

Old Testament History

Lesson #19

2 Kings 4:1-8:24

Outline

I. ***The Ministries Of The Prophets (1 Kings 17:1-2 Kings 8:15)***

- A. Elisha and Jehoram of Israel (2:19-8:15).
 1. Elisha and the widow's oil (4:1-7).
 2. Elisha raises the Shunammite woman's son (4:8-37).
 3. Elisha feeds the people (4:28-44).
 4. Elisha heals Naaman of leprosy (5:1-27).
 5. The floating axe head (6:1-7).
 6. War with Syria (6:8-7:20).
 7. The Shunammite woman's land restored (8:1-6).
 8. Elisha and Hazael of Syria (8:7-15).

II. ***The Late Divided Kingdom (2 Kings 8:16-17:41)***

- A. Jehoram of Judah (8:16-24).

Notes

2 Kings 4:1-44

- The history of Elijah and Elisha marks the high point in the miraculous attestation of the mission of the prophets. The real meaning and purpose of the miraculous elements in the ministry of Elisha is to teach to Israel again the presence and power of God, and by such religious revival to prevent national judgment.
- Elisha died during the reign of Joash (2 Kings 13:14), so his ministry must have extended over four reigns, and lasted about 55 or 57 years. Therefore there would be a blank of 45 years in the narrative if all that is recorded of Elisha had taken place in the time of Jehoram.
- Some have compared this first miracle with the miraculous provision for the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:9-16). However, the two differ on almost every detail, except the fact that in both instances the recipient of the miracle was a widow. The miracle at Zarephath was a prefigurement of the mercy and help to be extended to the Gentiles. The miracle in this chapter showed that God was a present help in trouble.
- When she indicated that she lived comfortably among her own people and had no special needs, Gehazi, Elisha's servant, pointed out that the couple was childless; and, since her husband was old, the woman's longing for a child seemed hopeless.
- God had given the child, and He could certainly restore the child. The woman was strong and resolute, bent on the greatest of purposes: the

resurrection of her child. She grabbed hold of the faithfulness of God to His word and His promise. She was a true and faithful Israelite woman, who, in a time of general apostasy, followed God in her life and her home.

- Elisha quickly sent Gehazi ahead with instructions to lay the prophet's staff on the dead lad. The act of Gehazi was allowed to fail, in order to free the Shunammite, and the people of Israel as well, of the superstitious notion of supposing a miraculous virtue resided in any person, or in any rod, and to prove that it was only through earnest prayer and faith in the power of God and for His glory that this and every miracle was to be performed.
- The final two events in the chapter must have occurred a considerable time later than the previous incident, and at a time of famine, which long afterwards is described in relation with Elisha's prophecy (2 Kings 8:1). The first one showed how God could remove what was harmful from the provision of His people, and the second one showed how easily He can give to provide for His servants.

2 Kings 5:1-27

- While the previous chapter dealt primarily with Elisha's private ministry, this chapter details his public activity. It was an opportunity to bring Israel into direct contact with their enemy, Syria -- this time, not in war, but in peace. The bloodless victory which was achieved would have taught the king and people how easily the Lord could turn the hearts of their adversaries, and by the manifestation of His grace make them fellow believers and worshipers of Israel.
- The latter days of the reign of Israel's king Jehoram were marked by hostilities with the Syrian king Ben-Hadad II. Probably due to Israel's failure to participate in the continued Syrian-Assyrian confrontation that marked most of the sixth decade of the ninth century B.C., the Syrians continually punished the northern kingdom with systematic raids (cf. 2 Kings 6:8), culminating in an all-out military excursion into Israel (cf. 2 Kings 6:24-7:20).
- The "little girl," a seemingly insignificant character, formed the bond between the Jews and Gentiles, and began the process of proving to Naaman that there is a God in Israel. She certainly occupied a place of great honor in the home!
- Neither Naaman nor Ben-Hadad would see anything strange in the possession of magical powers by a prophet of Israel. Furthermore, it agreed with heathen beliefs to expect that the king of Israel would be able to get any result which he might desire from his own prophet.
- Jehoram was a coward before any danger presented itself. News of the whole affair reached Elisha, who sent word to Jehoram that God was still

at work in Israel and could work through His prophet. Accordingly Naaman was sent to Elisha, who, rather than receiving him, sent his servant to meet Naaman. He had to understand that Elisha served a greater king than did the Syrian general.

