

2ND KINGS

Week 11, Chapter 8 continued

We continue today in 2nd Kings Chapter 8 and the ongoing saga of Israel's history during an era when Elijah and Elisha were raised up by God to bring His justice to the kingdoms of Ephraim/Israel and Judah. Elijah operated almost exclusively in the northern kingdom; and while the bulk of Elisha's work was there also, we do find him dealing with the southern kingdom to a degree. And we continue to have to be careful as we read these passages to understand that at times the reference to Israel is only to the northern kingdom, and at other times (although infrequent) it means "all Israel" in the sense of the northern and southern kingdoms together.

We also need to keep in mind that there was a divine purpose for the Lord raising up these two powerful prophets that not only brought the Lord's prophetic oracle to the Israelites, but who also had a hand in causing miracles to happen. Elisha's spiritual gifts went even further than his master *Eliyahu's* so that Elisha was able to see into men's thoughts at times, and could discern the future. No doubt this ability was on a case by case basis and as directed by Yehoveh.

Most typical prophets were anointed men who were set apart for service to Yehoveh and discerned God's Word of instruction and either brought it to a king or, as Isaiah and others, also were used by God as an instrument of warning the people of their precarious condition caused by their willful idolatry and apostasy, and told them what was going to happen if they didn't change their ways. But the Prophets Elijah and Elisha were established as divine counterbalances against the Israelite kings who rebelled against the Lord, and these 2 men also acted to fill the void caused by the absence of a Levitical priesthood in the northern kingdom, and a steadily deteriorating one in the southern kingdom. In the fact the existence of the several large prophet guilds in cities scattered about the Promised Land (but mostly in central and northern Israel) are proof that a kind of replacement or alternative priesthood had been created (consisting of prophets from various tribes instead of the priestly descendants of Aaron) in order to keep the Word of God alive in a backslidden Israel. And one reason for the Lord taking these extraordinary measures was because Queen Jezebel had brought the worship of her god Ba'al from her homeland of Sidon and transplanted it in Israel, with the goal of stamping out Yehoveh worship. And she had been quite successful in her efforts because the road to achieve this goal had been paved by the wicked actions and policies of earlier Israelite monarchs.

Starting with the 1st king of the northern kingdom, Jeroboam, the Israelites of the north had been essentially barred from access to the Temple in Jerusalem and by national policy were discouraged from seeking the one true source of truth and light, the God of Israel. We don't find that the general population was necessarily harmed for their faith; however we do find that the religious leadership of steadfast Yehoveh followers were seen as a danger to the state and thus targeted for extermination; and that the people who clung to the Lord were considered as non-conformists to be looked down upon and shunned.

But there was another reason for the existence of so many common prophets who lived in communal prophet guilds: in time the Lord would move to severely oppress His chosen people in punishment for their unabated apostasy, and He would make it clear to them (through other prophets) that they apostatized not in ignorance, but in willful choice. They would not be able to say that they didn't know God's Torah or His will because even though the official priesthood and the kings that the Lord had ordained were failing their people and doing all in their power to erect a wall between the people and God, there were hundreds and hundreds of prophets who were dedicated teachers of God's Word who kept that Word alive and well within the Land. It's only that the bulk of the population dutifully followed their leaders and grew to prefer something else.

While I am no prophet like Elijah or Elisha or Isaiah, I still want to add my voice to many other teachers of the Word who are greatly alarmed at what we see happening all around us. It is as if we are reliving the era of Judges or of the biblical Kings all over again, and in churches and synagogues everywhere people have become willfully ignorant of God's Word and prefer instead to accept the more attractive traditions of men as their path and source of truth. Naturally this has led to societies that more and more see Christianity as an obstacle to peace and harmony, and that those who teach of an absolute morality as defined by the Bible as dangerous haters. Clinging to God's Word is only for the unintelligent, unenlightened, superstitious and backward. Many things that God says epitomize evil in His eyes are what our political and religious leaders now call good, and are taught in our public education systems as normal and desirable, and must be accepted by society in general. Those who oppose it are called bigots and are said to suffer from one sort of phobia or another.

