

NATIONAL HISTORY continued

2nd Kings

2nd Kings 1

It is possible for a nation of people to go downhill so far and so fast, that God lets the inevitable conclusion happen. Inward corruption morally follows spiritual corruption and compromise. Soon idolatry takes the place of the worship and fear of God. Religious practices continue but they follow the teaching and form that most appeals to the population rather than the standards of a righteous, holy and unchangeable God. That has happened in this country so that now tolerance of sin, pleasure, materialism and self-fulfillment are the idols that most people worship.

However, going against the stream of man's opinion, success and pleasure, there are those who are still going upstream to the higher ground of fellowship with God. They have new life - divine life imparted by the Spirit of God, so they have the strength and fortitude to go against the forces of the downward flowing river of the world. They stand out when they are seen by others, and the down-sliding majority seeks to catch them and take them along with them.

The book of 2nd Kings is a continuation of 1st Kings in which the historical drift gains momentum and ends with the once favored nation taken captive. The dispersion of the Jewish people among the nations of the world took place, and even yet, though there is a recent secular nation of Israel, the chosen earthly people of God remain scattered throughout the world. There they will remain until our Lord Jesus Christ comes in glory and takes the throne of David from which He will rule for 1000 years over the nations of earth.

2nd Kings gives the account of the twelve failing and evil rulers of the northern tribes, Israel, and the succession of the kings of the southern tribes, Judah. There were two good kings in Judah and so it continued as a national identity 130 years longer than Israel.

It was during the years of failure and departure that God sent many prophets to call the people to repentance and to testify to the people the fact that God was still on His throne and was willing to receive them back to Himself if they would repent. Prophets from Elijah to Hosea warned and taught the people of Israel. From Micah to Obadiah, faithful prophets gave the message of God to Judah. There were brief moments of consideration given to the prophets but for the most part they were scorned, rejected and persecuted.

The challenge of dark days is to remain faithful and courageous in our lives for God in spite of that which pleases the majority of people. Testimony of the practices and service of such people is contained in the minor prophets. There were godly prophets and priests who lived among the people and did not compromise themselves, their message or their responsibility. God is still at work in situations and nations that are in terrible moral and spiritual conditions.

Ahijah the prophet, spoke for God in Israel during the reign of Jeroboam. When Ahab became king, he tolerated and promoted evil that brought famine as a punishment from God, and into that situation came Elijah, the prophet. After Ahab was killed at Ramoth-Gilead when Israel and Judah under Jehoshaphat attacked the Arameans, Ahaziah, Ahab's son became king. He had proposed a trade agreement with Judah at the beginning of his reign. They were intending to go into a shipping venture, but God stopped that unequal yoke.

Ahaziah was only king for two years and was known for his wickedness. It was then he fell through the railing of the upper floor and was seriously injured. Instead of turning to the Lord in repentance, he wanted to consult with a false god who was thought to be able to see into the future. Even though wicked men rule a nation, God is merciful when repentance is genuine. In this particular situation the Lord sent an angel to Elijah with a message rather than speaking to him personally. Ahaziah sent his messengers to consult the false god, but of greater authority, God sent His messenger. The answer to Ahaziah's request was clear and plain. "You will surely die!"

Elijah was certainly different in his dress so there was no way he would be confused with people of the worldly system. Ahaziah likely thought he could get Elijah to heal him because God had done miracles before through his prophet. But we cannot strike bargains with God so He will submit to our requests. One hundred men died before they realized the power and authority of the Lord. The third captain came in

humility with his request and it was granted. Far too often we act on our own without acknowledgement of our Lord's will and have to suffer consequences before we learn.

When God in sovereignty acts, there is no other recourse. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Wickedness brings serious consequences. A right attitude before the Lord will bring respect, humility and a call for mercy from the heart. This happened to the captain of fifty. It did not happen with Ahaziah who died as God had said. A prophet is a reliable witness when his prophecies happen as he said. False prophets make declarations, and perhaps some take place. A true prophet speaks for God and what he prophesies happens exactly as he said every time.

The Spirit of God used "holy men of old" to record certain events in the historical books of the Bible to instruct us. In this way we are able to see human and national events from God's perspective. These are for our "learning and admonition." Ahaziah had only two years as king and he was removed. Joram, his brother, became king and though he did evil, he wasn't as blatantly open as those before him.

