people were gone, he turned back to worshipping Baal.

Joash repairs the temple: 2Chr.24:4-14

One of king Joash’s first moves was to initiate repairs on the temple of the Lord (which had suffered much damage during Athaliah’s reign and her campaign to make Baal the god of Judah).

Now it came about after this that Joash decided to restore the house of the LORD. He gathered the priests and Levites and said to them, “Go out to the cities of Judah and collect money from all Israel to repair the house of your God annually, and you shall do the matter quickly.” But the Levites did not act quickly (24:4-5).

Joash seemed zealous for this repair effort, for when the priests were slow to carry out their rebuilding duties he reproved them (including Jehoiada his uncle) for being negligent. They had failed to go out and raise the money for the work in a timely manner.

So the king summoned Jehoiada the chief priest and said to him, “Why have you not required the Levites to bring in from Judah and from Jerusalem the levy fixed by Moses the servant of the LORD on the congregation of Israel for the tent of the testimony?” (24:6).

To speed up the fund-raising efforts, king Joash had a box placed at the entrance to the temple so that people coming in could drop their offerings into it. In this way, the funds were quickly raised to complete the temple repair project.

“So the workmen labored, and the repair work progressed in their hands, and they restored the house of God according to its specifications and strengthened it. When they had finished, they brought the rest of the money before the king and Jehoiada; and it was made into utensils for the house of the LORD, utensils for the service and the burnt offering, and pans and utensils of gold and silver. And they offered burnt offerings in the house of the LORD continually all the days of Jehoiada” (24:13-14).

The excess funds were brought to “*the king and Jehoiada.*” It seems that godly Jehoiada was very much involved in this entire effort to reinstitute a God-honoring worship system.

How is it that Joash could be so zealous to repair God’s house, but then so quickly depart from the Lord after Jehoiada’s death? Matthew Henry wrote: “It is easier to build temples than to be temples to God.” In other words, it is easier to engage in activity in the name of God, rather than to cultivate an inner heart where God is enthroned. King David had a very active outer life – leading a nation, fighting battles, solving problems, etc. Yet, the reason he was “a man after God’s own heart” was because of his commitment to cultivate his HEART FOR GOD. David wrote: “One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple” (Psalm 27:4). How about you? Are you cultivating a HEART where God is enthroned as King? Or, are you so busy outwardly that you are neglecting the condition of your heart for God?

Jehoiada’s death and burial: 2Chr.24:15,16

Much attention is given to the life of Jehoiada the priest. Truly, he played a major role in calling the people to serve the Lord during his tenure as priest. Even in his death, he was highly honored:

“Now when Jehoiada reached a ripe old age he died; he was one hundred and thirty years old at his death. They buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done well in Israel and to God and His house” (24:15,16).

A priest buried among the kings! What an epithet over his life: *“He had done well in Israel and to God and His house.”*

Your epithet will be inscribed after you die; but it is being “written” right now, as you live. And . . . you have the chance to EDIT your epithet while you live. When Alfred Nobel’s brother died, a paper mistakenly printed Alfred’s obituary. They hailed him as the inventor of dynamite (along with his other inventions of destruction). Alfred decided he did not want to be remembered as the inventor of destruction. He spent the rest of his life establishing the Nobel Peace Prize. Today, few people associate the name “Nobel” with destruction. Most associate the name “Alfred Nobel” with peace. That’s because Nobel chose to edit his epithet while he lived. What kind of epithet are you currently writing for yourself? Are there life changes you need to make so that you can edit your epithet before it is finally inscribed?

Joash turns away from the Lord: 2Chr.24:17-19

God has no grandchildren; only children. Now we see this principle played out in the life of Joash. It appears that he was coasting on the faith of his uncle and aunt, not cultivating a faith of his own.

“But after the death of Jehoiada the officials of Judah came and bowed down to the king, and the king listened to them. They abandoned the house of the LORD, the God of their fathers, and served the Asherim and the idols; so wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their guilt. Yet He sent prophets to them to bring them back to the LORD; though they testified against them, they would not listen” (24:17-19).

Joash was easily swayed by the voices of other people, in this case, those of the “officials of Judah.” These officials had been waiting for Jehoiada to die so that they could influence the king to take things in a different direction.

Opinions are ideas that we hold loosely. Beliefs are ideas that we hold firmly. Convictions are ideas that take hold of us. We may debate our opinions. We should defend our beliefs; but we will die for our convictions. If you made a list of opinions, beliefs and convictions, what would you place under each heading? For a Christ-follower, there are two core convictions that should serve as the foundation for all other convictions: 1) God has spoken to us through the written Word, the Bible. Thus, the Bible is our ultimate authority in all matters of faith and practice (and God’s Word will give shape to all of our other convictions.) 2) God has spoken to us through the Living Word, Jesus, the 2nd Person of the Triune God. Thus, in Jesus we receive the ultimate revelation of the Person and Plan of God. Read Hebrews 1:1-2 and you will see how the author states these two foundational convictions. How does one develop firm convictions? Opinions become beliefs as we study truth. Beliefs become convictions as we personally experience the truth at work in our lives.

Joash murders Zechariah, son of Jehoiada: 24:20-22

There are few acts of treachery in the Bible that can compare to what king Joash did to Zechariah, the godly son of Jehoiada the priest. When Zechariah saw Joash turning away from the Lord, he went in the power of the Spirit of God to reprove him and call him back to God’s ways:

Then the Spirit of God came on Zechariah the son of Jehoiada

the priest; and he stood above the people and said to them, “Thus God has said, ‘Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD and do not prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, He has also forsaken you.’” So they conspired against him and at the command of the king they stoned him to death in the court of the house of the LORD. Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness which his father Jehoiada had shown him, but he murdered his son. And as he died he said, “May the LORD see and avenge!” (24:20-22).