And I must say, it is NOT the condition of the secular world (the pagan, non-God fearing world) that concerns me. Pagans act like pagans because they're pagans. What else would one expect of them? As a teacher of the Word it is the world of Church and Synagogue that concerns me; those who claim to be God's people but behave more like their pagan neighbors. Those who claim their salvation but go on living as though nothing of any significance has changed in their lives. Or they don't accept God's commandments as truth and light but rather as suggestions. Or they distort those bible truths to such a high degree as to turn their plain meaning and intent upside-down.

Let us pay close attention as the Book of 2nd Kings moves along, because we see the pattern

continue (as developed mainly in the Book of Judges) as to how God responds to such apostasy, idolatry and general unfaithfulness. And because God never changes, in contemporary times we are simply living out that same pattern again. However since modern Christianity finds little if any relevance of the Old Testament history to our New Testament faith in Christ, then they (we) can be oblivious to the reality that we are merely actors in a play that has been repeated before and so the outcome is certain. And no amount of our denials or our offense at being accused of rebellion against God will change that. Only changing our ways and returning to the true religion of the Bible, the combined wisdom of the Old and New Testaments, and the faith practiced by the 1st and 2nd generations of Believers will there be any meaningful effect.

Let's re-read part of chapter 8.

RE-READ 2ND KINGS CHAPTER 8:7 – end

Last week we examined verse 10 pretty closely because it seems to say that God told Elisha that he was to tell the gravely ill King of Aram that he would survive his infirmity even though in fact he would not. And whether one interprets the scripture passage to mean that this was the Lord who ordered Elisha to tell this lie or it was Elisha's own thought to do so, nonetheless it is troubling for us, especially since neither Ben-Hadad nor Haza'el were behaving as enemies; and in fact they were showing proper respect to Yehoveh as well as to His prophet Elisha. But as we discovered, in reality the oldest Hebrew manuscripts we have show that the Hebrew word **lo** is included in saying whether the King would recover or not, and **lo** means no or not. Thus what it actually says is that Elisha told Haza'el that Ben-Hadad **WOULD NOT** recover from his sickness. And then in the next phrase it seems to simply repeat that same sentiment using the words, "even though Yehoveh has shown me you shall surely die". So: "you will not recover even though you'll die"; but that is confusing. The sense this is meant, I have no doubt, was that the King of Aram wouldn't die of his illness, but he would nonetheless die of something else. And that is exactly what soon transpired. There was no lying by God or Elisha involved, not even any cunning words that distorted or hid the truth.

What happened next was truly dramatic and gut wrenching, and there is a sobering lesson contained in it. In verse 11 we're told that after telling this to Haza'el (Ben-Hadad's next in command), Elisha became so overpowered with emotional pain, that he was momentarily speechless. Rashi says that the meaning of the sentence is that Elisha actually turned his face away to try and hide the tears that began to flow. And between men, for one to just cloud up and break down into tears, it actually is greatly uncomfortable to the other man who is witnessing it. This kind of emotion is not something that males handle very well. So Haza'el was rightly bothered and puzzled by this outburst and after a few awkward seconds of silence that must have seemed like hours he asked the great prophet what the crying was about.

Even though Elisha had publically upbraided a number of Israelite kings, even participating in bringing a famine upon the land as punishment for wickedness, he loved the Hebrew people and what he was about to speak into existence was going to cause them great harm. Because once he delivered God's message to Haza'el, it would set into motion great calamities upon the Israelites, at the hand of the man who now stood directly in front of him. Even more, it would be Elisha's own vial of oil that he would use to personally anoint Haza'el as the new king of Syria, in obedience to God, and would thus empower Haza'el to bring about the killing and pillaging and oppressions that were in store for Elisha's own countrymen.

After Elisha painted a gory picture of the atrocities that Haza'el would commit, Haza'el became as a deer caught in the headlights of an oncoming car. He was taken aback by Elisha's bold statement; but in fact it was more than that. Haza'el's first reaction was of course to feign innocence and shock that anyone could think of him as capable of doing such awful things. How, he said, even if he wanted to, could he bring something of that magnitude about? Why would Elisha predict such a revolting thing for him? But of course, it was not that we have any mention that God directly told Elisha that this would be the result; rather it was something that God told Elisha's master several years ago, that he had relayed to Elisha and Elisha had never forgotten it.