- The simple command to wash and be cleansed was a stumbling block to Naaman. He would have been satisfied if he were asked to do something dramatic, but the Jordan River did not seem sufficient to take away such a disease. However, Naaman had friends in his servants, who talked him into obeying the prophet and cleansing himself of leprosy.
- Unfortunately, there was a sad sequel to the story. The character of Gehazi was the complete opposite of Elisha's. He was covetous, selfish, and narrow-minded. Slipping away stealthily, he overtook the Syrian general. Naaman's descent from his chariot to meet Elisha's servant was a mark of his being a changed man. No longer a proud, arrogant person, the grateful, reverent, and humble Syrian came down from his honored place to meet a prophet's servant.
- After getting the payment from Naaman, Gehazi attempted to go back to Elisha's house unnoticed -- only to be confronted by the prophet. His master knew all that had transpired! Gehazi's lies only worsened the situation. Naaman's leprosy would become Gehazi's. Elisha's privileged servant was banished in disgrace, for he had misused his favored position in an attempt to acquire wealth for himself. Gehazi had to learn that the work has no place for those who would make merchandise of it.

2 Kings 6:1-23

- For a brief time the narrative turns again to the more private and personal ministry of Elisha. In contrast to Gehazi who had received the reward of his unfaithfulness, this account is a demonstration of the reward of faithful labor.
- One of the positive elements about this time period is the growing number of the "company of the prophets." This school apparently was located in Jericho near the Jordan, a place of prophetic instruction. Elisha acceded to the request to build larger quarters and even went with them to work. The whole episode shows the simplicity and earnestness of their faith, and the poverty and humbleness of their outward circumstances. The miracle also taught the prophets about the constant care and provision of God, however small and humble the need might be.
- The account returns to the intermittent warfare between the Syrians and Israelites. Time after time the Israelite king and his forces were delivered from ambush because of Elisha's warning, for by divine revelation Elisha was privy to the Syrian king's secret plans. Elisha's aid

to Jehoram became common knowledge and was reported to the Syrian king, who had suspected a traitor within his own court.

- Elisha knew that during the night the city had been surrounded by the Syrians so that, to the eye of man, there seemed no way of escape. When Elisha's servant saw the two surrounded by the Syrian host, his heart failed him, and he turned to his master with the despairing inquiry of what they were to do.
- In accordance with Elisha's prayer, the enemy army was struck blind and was led away by Elisha about ten miles away to Samaria. Once inside the city, the army discovered that instead of taking Elisha captive, they were prisoners of Jehoram. At Elisha's directions, rather than killing their enemies, the Israelites treated them to a large feast and, having given them provisions for the journey home to Syria, sent them away. The Syrians reported Israel's kindness, and the raids ceased.

2 Kings 6:24-7:20

- At a later date war broke out again between Ben-Hadad II and Jehoram. Perhaps the miraculously arranged temporary lull had been designed to teach Israel God's love and concern for His people, to whom He had sent His prophet, Elisha. But with no evidence of repentance by Israel, God withdrew His protection; and Israel faced a full-scale Syrian invasion. The Syrians were successful, penetrating to the gates of Samaria itself and putting the city under a severe siege.
- While making the rounds inspecting the city and observing the movements of the enemy, Jehoram was stopped by the cry for help of a frantic woman. The horrible story told by the woman caused the king to tear his clothes, revealing his sackcloth garments of grief underneath. Enraged and blaming Elisha, he sent a messenger to seize and behead Elisha.
- Jehoram had given up on divine deliverance, but Elisha assured him that there would be abundance the next day, the extent of which could not have been expected even in the most fruitful seasons. Because Jehoram's aide doubted, Elisha said he would see it with his own eyes but he would not eat any of it.
- Four leprous men who lived outside the city gate knew their situation was desperate. Accordingly, they decided to surrender to the Syrians. Death already stared them in the face; they had nothing to lose by giving up. As they moved into the camp, they found it totally deserted. The Lord had miraculously caused the Syrians to hear what seemed to them the approach of a great army to free the besieged Israelites. They ran for fear of their lives.
- The four rushed about eating and drinking, gathering and hiding their spoil. When the thrill of the moment had worn off, they realized that as

Israelites it was their duty to tell the good news to others. So they hurried on to the city and told the gatekeepers that the Syrians had suddenly left.