Joash, who became king because of Jehoiada’s courage, murdered Jehoiada’s son Zechariah, who courageously called him to account for his spiritual wandering! In Joash and Zechariah we see the juxtaposition of two kinds of “sons”: **Joash** never embraced or embodied the faith of his “spiritual father” Jehoiada. **Zechariah** made it clear through his life and death that he had his own strong faith, much like his father’s. (Note: “Zechariah” means, literally, “God remembers.” Surely God remembers what Joash did to Zechariah. The Lord will see and avenge such treachery!)

Syrian invasion and the death of Joash: 2Chr.24:23-24

God regularly brought judgment upon His people when they strayed from the terms of the Mosaic covenant. These judgments had been written into the terms of the covenant by Moses when the nation entered into the covenant with Yahweh at Mt. Sinai (much like a modern contract might include, “Penalties for breach of contract.”) If the people were unfaithful to the covenant, many disciplines would fall upon them, including:

“The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young . . . They will besiege all the cities throughout the land the LORD your God is giving you” (Deuteronomy 28:49-52).

This explains why, when the kings of Judah and Israel turned away from the Lord, we almost always find a story of foreign invasion close by. So it was with Joash. His rebellion against the Lord was swiftly met with a foreign invasion called forth by God.

“Indeed the army of the Arameans came with a small number of men; yet the LORD delivered a very great army into their hands, because they had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers. Thus they executed judgment on Joash” (24:24).

The dishonorable burial of Joash: 2Chr.24:25-27

The Aramean invasion signaled the end of Joash' reign. The leaders who had encouraged him to turn away from the Lord were killed (24:23). Joash himself was left in mortal condition after the Aramean's departed. Finally, his own servants murdered him:

“When they had departed from him (for they left him very sick), his own servants conspired against him because of the blood of the son of Jehoiada the priest, and murdered him on his bed. So he died, and they buried him in the city of David, but they did not bury him in the tombs of the kings” (24:25).

Joash reigned as king for 40 long years in Judah; but in death he was not recognized as a true “king.” How sad. Yet, how fitting. Jehoiada the priest, who lived a godly life, was buried like a king. Joash the king, who turned away from God, was buried like a non-king.

Additional Notes on Athaliah and Jehosheba:

Wicked ATHALIAH'S Role

Athaliah's married Jehoram, Judah's 1st born prince, so that his father (Jehoshaphat) and her parents in Israel (Ahab and Jezebel) could secure an alliance. As wife of Judah's king, she supported Jehoram as he killed all 6 of his royal brothers to secure their reign in Judah (2Chr.21:4,5,13). God disciplined them for this evil, and Judah was attacked. All their sons and wives were captured except for their youngest son Ahaziah (2Chr 21:13,16,17). Athaliah and Jehoram reigned for 8 years until he died from a very painful disease (2Chr 21:6,13). Their son Ahaziah reigned for only 1 year, but as Queen Mother, she influenced him to continue doing evil (2Chr 22:3). After Ahaziah died, Athaliah seized the throne and ruled with an iron fist for 6 years. She is the only female monarch in the history of Judah or Israel who reigned by herself.

Her Feminine Strength

Athaliah had many strengths; but like her mother Jezebel, she used these strengths only for evil gains. She was ambitious, tenacious, and fanatical; and not afraid of killing innocent royal family members to protect her territory as Queen. She influenced her husband to promote Baal worship in Judah, and was responsible for the Baal Temple being built, and using parts of Solomon's

Temple to build it (2Chron 24:7). She killed all her royal grandchildren from her son Ahaziah, so that she could secure her uncontested authority as Queen. (Only Joash the 1 year old infant was hidden from her.) Her ability to retain her position as Queen without an over-throw for 6 yrs shows her power! She had royal origins and family connections in the North, plus political knowledge & personal determination. Athaliah had the guts during the well-planned coup, to run into the temple by herself and shout “Treason! Treason!” as if she had the power to stop it.

God on Display

God was patient with this woman. Athaliah had many years she could have believed in Yahweh. Yet, His sovereign rule overruled her wicked plans. The royal line of David was preserved, even though she tried to destroy it completely.

Her life as a Warning

The life of Athaliah warns us as to what evil can look like in human form. She got what she wanted for a while, even murdering her very own grand-children, but God caused her schemes to fail, when she was finally slain as well. The Bible teaches that we should not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. We WILL reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7).

Courageous JEHOSHEBA’S Role

Jehosheba was the daughter of King Jehoram, but from a different wife. Athaliah was her stepmother. She was the ½ sister of her younger brother Ahaziah, and the AUNT of his infant son Joash. Her key role was to preserve the royal line of King David by rescuing baby Joash as wicked Athaliah was murdering all her grand-children who were potential heirs to the throne of Judah. Jehosheba was married to Jehoiada the high priest and uncle to Joash. He was his spiritual father and mentor as Joash grew up.

Her Feminine Strength

Jehosheba was a woman of courage in the face of Athaliah’s tyranny. She wisely chose to marry a godly priest and follow the Lord, even though her father and stepmother were trying to extinguish all faith in Yahweh. Jehosheba surely experienced her own fears, yet chose faith over fear. She escaped the attacks and raid that captured all of her brothers except for Ahaziah. She and her husband hid Joash in the Temple for 6 long years!

God on Display

God uses people to fulfill His promises. Jehosheba chose to believe God's promise that ISRAEL'S MESSIAH would someday be a royal heir of King David. She played a key role by rescuing the only remaining heir to that Messianic promise! God's plan will always be fulfilled, even when human tyrants seem to be winning.

Her life as an Example to Follow

God used Jehosheba as a faithful believer who could be trusted with the task of preserving His eternal promise to king David: "*Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before Me; your throne will be established forever*" (2 Samuel 7:16). She also serves as a great example of faith and courage. She inspires women to fill their minds and hearts with God's Word, so that when we are afraid we can be reminded to put our trust in God and take a risk (Psalm 56:3,4).