Listen to this excerpt from 1st Kings 19:

CJB 1Kings 19:15-17

15 ADONAI said to him (Elijah), "Go back by way of the Dammesek Desert. When you get there, anoint Haza'el to be king over Aram.

16 Also anoint Yehu the son of Nimshi to be king over Isra'el, and anoint Elisha the son of Shafat of Avel-M'cholah to be prophet after you.

17 Yehu will kill whoever escapes the sword of Haza'el, and Elisha will kill whoever escapes the sword of Yehu.

The killing that is being described in this last verse of 1st Kings 19 is the killing of Hebrew people, Elisha's people. And not only will Haza'el, a Syrian foreigner with a history of hostility against Israel lead the way, but so will Yehu, an Israelite, kill many Hebrews. But even more, the prophecy says that Elisha will somehow be involved. And now is the moment when the fulfillment of that prophecy is being launched. Is it any wonder that Elisha is anguished beyond words?

You know, I don't think I've done a good enough job of communicating what was befalling Elisha at this very moment. So let me get a bit preachy and offer something of a personal experience to you. Sometime after the midpoint of my life, as I began to take God's Word seriously and studied it more earnestly, I often sat perplexed as Believers all around me in Church listened to what has become a rather common message about the return of Christ, Armageddon, and the annihilation of tens of millions of people at Jesus's own hand, as God's redemptive process enters its final moments. I was perplexed because invariably the next sound I heard were joyous "hallelujah's" and excited "amen's" coming from all over the sea of smiling faces surrounding me and I wondered if that would be those folks' reaction if they were present when it all begins. When Christ DID appear in the clouds as they stood dumbfounded, and then lived through the onslaught as His re-appearance sets off a worldwide conflagration the likes of which no horror movie could ever depict because no creative mind could ever imagine it let alone communicate it.

I have lived through earthquakes that were so violent that in a few places the earth split apart an inch or two on asphalt roads halting traffic; and I witnessed hot muddy water bubble up, and small geysers spout boiling water 4 or 5 feet into the air through the rather small fissures. And I assure you that the size of the earthquake that caused it was quite large and terrifying and there was always substantial property damage. So what will it be like for those who are there when a cataclysmic event causes the Mt. of Olives to split under Messiah's feet and the entire mountain changes form as a Grand Canyon sized valley is created in but moments, with a rush a water flowing through it all the way from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea, a nearly 4000 foot elevation drop? Do you think that the Believers who just happen to be there will be smiling and shouting Hallelujah and amen; glad to see it unfolding while they are in the midst of it?

You see it's easy for us to be happily expectant for these prophesied things when we don't actually expect to experience them. We say and we pray and we sing, "Lord Messiah come right now". Really? While the beginning of the end would finally be upon us, the means to this end is going to be horrifying, not glorious. I doubt that any Believer is going have a smile or look of joy on his or her face. It's all so comforting when a predicted event is abstract, future, and will affect only "other people". It's so much more warm and fuzzy to think of the End Times in spiritualized terms, with an idealized vision of grandeur. The Jews of the mid 20th century knew well the ancient prophecies of a return to their roots and most of them longed for the day, as they had for so many centuries. Theodore Hertzl, the founder of modern Zionism, had gone a long way towards finally making the biblical Promised Land (then called Palestine) a real possibility of becoming a reborn Jewish homeland, which was a necessary ingredient for fulfillment of the Jews' return. But do you think he ever would have spent his adult life working for that end if he had any idea of what would finally have to happen to his family, his people, in WWII to make it all a reality? Do you think if you were a Jew living in Europe before Hitler came to power that you would still be praying daily for a new glorious exodus back to your Jewish homeland if you knew that it would begin in the Nazi death camps and that you and/or most of your loved ones (almost 40% of the entire world's Jewish population) would not survive those unspeakable horrors?

