

OLD TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 26

2 Kings – Part One

II KINGS OVERVIEW

Chapters 2 – 25

I. BACKGROUND

The background information to II Kings is contained in the lesson outline for I Kings. In the original Hebrew Bible, the two books were actually one scroll. The division into two books came about with the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek around 200 B.C. (the "Septuagint").

II. CONTENT.

Just as we saw in I Kings, the book of II Kings alternates between the history of the Northern Kingdom ("Israel") and the Southern Kingdom ("Judah"). The histories given are put against a structure of the various kings that ruled over the nations. Some receive a lot of attention; some receive very little attention. The focus seems dictated, not by the worldly success of the kings, but by the spiritual focus of the events.

The history in the books is somewhat hard to follow because the history skips frequently between north and south. In this discussion, we will attempt to separate the histories out, dealing first with the north and then with the south.

A. North History.

II Kings begins in the north where I Kings ended. King Ahaziah, son of King Ahab, is injured. Ahaziah seeks his medical prognosis from Ba'al-Zebub, rather than Yahweh. Through Elijah, Yahweh states that Ahaziah will not recover but will in fact die.

Yahweh was right.

We then read of the ascension of Elijah to heaven. Elijah does not "die" in the traditional sense. Instead, Elijah is whisked heavenward on a fiery chariot. Elisha, Elijah's successor, witnessed the ascension. Before Elijah goes, he promises a

double portion of his spirit to Elisha. Interestingly, II Kings will record Elisha doing many of the similar miracles Elijah did, but doing them twice as much or twice as often.

The difference in the life of Elijah and Elisha is similar to the differences in their names. Elijah meant "Yahweh is my God." Elisha means "God is salvation." Elijah's ministry was one of proclaiming the Lordship of Yahweh over the Ba'al worship of Israel. Elisha's ministry focused on bringing God's salvation/help to all sorts of people, from those born high and rich to those born lonely and poor.

Through Elisha, we see King Joram (King Ahaziah's successor) finding success in battle against the king of Moab. We also see a widow finding debt relief and sustenance from a jar that fills olive oil jars without emptying itself. Elisha prophesied a birth to a Shunammite woman whose husband seemed too old to father a child. Once the child is born, death comes to the child and God uses Elisha to raise the child from the dead. Elisha purifies a water well and a pot of stew. Elisha feeds a hundred men with 20 small portions of bread.

One of Elisha's most interesting miracles involved the healing of Naaman. Naaman was the commander of the army of Aram, a historical enemy to Israel. When Naaman was struggling with leprosy, a Jewish girl who had been captured and enslaved by the Arameans told Naaman's wife that a prophet Elisha could heal leprosy. The king of Aram sends Naaman with gifts to seek Elisha's healing touch.

The king of Israel sees this as a big set-up by the king of Aram. Elisha seems to have no fears. In fact, Elisha does not even bother to talk to Naaman. Elisha sends a messenger to tell Naaman to dip seven times in the Jordan River. Naaman is incensed. Initially, he does not plan to follow the instructions; however, the logic of his servant persuades him to give the dipping a try.

Sure enough, on the seventh dip, Naaman is healed. Naaman returns to offer bountiful gifts to Elisha. Elisha refuses the gifts and Naaman leaves a converted man. Elisha's servant tries to hoodwink Elisha and Naaman and get some of the goodies that

had been offered to Elisha. The servant gets the goodies -- and gets Naaman's leprosy as well. The servant wasn't too smart in thinking about God's and Elisha's ability to see.

Accounts of Elisha's miracles do not stop there. Elisha causes an iron ax head to float in water. Elisha sees to the cessation of a siege on Samaria. Also, Elisha opens the eyes of his servant to see the spiritual armies of God that outnumber the human armies of the king of Aram. Elisha sees the coming death of the king of Aram and prophesies that Hazael will succeed him as well.

Elisha lives to anoint Jehu as the next king of Israel, succeeding Ahab's son, Joram. The problem here was that Joram was still alive! Jehu gets the support of key men in the army. Jehu then proceeds to kill Joram, Joram's mom Jezebel, (and Ahaziah, king of Judah - just for good measure!) Jehu sees that the other 70 sons of Ahab are also killed, with their heads returned in baskets for display. Jehu reigned for 28 years and killed many other Israelites during this time. God did not approve of the excessive violence of Jehu. Ultimately, Jehu had to pay tribute to Assyria as protection money. Archaeologists have uncovered an Assyrian obelisk that has a carving of King Jehu bowing in subservience to the king of Assyria.

After Jehu's reign, Jehoash became king of Israel. He was an evil king who reigned for 16 years. Jehoash reigned when Elisha died. Interestingly, even Elisha as a dead man was the center of God's miraculous power. A dead man was thrown onto Elisha's body. At the point of contact, the dead man returned to life. Following Jehoash, Israel was ruled by Jeroboam II. This Jeroboam reigned 41 years in a way that secular historians would deem "successful." II Kings does not give us that impression. It notes that Jeroboam II was evil in the eyes of the Lord. Other biblical books are writings of prophets who were alive in Israel at the time. These prophets proclaimed the word of God that judgment was coming upon Israel. While the citizens might have thought life was great, judgment was in fact right around the corner.

Over the next the next 32 years and seven months, Israel had a succession of kings and assassinations. Zechariah lasted 6

months before assassination. Shallum was assassinated after one month. Menahem was king for 10 years before he died. Pekahiah ruled as an evil king for 2 years before assassination. Pekah was king for 20 years before his assassination.

A fellow named Hoshea was Pekah's assassin. Hoshea was an evil king who kept the throne 9 years. With his downfall came an end to a significant chapter of Jewish history. Hoshea was not merely assassinated by an aspiring king-wannabe. Hoshea and the Israelites were conquered by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria. Shalmaneser carried off the Jews and resettled them in other places. Shalmaneser also resettled the northern area (especially Samaria) with non-Jewish peoples. In an effort to appease the "local god" of the Israelites, Shalmaneser had a Jewish priest live among the resettled Samaritans to teach them Yahweh worship.

II Kings goes into quite a thorough discussion on the reasons for the downfall of Israel in II Kings 17. The judgment came because Israel:

1. sinned against God,
2. worshipped other gods and idols,
3. secretly did things against God,
4. refused to follow God's commands,
5. were stiff-necked (proud and stubborn)
6. would not listen to God,
7. imitated the pagans,
8. sacrificed their sons and daughters,
9. practiced divination and sorcery, and
10. persisted in these sins after constant warnings generation after generation.

B. *South History.*

Next week, we dissect II Kings for the history of the South (Judah).

III. POINTS TO TAKE HOME

A. God watches.

B. God is not mocked.

C. God reaches out to all who want and need him.

D. God can save.

E. God can judge.