Discussion Questions

1. Throughout this section of the Bible, there is the theme of the *transfer of faith from one generation to the next*. Think about this theme in light of your own spiritual heritage, journey and legacy. What comes to your mind when you ponder your own place in the transfer of faith?
2. What do you take away from the lives of courageous Jehosheba and Jehoiada? How do their actions inspire you? Is there some act of courageous faith that God is calling you to do?
3. Think about this Matthew Henry quote: "*It is easier to build temples than to be temples to God.*" How does that quote speak to you?
4. Think about your epithet. How do you want to be remembered? If you could write your own obituary today, how would it read?

GOD WITH US
Part 6: Israel's Unfaithfulness and God's Ridiculous Love
Kings & Prophets thru 722 B.C.

Message 8 – Minor Prophets with Major Messages
Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah

Introduction

The 12 minor prophets were raised up as mouthpieces of God to continually call the 10 northern tribes-Israel, and the 2 southern tribes-Judah, back to a sincere faith in Him. Up until these prophets, the former prophets like Elijah and Elisha, as well as the more 'minor' ones like Hanani and his son Jehu, were all prophets who ministered, but did not write books on a scroll in the O.T. The messages of the 12 minor prophets were "minor" only in the length of their messages. The messages the prophets spoke were from God's heart. God was calling the 12 tribes that He had chosen back to a faithful love relationship with Himself. They were to represent Him to the nations around them, to give all of humanity an opportunity to know Him and walk in His ways. But because they continued to stray and follow the customs and beliefs of the nations that surrounded them, worshiping the local gods of Baal and Asherah, God's 'unusual work' was to discipline them in love because He is *just and holy*. He also used the prophets to call the surrounding nations directly to repent of their evil beliefs and practices, and believe in Him as the one true God – Yahweh.

These writing prophets lived in the period after 2 Kings 12 and 2 Chronicles²⁵. The historical records in Kings and Chronicles give us the background to understand why the prophets' messages were so important. Most of the prophets begin their messages by naming the kings who reigned during their ministry.

The prophets had 2 main ministries: **1) Forth-telling**: To instruct and exhort the people based on words of God that were previously revealed. They dealt with the current or past sins, God's warnings, and the judgment that would come if the people did not repent and change their ways. As forth-tellers, they were functioning much like a modern pastor-teacher. **2) Foretelling**: To reveal God's words concerning future events. Their predictions centered around 4 points in history: Their current historical setting; the threatening invasions and captivities of the Assyrians and the Babylonians; the

future 1st coming of the Messiah; and the final days and 2nd coming of the Messiah and His Millennial reign on earth. Interestingly, Peter, in the N.T. explains that even the prophets themselves wondered at times how and when the events they foretold would actually happen (see 1Peter 1:10-12).

JOEL

Outline

Joel's messages are arranged as follows. In general, the first 3 parts of his book deal with the current situation in Judah, while the last 3 point forward to distant future when God will judge all the nations of the world.

1. The Historical Situation
 - The Locust Plague 1:1-2:11
 - Call to Repentance 2:12-17
 - The Lord's Response 2:18-27
2. The Future Day of God's Judgment
 - A Future Day 2:28-32
 - A Day of Judgment 3:1-17
 - Judah Restored and Exalted 3:18-21

Overview

Joel arose with a word from God during a devastating locust plague that destroyed the entire Southern Kingdom of Judah. He describes the locust plague like a vast army invading the country.

“A nation has invaded my land, a mighty army without number. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, it is like a desert waste—nothing escapes them. They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry. With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountaintops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle. At the sight of them, nations are in anguish; every face turns pale. They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They all march in line, not swerving from their course”
(Selections from Joel 1-2).

In that day, with no pesticides to help ward off plagues, the entire economy of a nation could be destroyed for many years by such a vast infestation. Things were so bad in Joel's day that there was not even sufficient grain and oil to carry on the normal worship duties at God's temple.

But what God says through Joel is that HE sent the locust army to invade the land. This wasn't some freak of nature. It was the hand of God moving to discipline His people for disobedience to the covenant.

“The LORD utters His voice before His army; surely His camp is very great, for strong is He who carries out His word. The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it” (Joel 2:11)?

This idea that God disciplines His children is a theme echoed throughout the Bible. “My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline, and do not resent His rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, as a father the son he delights in” (Prov. 3:11,12 and Heb. 12:5,6). How does God discipline His children? Locusts! He sends something to eat away something we’re clinging to. A relationship falls apart. A financial deal goes south. A plan we have crashes. Our health sidelines us. It’s always one kind of locust or another; God moving in various ways to strip away things that we cling to, things that are not good for us. But He always disciplines us in love to the end that we might be conformed to the image of His Son.

In the midst of this discipline, God calls the people to repent (turn back to Him). Yet, their repentance must be deeper than just an external display of remorse.

“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Tear your heart, not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and He relents from sending calamity” (Joel 2:12,13).

God is fundamentally gracious and compassionate. So, even in times of discipline, He’s longing for us to turn back to Him. To “tear our garments” is to engage in external displays of remorse. To “tear our hearts” is to repent deeply and sincerely. God can see when we’re going through the motions. That’s what was happening in Joel’s day. People felt the sting of the locust plague, and they started “going to the temple.” But their hearts weren’t truly broken over their sin. They were going through the motions in the hope that a little “religion” would be enough to send the locusts away.

Yet, IF the people would truly repent, God would respond:

“I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten . . . My great army that I sent among you. You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed. Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed.”

Is God trying to get your attention on something? Has He sent some locusts to eat away at something that you are holding onto? Maybe it's time to take a message from Joel. God disciplines us for our good; but we must respond to His discipline with humble hearts of repentance. Tear your heart, not your garment!