Elisha foreknew what lay ahead for him and his people. He foreknew that by his own hand, he was God's instrument to empower the wicked Haza'el to bring horrific judgment upon Israel. Do we find Elisha piously looking heavenward and joyfully saying Hallelujah and amen because God's will is being manifest? No, even in his steadfast obedience to the Lord we find him weeping and distraught. No doubt he was terribly conflicted, torn and full of guilt for his role in it. His was a most appropriate response to the reality of the circumstances and one that probably ought to be closer to where our thoughts wander when we sing songs and hear sermons about the End of Days.

In verse 14, Haza'el returns to Aram and to his master Ben-Hadad and lies to him by telling him that he'll recover from his sickness. The King of Syria no doubt felt at peace and so fell deeply asleep probably for the first time in days since he sent Haza'el off to inquire of Elisha. Haza'el returned some hours later to the king's bedchambers as the weakened Ben-Hadad lay sleeping and unaware. He quietly soaked a blanket with water, placed it over the king's face covering his mouth and nostrils, and suffocated him. Elisha's prophecy came true; the king died not of disease but of murder. And Haza'el was now the new King of Aram.

Starting in verse 16 we get a series of names of Kings of Judah and of Ephraim/Israel. It can get quite confusing and frustrating because we have a situation whereby sometimes a King of Israel had the same name as a King of Judah. For instance, there was King **Y'horam** of Judah who ruled for awhile at the same time another man named **Y'horam** was King of Israel. To try and help the befuddled reader, Bible Translators long ago called King **Y'horam** of Judah merely Joram, while calling the other **Y'horam**, Jehoram.

Thus the **Y'horam** of verse 16 is identified as the one who is the King of Judah who God regarded as wicked because he ruled in the same manner as the apostate Kings of Israel. And the reason that this King of Judah was so wicked is that he had married the King of Israel's daughter. The King of Israel this is referring to is Achav and his wife was Jezebel. Their daughter was Athaliah and she became the King of Judah's wife. What is so significant, is that here we see that the two independent monarchies of Israel and of Judah have become intertwined by marriage. Judah had retained the Temple and the Levitical priesthood, and so while by no means had they remained pure, they were basically righteous except for occasional lapses. Judah was far more fastidious in their worship of Yehoveh than their counterparts in the north who had essentially abandoned God. But now, with intermarriage of the royal families, the wickedness of the northern kingdom quickly began to infect the southern kingdom to a far greater level than ever before. In fact, verse 19 tells us that even though He was in the midst of judging Ephraim/Israel, YHWH was withholding the divine judgment that Judah merited but only for the sake of King David. And this is because the Lord had promised that a vestige of David's dynasty would continue to rule indefinitely.

It helps us to understand how quickly Judah slid down the slippery slope to evil when we read a parallel account of what happened upon **Y'horam** becoming the King of Judah in 2nd

Chronicles.

CJB **2 Chronicles 21:1**

Y'hoshafat slept with his ancestors and was buried with his ancestors in the City of David, and Y'horam his son became king in his place.

² He had brothers who were sons of Y'hoshafat- 'Azaryah, Yechi'el, Z'kharyahu, 'Azaryahu, Mikha'el and Sh'fatyahu; all these were sons of Y'hoshafat king of Isra'el.

³ Their father had given them lavish gifts of silver, gold and other items of value, as well as fortified cities in Y'hudah; but he had given the kingdom to Y'horam, because he was the firstborn.

⁴ But when Y'horam had taken control of his father's kingdom and consolidated his rule, he put to the sword all his brothers and a number of the leading men in Isra'el.

⁵ He was thirty-two years old when he began his reign, and he ruled eight years in Yerushalayim.

⁶ He lived after the example of the kings of Isra'el, as did the house of Ach'av; because he had married Ach'av's daughter; he did what was evil from ADONAI's perspective.

So upon his assuming the throne of Judah (completely legitimately), **Y'horam** proved his wickedness by immediately killing off all of his brothers for no reason other than he wanted for himself the portion of wealth that their father had given to them. What is interesting is how in 2nd Kings the Lord places direct blame on Jezebel and her daughter Athaliah as the source of the spirit of apostasy for the most recent generations of kings of both Israel and Judah. King **Y'horam** of Judah had made the fatal mistake of combining Judah's religion with pragmatic politics (by marrying Athaliah to create an alliance with the northern kingdom), and God would not let this stand.