- But so far from receiving the news as an indication that the prediction of Elisha was being fulfilled, the king did not even seem to have remembered it. He thought it was a trick of the Syrians until he sent scouts to determine the report's authenticity. The king commanded the people to go to the Syrian camp and plunder it. By day's end Elisha's amazing prophecy was fulfilled, including the portion that addressed Jehoram's aide. For in their mad rush for spoil, the people trampled him to death in the gateway he had been assigned to guard.

2 Kings 8:1-15

- Chapter 8 opens with a last glimpse of Elisha's former servant, Gehazi. Apparently King Jehoram of Israel had summoned Gehazi to learn from a reliable source something of the great prophet whose miraculous prediction had just come to pass.
- Elisha said that God called for a famine to last seven out of the twelve years of Jehoram's reign. Elisha wanted to send the Shunnamite woman away so she could find food. Upon returning, she found that her land had been taken. Taking her case to the king, she appealed to him for justice while he was speaking with Gehazi. Jehoram restored her property to her.
- Elisha's name and work was known far beyond Israel. Elisha anointed Hazael to succeed Ben-Hadad as king of Syria (1 Kings 19:15) -- a prophet of Israel anointed a foreign king to punish the prophet's own nation for their sins (10:32-33)!
- Ben-Hadad had become sick and he wanted to ask Elisha if he would recover. He sent Hazael, who would shortly stage a coup and take over the government from Ben-Hadad. The illness was not a fatal one in and of itself. Elisha's reply and cool stare indicated that Hazael had already plotted the king's demise and that he knew Hazael's secret thoughts. Hazael blushed in shame. Elisha's stares soon turned to weeping, for he knew what trouble he would cause for Israel. The next day, Hazael smothered Ben-Hadad and assumed the throne.
- An account of how Hazael became king of Syria is found in an inscription of Shalmaneser III, king of Assyria, who says, "I defeated Hadadezer (i.e., Ben-Hadad) of Damascus. I stretched upon the ground 20,000 of his strong warriors ... the remnants of his troops I pushed into the Orontes River; Hadadezer (himself) perished. Hazael, a commoner [lit., son of nobody] seized the throne."

2 Kings 8:16-24; 2 Chronicles 21:1-20

- The author now shifts his attention to the southern kingdom and to the two sons of Jehoshaphat. This is a period of fast-hastening judgment, illustrated by the horrors attending Jehoram's accession to the throne of Israel.
- The fatal combination of political intrigue and devout religion, which constituted the weakness of Jehoshaphat's reign, and led to his alliance with the house of Ahab, appeared also in his attitude toward his children. Jehoram got rid himself of all possible rivals by murdering his brothers and their adherents. The writer of Chronicles stated that Jehoram made the entire nation of Judah to sin according to the religion of the Canaanites. There is also evidence that his ungodly rule was unpopular in Judah.
- Despite Jehoram's spiritual and moral weakness, God honored His covenant with the house of David (cf. 2 Chronicles 21:7), and did not destroy the kingdom. Nevertheless, Jehoram and Judah did experience judgment in the form of three military engagements (cf. 2 Chronicles 21:10): (1) Edom revolted, a rebellion that nearly cost Jehoram his life in attempting to suppress it (cf. 2 Chronicles 21:8-10); (2) Libnah revolted (cf. 2 Chronicles 21:10); and, (3) the Philistines and Arabians launched a massive attack that reached Jerusalem itself and cost the king all his sons except Ahaziah (cf. 2 Chronicles 21:16-17; 22:1).
- Judah and its kings were smitten with the plague (2 Chronicles 21:12-15), Jehoram himself dying eventually of an incurable disease in the bowels (2 Chronicles 21:15, 18-19). Thus an unfortunate period of Judah's history, in the form of a wicked and apostate son of the house of David, passed, wicked Jehoram himself being excluded from the royal sepulcher (2 Chronicles 21:20).