****Note:** Joel's prophecy played an important role on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit fell upon the infant church. Peter pointed to Joel 2:28-32 to say that the promised outpouring of God's Spirit had happened (see Acts 2:16-21).

AMOS

Outline

Amos was a shepherd and grower of fig trees. He was from the rural south of Judah, but called to go to the urban north to confront Israel over their sins.

1. Oracles against the surrounding nations 1:1-2:5
2. Oracles against Israel 2:6-7:9
3. Historical Interlude: Amos and Amaziah 7:10-17
4. Visions of the Coming Judgment 8:1-9:10
5. A Vision of Future Hope 9:11-15

Overview

Amos ministered during the 41-year long reign of Jeroboam II, a hugely prosperous time for the people of the Northern Kingdom. It was a time when people were basking in the lap of luxury. Amos' message centers around the social injustices that were happening during this time of prosperity.

“They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Your women oppress the poor and crush the needy while saying to their husbands, “Bring us some drinks!” They oppress the innocent

and take bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts. You lie on beds adorned with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. You say, “When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?”—skimping on the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales ... (Selections from Amos 1-8).

They were living the lifestyle of the rich and famous; but they forgot that God had given them riches so that they could be generous, not greedy. God had blessed them so that they could, in turn, bless the less fortunate in society, instead of just building bigger houses. Through Amos, God gave a warning and then an appeal. First, God’s warning:

“I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished,” declares the LORD. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins” (3:15 and 5:11).

God warns His people: If you continue to revel in your luxuries and abuse the poor, I will strip it all away from you. Your *managers* of wealth that I have granted to you; not *owners*. If you won’t share with the poor and needy, I’ll take it all away from you.

And then God makes this appeal:

“I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:21-24).

God says: I want action, not religious posing. I want justice, not a religious festival. I won’t accept your offerings ... or your songs ... or your ceremonies. But I will accept some social justice and the right treatment of people who are hurting.

Social justice matters to God. It should matter to us too. The line from Amos: “Let justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like a never-ending stream” was at the center of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’ “I Have a Dream” speech that catalyzed the Civil Right Movement in America. Social justice continues to be such an important issue in our society today. The apostle John put it this way: “Whoever has the world’s goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth” (1John 3:17,18). Does your heart reflect God’s heart for those who are oppressed? Do matters of Social Justice burden your heart, as they do the heart of God?

OBADIAH

Outline

Although Obadiah contains only 21 verses, we can still see a clear outline of his message to the Edomites, Israel’s southern neighbor.

1. Edom will be humbled vv.1-9
2. God’s case against Edom vv.10-14
3. Vindication and Restoration of Israel vv.15-21

Overview

Obadiah prophesied against Edom, the southern neighbor of Israel. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, the brother and rival of Jacob (see Genesis 25-27). The contention between Jacob and Esau played out in the ongoing historical rivalry between the Israelites and Edomites. (It was very much like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict of today.) Obadiah specifically condemns Edom for cruelty toward Israel during times when Israel was being oppressed by foreign powers.

“Because of the violence against your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame you will be destroyed forever. On the day you stood aloof while strangers carried off his wealth and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were like one of them. You should not gloat over your brother in the day of his misfortune . . .” (vv.10-12).

Not only did the Edomites “gloat” over Israel’s misfortune; they also piled on and assisted Israel’s enemies in furthering their pain. “*You were like one of them*” (i.e., Israel’s cruel oppressors).

Through Obadiah the prophet, God points at something deeper than their sin of cruelty.

“The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, ‘Who can bring me down to the ground?’ Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,” declares the LORD” (vv.3,4).

The Edomites were a very smart and proud people. Their capitol city of Petra was literally carved out of cliffs in the mountains. They picked a mountain at the top of the world and carved the fronts of buildings into the mountains. They turned caves into homes and castles and temples. They believed they had built the most destruction-proof city ever.



Pride breaks the heart of God. As the Proverb says: *“Pride comes before the fall, and a haughty spirit before destruction” (Prov.16:18)*. In fact, the Edomites were subjugated by the Assyrians and other foreign powers. In the centuries just before Jesus came, the Edomites were subject to the Jews. Herod the Great, the “king of the Jews,” who ruled for the 40 years leading up to and including the birth of Jesus, was an Edomite!

The message of Obadiah should make us constantly wary of any roots of pride, arrogance, or gloating over others. God will always bring us down from our self-constructed fortresses of pride. Is the Holy Spirit speaking to you about any roots of pride in your life? It is good to confess the sin of pride, but to also allow other people to know about your struggle with pride and to be able to speak into your life when they see signs of pride arising from within you. “God is opposed to the proud; but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6 and 1Peter 5:5).

JONAH

Outline

The book of Jonah is more of a historical narrative of the prophet's life than it is a collection of prophetic messages. The narrative is continuous, but can be broken down into 4 sections:

1. God's Command and Jonah's Flight ch.1
2. Jonah's Prayer and Deliverance ch.2
3. God's Renewed Call and Nineveh's Repentance ch.3
4. Jonah's Complaint and God's Response ch.4

Overview

Jonah, like Amos, ministered during the 41-year reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel. (Note the reference to Jonah at 2Kings 14:25). But the major legacy of Jonah had nothing to do with his words to Israel; rather, his refusal to go speak words to the people of Nineveh, the capitol of the Assyrian Empire. God told him to go to Nineveh and tell them to repent of their evil ways, or they would be destroyed.

“But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD” (Jonah 1:3)



He was told to go 550 miles east by land. He went 2,500 west by water. Why did Jonah run the other direction? Because he knew that God was compassionate and merciful toward *all people*, and he didn't think the wicked Assyrians deserved any hope for God's mercy. They deserved judgment, not mercy. So Jonah said, in effect: *I'm not going to be your mouthpiece to these people*. Jonah stopped seeing the world through God's eyes of compassion.