So, in verse 20, we hear that the kingdom of Edom (which had been a vassal state under Israel for one and a half centuries) rebelled, re-established their independence and declared their own king. But starting in verse 21 the problems of dealing with the names of the kings surfaces again; and the problem is that we have 2 kings with the same name ruling over Judah and Israel. The CJB as do many other translations seem to have it that it was **Y'horam** King of **Israel** who responded to the rebellion of Edom by sending an army. But Israel had no treaty with Edom; Edom was Judah's vassal. So this must be Judah's King **Y'horam** that sent troops,

not Israel's. And I'm certain of this (and quite astounded that so many Bible translations have it wrong), due to a number of reasons that make the solution quite self evident. And I'll address that momentarily.

The army tried to use the cover of darkness to make a surprise attack (this is something that we have seen was a historical and traditional tactic of the Israelites), but it failed. They quickly found themselves surrounded by Edomites, and the non-professional soldiers that made up the bulk of Judah's army panicked and fled back to their homes. No doubt this wasn't the only attempt to try and keep Edom under Judah's control, but in the end, as verse 22 explains, Edom broke away and remained independent from that time forward. In fact, another Edomite city named Livnah that was located near the border of Judah finally joined in the rebellion of their brethren once they felt confident that Edom would win.

Next we're told that there were many other things that **Y'horam** King of Judah did and that they are recorded in the Annals of the Kings of Judah. Notice that the verse is speaking of the king who attacked Edom, and says his history is recorded in the Annals of the Kings of Judah. So here is further evidence as to which King **Y'horam** is being referred to. But more than that, there is the parallel account of this misadventure that is recorded in 2nd Chronicles 21. It's worth reading because not only does it make it clear that the king who attacked Edom was the Judahite king, but it also gives us details about his not contained in 2nd Kings.

READ 2ND CHRONICLES 21: 8 – end

In the end this wicked king of Judah died a terrible and agonizing death and was replaced by his son Achazyah. Achazyah was 22 years old when he took over Judah's throne, but he was at least as bad as his father and only lasted for a year. He was considered as such a bad and evil king that even though he was buried in the City of David, he was not entombed in the catacombs set aside of Judah's kings. Rather he was buried in the commoners' burial grounds of that same city.

And as I mentioned a bit earlier, the writer of 2nd Kings goes out of his way to pinpoint the source of the spirit of evil that accelerated both Israel's and Judah's demise as Jezebel and her daughter Athaliah. And that is the reason for this passage referring to Achazyah's mother as Athaliah. Further verse 27 again makes the connection that while Achazyah was the King of Judah, he was closely connected by blood and intermarriage to the House of **Achav** (meaning the dynasty of **Achav**, a King of Israel that actually began with his father **Omri**). So the idea is that whereas Judah and Israel were at one time of virtually opposite character (Israel was apostate, Judah was righteous) the reason for Judah's fall into the same kind of apostasy and idolatry that would eventually cause God to exile the 10 tribes of the northern kingdom from the land, was that Judah's kings mixed their blood with the evil dynasty of **Omri**, rulers of Israel.

Verse 28 shows how because the rulers of Judah and Israel were closely related, the two kingdoms became closely aligned. And so they made another joint effort to push back the territory of Syria that was now being ruled by Haza'el. And this effort focused on the city of Ramoth-Gilead that had long been an Israelite city in the Trans-Jordan. But one of the consequences of the battle was that **Y'horam**, King of Israel, was wounded seriously enough that he was taken to the royal palace in Jezreel to recover.

Achazyah, King of Judah, who had fought alongside **Y'horam** at Ramot-Gilead went to pay a state visit to **Y'horam** as he convalesced in Jezreel. We'll end today's lesson with this thought: 14 years earlier, Achazyah's grandfather Jehoshaphat had done the same WRONG thing by uniting with the wicked King of Israel in battle against a common enemy. The result was defeat and the King of Israel (**Achav**) lost his life in the process. Interestingly, that battle was over the same city, Ramoth-Gilead, as in our 2nd Kings 8 story, and in chapter 9 we'll see that the current Kings of Israel and Judah, now both related by blood to King **Achav**, would also suffer his fate.

God's patterns are His chief governing dynamic.