God could have allowed Jonah to die in the great storm at sea, and He could have found another willing prophet to do the work that Jonah refused to do. Instead, God gave Jonah 3 days in the belly of a “great fish” to rethink some things. This shows that God was not only concerned with the ministry and message of His servant; but also with the heart of His servant. God led Jonah to repent even as He prepared him to lead the people of Nineveh to repent.

Then God gave Jonah a second chance. The great fish vomited Jonah up on the beach. God then re-commissioned Jonah to go to the great city of Nineveh with a message of repentance.

“The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth” (3:5).

The whole city turned to God and asked for His mercy! People’s hearts were ready. Nineveh was saved! That should have produced delight in Jonah’s heart. Instead, it made Jonah very angry.

“But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD, “Isn’t this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live” (Jonah 4:1-3).

Jonah could not get his head around God’s mercy toward all kinds of people. Deeply disturbed, he went outside the city and waited to see if, perhaps, God would change His mind and destroy Nineveh. In the attempt to try to get Jonah’s attention, God allowed a plant to grow up to provide shade for Jonah in the sweltering heat. Jonah fell in love with his shade-plant! Then, God allowed a worm to attack the plant, and it died, causing Jonah great grief. When God asked Jonah if he had good reason to be sad over the death of the plant, Jonah replied that he most certainly had reason to be upset. Then, God ends the narrative with this question:

Then the LORD said, “You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?” (Jonah 4:10,11).

A recent study of thousands of non-Christians revealed that the #1 disposition they feel coming from the Christian community toward them is JUDGMENT, not love. CONDEMNATION, not compassion. So, we have a problem with the mission. Our heart is not accurately reflecting God's heart. How about you? Do you have God's heart of compassion for the world? Are there certain groups of people that you are unwilling to show God's love to? "Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion for the world is to look out; yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good; and yours are the hands with which He is to bless us now. -Saint Teresa of Avila

Discussion Questions

These 4 minor prophets have given us major messages to ponder for our own lives. Let's allow each prophet to ask us questions:

1. Joel – Has God sent something to eat away at something that you are holding onto? Do you recognize this “locust invasion” as a discipline from the loving hand of your Father-God? Have you turned back to Him in humble repentance over this issue?
2. Amos – Does social injustice break your heart, as it breaks the heart of God? Are there matters of social injustice that you need to personally get involved in? Are you using your wealth/prosperity to bless and help those less fortunate than you?
3. Obadiah – Has the sin of pride crept into your life in some way? Have you developed any sense of invincibility? Do you need to cultivate a deeper dependence upon God? He is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.
4. Jonah – Do you have a heart for those who are far from God? Are you willing to be God's ambassador of love to anyone He sends you to?

GOD WITH US

Part 6: *Israel's Unfaithfulness and God's Ridiculous Love* Kings & Prophets thru 722 B.C.

Message 9 – God's Ridiculous Love Hosea and Gomer

Introduction

Perhaps you wondered why we entitled this section of our Bible series, *God's Ridiculous Love*. We did so because God's love is *always* extravagant and relentless; *but never is this more clearly demonstrated than in the life and ministry of Hosea the prophet*. A little background: After the exodus from Egypt (1440 BC) God formed a covenant relationship with Israel at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19-40). Yahweh would be their God and they would be His "priests" representing Him to the world. This covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel was often depicted as *a marriage*: Yahweh was the husband, Israel His wife (very much like in the New Testament where Christ is the bridegroom, the Church is His bride). Of course, any covenant requires *faithfulness* on the part of those in the relationship. Unfortunately, Israel proved to be a constantly *unfaithful* wife to Yahweh.

The prophets of the Old Testament were raised up to enforce the terms of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel. They were "covenant cops" calling the nation back to obedience whenever they strayed. Often, God would ask prophets to engage in *symbolic actions* to illustrate His message to Israel. The most dramatic of all the symbolic actions came through Hosea, who ministered during the long reign of Jeroboam II, in the final decades leading up to the Assyrian invasion of Israel and the end of the Northern Kingdom (722 BC). To illustrate God relationship with unfaithful Israel, Hosea was commanded by God to *marry an unfaithful woman*. Thus, Hosea's home life became a living parable of the heart-breaking relationship between God and Israel.

Outline

The first 3 chapters focus on Hosea and Gomer. The last 11 chapters focus entirely on God's case against unfaithful Israel.

1. Unfaithful Gomer – Faithful Hosea: chs. 1-3
2. Unfaithful Israel – Faithful Yahweh: chs. 4-14

Overview

1. Unfaithful Gomer – Faithful Hosea: chs.1-3

Hosea's Marriage to Gomer: Ch.1

When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, “Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD” (1:2).

The phrase used to introduce Gomer has been interpreted in various ways: “a promiscuous woman,” “an unfaithful wife,” “a prostitute,” “a temple prostitute,” “a wife of harlotry.” It is unclear what Gomer’s life was like prior to her marriage to Hosea. At the very least, she was prone to promiscuity; at most, she might have been an active prostitute in Israel. In any case, the main point in the analogy of Hosea’s marriage to Gomer was to provide a living illustration of God’s “marriage” to Israel: “. . . *for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD.*

Gomer bore 3 children. The first, Jezreel was Hosea’s child. (The name Jezreel reminded Israel of their history when king Jehu killed all of Ahab’s living descendants, even going too far - killing Judah’s King Ahaziah and 42 of his relatives. Israel as a nation would be punished for the sins of Jehu.)

The second and third children were the product of Gomer’s adulterous lovers. Lo-Ruhamah means “No mercy” while Lo-Ammi means “Not my people.” God would have “no mercy” on Israel because they had strayed from Him and they were “not His people” any longer.

What a sad commentary the home life of Hosea presented to his people. His wife was unfaithful and his children were illegitimate. Surely the nation watching Hosea would have heard the message loud and clear: *This is how God feels about His marriage to Israel.*

Yet, even as the opening chapter ends, there is a vision of hope for the future based on *God’s faithfulness and loyalty* to His people (the major theme of the entire book of Hosea):

“Someday it will be impossible to count the people of Israel, because there will be as many of them as there are grains of sand along the seashore. They are now called ‘Not My People,’ but in the future they will be called ‘Children of the Living God.’ Israel

and Judah will unite and choose one leader. Then they will take back their land, and this will be a great day for Jezreel” (1:10,11).

The FAITHFUL LOVE of God stands at the center of the book of Hosea. Similarly, in the book of Lamentations, Jeremiah sings of God’s faithfulness, even on the eve of the nation going into captivity: “The LORD’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:23,24). Again, in the New Testament, the apostle Paul writes: “Even if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself” (2Timothy 2:13). This is one attribute of God that we all need to hold tightly to and thank Him for daily. He loves us faithfully, steadily and relentlessly. HE is a covenant-keeping God.

God Laments His Marriage to Israel: 2:1-13

The second chapter of Hosea summarizes the message of the entire book. Here, Hosea and Gomer become the backdrop as God begins to describe His relationship with His “wife,” Israel. The “children” represent the people of Israel while the “other lovers” are the false gods that Israel has worshipped in place of Yahweh.

“But now bring charges against Israel—your mother—for she is no longer My wife, and I am no longer her husband. Tell her to remove the prostitute’s makeup from her face and the clothing that exposes her breasts. Otherwise, I will strip her as naked as she was on the day she was born. I will leave her to die of thirst, as in a dry and barren wilderness. And I will not love her children, for they were conceived in prostitution. Their mother is a shameless prostitute and became pregnant in a shameful way. She said, ‘I’ll run after other lovers and sell myself to them for food and water, for clothing of wool and linen, and for olive oil and drinks’” (2:2-5).

God determined to discipline Israel by showing her the emptiness of her pursuit of other lovers, all in the attempt to woo her back.

“For this reason I will fence her in with thorn bushes. I will block her path with a wall to make her lose her way. When she runs after her lovers, she won’t be able to catch them. She will search for them but not find them. Then she will think, ‘I might as well return to my husband, for I was better off with Him than I am now’” (2:6,7).

We are reminded of the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15) who finally “came to his senses” and determined that he would be better off going back to his father’s house (Luke 15:17-19). We could call the story of Gomer the *parable of the prodigal wife!*

God was pained by the fact that Israel had taken the many gifts *He bestowed on her* and used them in her pursuit of other gods.

“She doesn’t realize it was I who gave her everything she has—the grain, the new wine, the olive oil; I even gave her silver and gold. But she gave all My gifts to Baal . . . I will punish her for all those times when she burned incense to her images of Baal, when she put on her earrings and jewels and went out to look for her lovers but forgot all about Me,” says the LORD (2:8,13).

How often do WE take God’s good gifts and use them in ways that dishonor Him? He is the source of all our blessings, including life itself. In what ways are you using TIME, TALENT, and TREASURE in ways that dishonor God? Are there changes that you can make to better honor God with the gifts that He has given to you?

The Lord’s Loyal Love for Faithless Israel: 2:14-23

Characteristic of the prophets’ writings, there are quick shifts in the picture as God looks to a future day when He will renew His covenant relationship with Israel and win her heart back to Him. Such a shift occurs right in the middle of the second chapter of Hosea. One moment God is lamenting His unfaithful bride; but the next He is planning on how to win her heart back to Him again.

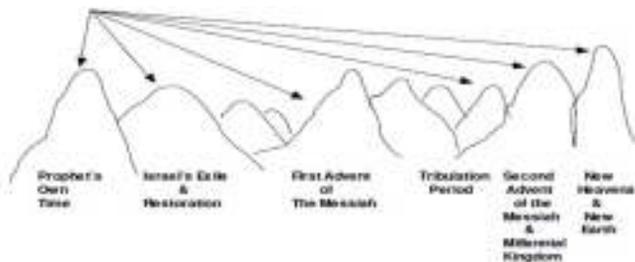
“But then I will win her back once again. I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her there. I will return her vineyards to her and transform the Valley of Achor into a gateway of hope. She will give herself to me there, as she did long ago when she was young, when I freed her from her captivity in Egypt” (2:14,15).

This passage contains the *heart of God* in one picture. The “*valley of Achor*” was the place where the people of Israel committed their first act of unfaithfulness against Yahweh after entering the Promised Land (see Joshua ch.7 and the sin of Achan in the valley of Achor – “Valley of Trouble”). God says, in effect: *I will take you back to the place where you first committed adultery against Me, and there I will renew My marriage vows with you. The place of your unfaithfulness will become a door of hope for us.*

In the remainder of ch.2, God paints a vivid picture of His future life with His restored bride, Israel:

“In that day,” declares the LORD, “you will call Me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call Me ‘my master.’ I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked. In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety. I will betroth you to Me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the LORD. In that day I will respond,” declares the LORD— “I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth; and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and the olive oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. I will plant her for Myself in the land; I will show My love to the one I called ‘Not My loved one.’ I will say to those called ‘Not My people,’ ‘You are My people’; and they will say, ‘You are My God’” (2:16-23).

The prophets saw future events like a series of distant mountain peaks. They often did not distinguish clearly between events in the *near future* and those in the *distant future*. Thus, a vision of return from captivity (50 years off) would overlap with a vision of the time of Messiah’s arrival (100s of years off) or even the distant end-times when God would restore Israel and set up His kingdom on earth (1000s of years off). Hosea 2 provides a good example of this complex prophetic foresight. When Hosea prophesied of times of restoration for God and Israel, he was likely prophesying of some measure of restoration and renewal for Israel that would take place after the Assyrian invasion (post 722 BC); but he was also seeing events of cosmic proportions that would take place in the days of Messiah’s appearance, and on into the end times when Israel would be replanted in her God-given land once and for all.



Hosea redeems Gomer: 3:1-5

The most impactful moment in the Hosea-Gomer story came when Hosea was commanded by God to go and “love his wife again” even though she had left him for other lovers. The fact that Hosea had to “buy” his wife back indicates that Gomer had been cast off by her other lovers and was forced to desperately offer herself as a slave to anyone who would purchase her. Hosea went to the place where slaves were being auctioned, and he bought back his wayward wife!

The LORD said to me, “Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes. So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. Then I told her, “You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you.” For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods. Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days” (3:1-5).

Again, the Hosea-Gomer relationship served as a picture of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Thus, the message is that God would someday “buy back” His beloved people from their captivity (presumably the Assyrian captivity that began in 722 BC, but also the Babylonian captivity after 586 BC, and even later captivities that Israel would endure). God would “bring His people back home” and gradually “restore” them to Himself in purity and faithfulness.

What a beautiful picture Hosea paints of God’s redemption of all of us! Through the death of Jesus, God paid the price to buy us off the slave-market of sin and death. He takes us home and begins to restore our lives and our relationship with Him. No matter how far we have gone from Him, His ridiculous love reaches out to bring us home!

2. Unfaithful Israel – Faithful Yahweh: chs.4-14

The longer section of Hosea details God’s case against His people. Their sins of unfaithfulness are enumerated, along with the

penalties for breach of covenant. Hosea and Gomer do not appear in this section of the book.

God's Complaint

“Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites, because the LORD has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: ‘There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land dries up, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea are swept away’” (4:1-3).

Recall God's original purpose for Israel to be His “priests” representing Him to the world (Exodus 19:5,6). Now, their privilege is being revoked due to disobedience.

“Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children” (4:6).

Israel had stubbornly spurned the correction of the Lord.

“The Israelites are stubborn, like a stubborn heifer. How then can the LORD pasture them like lambs in a meadow? Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone! Even when their drinks are gone, they continue their prostitution; their rulers dearly love shameful ways. A whirlwind will sweep them away, and their sacrifices will bring them shame” (4:16-19).

God has given us a free will so that we can choose to follow Him or not. While God is very patient, and lovingly pleads with us to follow Him, there is a point when He says: “Have it your way.” To use the apostle Paul's words in Romans 1:24,26,28 – “God gave them over” to their own desires. It is a sad day when our stubbornness becomes so great that God says: ‘YOU are joined to your idols. I will leave you alone.’ To King David God wrote: “I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control” (Psalm 32:8,9). Is there any area of your life where you are being “as stubborn as a mule” toward God? Be careful! He might let you have your own way.

God Reminisces

In certain passages, God looks back at how deeply He loved Israel,

His wife, from the very beginning even to the present day.

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and I called My son out of Egypt. I Myself taught Israel how to walk, leading him along by the hand. But he doesn’t know or even care that it was I who took care of him. I led Israel along with My ropes of kindness and love. I lifted the yoke from his neck, and I Myself stooped to feed him” (11:1,3,4).

“I have been the LORD your God ever since I brought you out of Egypt. You must acknowledge no God but Me, for there is no other Savior. I took care of you in the wilderness, in that dry and thirsty land” (13:4,5).

“She doesn’t realize it was I who gave her everything she has—the grain, the new wine, the olive oil; I even gave her silver and gold” (2:8).

God Laments

Then, there are many passages where God laments how it felt to have a “wife” that left Him for other gods:

“I cared for you in the wilderness, in the land of drought. But when you had eaten and were satisfied, you became proud and forgot Me” (13:6).

She said, “I’ll run after other lovers and sell myself to them for food and water, for clothing of wool and linen, and for olive oil and drinks” (2:5).

“She went out to look for her lovers but forgot all about Me,” says the LORD (2:13).

“For she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine and the oil, and lavished on her silver and gold” (2:8a).

“They deserted me for Baal, giving themselves to that shameful idol” (9:10).

“She gave all My gifts to Baal” (2:8b).

“Your love vanishes like the morning mist and disappears like dew in the sunlight . . . You broke My covenant and betrayed My trust” (6:4,7).

“Though I wrote for them ten thousand precepts of My law, they are regarded as a strange thing” (8:12).

“Like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; there they have dealt treacherously against Me” (6:7).

“They are all adulterers, burning like an oven whose fire the baker need not stir from the kneading of the dough till it rises” (7:4).

“For their hearts are like an oven as they approach their plotting; their anger smolders all night, in the morning it burns like a flaming fire” (7:6).

“Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless—now calling to Egypt, now turning to Assyria” (7:11).

“I trained them and strengthened their arms, but they plot evil against Me. They do not turn to the Most High; they are like a faulty bow” (7:15,16).

“For they have gone up to Assyria, like a wild donkey all alone; Ephraim has hired lovers” (8:9).

Calls to Return

In the midst of the case against Israel, the voice of Hosea rises issuing calls to return to God. These calls are founded upon the faithful, merciful character of God. Surely Hosea knew something about showing mercy to an unfaithful person!

“Come, let us RETURN to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but He will heal us; He has injured us but He will bind up our wounds. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will restore us, that we may live in His presence. Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge Him. As surely as the sun rises, He will appear; He will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth” (6:1-3).

“RETURN, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for your sins have brought you down. Bring your confessions, and return to the LORD. Say to Him, “Forgive all our sins and graciously receive us, so that we may offer You our praises. Assyria cannot save us, nor can our warhorses. Never again will we say to the idols we have made, ‘You are our gods.’ No, in You alone do the orphans find mercy” (14:1-3).

Sadly, this “return to the LORD” did not happen in the lifetime of Hosea the prophet. Thus, in the years after he died, the Northern

Kingdom of Israel was taken into captivity by the Assyrians. This ultimate punishment for disobedience had been spelled out in the original covenant Yahweh made with Israel (see Deuteronomy 28). In 722 BC, the Northern Kingdom (Israel) came to an end. The historical account of the end is found in 2Kings 17.

God Restores

Yet, the book of Hosea does not stop with the “end” of Israel. Instead, God points forward to a future day of restoration.

“Oh, how can I give you up, Israel? How can I let you go? How can I destroy you like Admah or demolish you like Zeboiim? My heart is torn within me, and my compassion overflows. No, I will not unleash my fierce anger. I will not completely destroy Israel, for I am God and not a mere mortal. I am the Holy One living among you, and I will not come to destroy. For someday the people will follow me. I, the LORD, will roar like a lion. And when I roar, my people will return trembling from the west. Like a flock of birds, they will come from Egypt. Trembling like doves, they will return from Assyria. And I will bring them home again,” says the LORD (11:8-11).

The LORD says, “Then I will heal you of your faithlessness; My love will know no bounds, for My anger will be gone forever. I will be to Israel like a refreshing dew from heaven. Israel will blossom like the lily; it will send roots deep into the soil like the cedars in Lebanon. Its branches will spread out like beautiful olive trees, as fragrant as the cedars of Lebanon. My people will again live under my shade. They will flourish like grain and blossom like grapevines. They will be as fragrant as the wines of Lebanon” (14:4-7).

Thus, the picture of Hosea buying Gomer back from the slave market, bringing her home and restoring her (ch.3) now finds its parallel. God promises to someday redeem Israel, bringing her out of captivity and restoring her dignity and beauty . . . and most of all, reuniting her heart to His in a new and permanent covenant relationship.

Postscript: Hosea pictured a very glorious restoration of Israel. While certain aspects of this restoration have happened in the 2,700 years since Hosea (returns from captivity, resettling in the land, recovery of national identity, even the existence of Israel as a nation today), the ultimate fulfillment of his vision of restoration

awaits the millennial kingdom of Messiah, yet future. All the prophets contain visions of a time when Messiah will establish His kingdom on earth, with the center in a renewed, righteous and restored Israel. Many scholars believe that this “millennial kingdom” will be established in the 1,000 years prior to the new heavens and new earth (see Revelation 20 for the 1,000 year period, followed by the eternal kingdom of Revelation 21,22).

Additional Notes on Gomer

Gomer’s Role

Gomer was the ‘promiscuous woman’ Hosea married. She would break her marriage vows and commit adultery against Hosea. She gave birth to one legitimate and two illegitimate children, leaving Hosea to raise them. Gomer broke Hosea’s heart. Yet, he married her trusting in God for His bigger story. This marriage depicted the impact of Israel’s spiritual adultery against Yahweh. As the people of Israel watched Hosea’s pain, they would see God’s pain and His broken heart. Unfaithfulness and betrayal are painful to every human heart . . . and they are painful to the heart of God!

Gomer’s name means “full of idolatry.” Her father’s name, Diblaim,” means “full of sensuality. Gomer probably learned about sensuality and unfaithfulness from her own father. She would learn the opposite from Hosea, her faithful husband.

Her Feminine Strengths

Gomer used her strengths to do life her own, self-willed way. Hosea had chosen her to be cherished and loved ‘just because’ (not because she deserved it). He had blessed her, provided for her and adorned her. She could have used her strengths to love her husband and bless her children. Instead, she became proud and decided to use her gifts and beauty to pursue other lovers. She satisfied her own desires and invited other men to be intimate with her (just as Israel took their blessings from God and went their own way, worshiping false gods).

Gomer returned home to give birth to 2 illegitimate children. God told Hosea to name the daughter “Lo-ruhamma” (not loved). God was saying that He would no longer show love or pity to Israel. The illegitimate son was to be named “Lo-ammi” (not my people). Israel was no longer God’s people, and he was no longer going to be their God. After the birth of these children, it seems that Gomer left the home, intending to never return.

God on Display

God was put on display through the love of Hosea for Gomer. Eventually, when her lovers began to replace her, she had no one else to turn to. She became destitute and homeless. She was worthless, helpless and hopeless. Her only choice was to offer herself for sale as a slave, hoping that someone would buy her and care for her. She never expected that her husband, Hosea, would show up that day to purchase her and take her back home! Hosea pictures our relentless, loving Savior. In fact, the name “Hosea” means “Salvation.” God had commanded Hosea to redeem Gomer, take her home, love her again, care for her, bind up her wounds and bring healing to her soul *and* restoration to their marriage. Wow! What a picture of God’s ridiculous love for us.

How God Used Her Life

Gomer represents *each one of us*. From God’s point of view, all of humanity has strayed from Him. We each wander away in small and big ways, to find out if life is more satisfying apart from Him. Yet, God has paid the redemption price through His Son, Jesus Christ, to buy us back to Himself.

Often, it takes a wake-up call to hear His voice calling out our name. When we respond to His love, He begins to restore the broken places in our lives and to walk with us through the rest of life. Gomer shows us that there is no *shame* when standing in the light of God’s loving gaze. The longer I stand in His gaze, the more I can see how my identity has, in the past, been shaped by other voices. As I learn about His love, He exchanges those other voices with His true and gracious view of me. This beautiful story of God’s relentless, ridiculous love gives me hope! God told Hosea that in time, his illegitimate daughter would be called “loved” and his illegitimate son would be called “My people.” God has already written a grand divine story, and all who believe in Him are a part of it. When we respond to His love, we also get new names: “Loved.” “Son or Daughter of God.”

Discussion Questions

1. How has the story of Hosea and Gomer impacted you?
2. What stands out most to you about the character of God as you reflect on the book of Hosea? Are you surprised by His character?
3. How does Hosea’s faithful love challenge you to be faithful?