2Kings 1:2. *"And Azariah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick: and he sent messengers, and said unto them, go inquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease."*

THOSE ARE FALSE GODS.

Strangely people seem to think
They need the latest or they'll sink
Into deep despair because they don't fit
The expectation of others who already have it -
So, gadgets and games they set out to buy,
Created by men - the newest technology -
It's supposed to satisfy - but it went up in smoke -
And your fun is gone, plus you now are broke.

The advertising says this unit is the latest -
You will get rich quick because this is the greatest
Way to gain material success -
So, get it now, pay later and you'll be like the rest
Who are up with the times and admired by all men.
If you get it now, prepare for your great gain.
After all, don't you want everyone to look up to you?
Add now to your possessions before opportunity is through.

You didn't get your way? Then go out and fight!
Those who don't agree with you have no real right
To expect you to live in peace with them unless they are like you -
So, get your guns and armaments - tell them you're coming through
To change them so to you they will be conformed
To what you think is right for them - more like the norm
That is accepted by those who live by us and are here -
And if they don't accept your demands, they will live in fear.

False gods that seem to attract so many, never bring content.
They lure you into sinful ways that Satan himself has sent
To make people think the newest inventions will bring peace of mind -
Or if you get more things around you, contentment you will find.
If you don't get your own way, then go and start a war -
But stop for a moment and consider what you want these for:
God has a purpose and pattern to follow that can give you peace -
His way brings grace and forgiveness - false gods can't give you these.

"Almighty God, there is no other God but Thee. These false guides and leaders that deceive seem to have taken over much of this nation. The people are discontented, in debt and despairing of any hope in the future. Please move by Thy Spirit and power to turn us all back to Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

2nd Kings 2

SPIRITUAL SUCCESSION

The passing of spiritual leadership from one generation of qualified men to the next has often been done based on the desire of the older to have the younger continue their work. When Elisha was called to follow Elijah, he was not coerced into it, but "burned his bridges" and went willingly. A time of watching, listening

and learning from one who is older is really a principle of succession that needed to be practiced. Training for specific tasks, and in particular for leadership, is done by observation as well as by communication. One may know all the right words and be quite familiar with scriptural doctrine, but when he comes to taking action and doing that which one has not done before, observing a godly leader acting for the Lord is the best way to learn.

Grace, dignity and integrity are all needed when a servant of God goes out before the people of God to make decisions and carry out the actions of his calling with wisdom. Elisha knew Elijah was nearly finished his ministry and wanted to be with him right to the end. He was totally committed to him personally and to the work that was being passed on to him. He also knew his own limitations and his need of God in the service of the Lord. Both of these are needed to accomplish a successful ministry for the Lord. Admission of our inability in ourselves is a good place to start in any ministry in which we are called to serve.

There will be others who are involved in similar labors for the Lord who see mainly obstacles and difficulties, and so they wait until a more opportune time. When we know we have been given a task or an on-going work for the Lord, to wait is usually because of a lack of faith. To want to know the actual outcome before we start is not wise stewardship. The "sons of the prophets," or those who have been schooled to do a prophetic ministry, often are more concerned with obstacles than opportunities. These various groups who knew what was happening, just stood and waited for events to unfold. Elisha wanted to be part of the event and get the blessing that comes from going forward in faith.

A clear objective on the part of one who is called to lead, will not be easily deviated from even though others want to impart their own opinions on you. Fifty men watched from a distance. Elisha learned personally how a man of faith deals with obstacles. When his determination had been tested and proven, Elijah then was ready to give his final lesson in faith and leadership. The request was to accomplish more for God, not to be more powerful or better than Elijah. If our desire is to do great things for God, then we can ask them of Him. Our personal ambitions or self-interest must be gotten rid of. Then the Sovereign Lord can do with us as He chooses from His infinite wisdom and power. Elijah left the answer in the hands of the Lord, and Elisha kept his eyes on Elijah as his part of answer.

The conclusion of a person's ministry may not always be dramatic like that of Elijah. But a "good and faithful servant" can entrust all of the efforts of his life to our Gracious Lord and depart in peace. Even though Elijah went to heaven without dying, it may be that both he and Enoch will be the two who will testify for God during the Tribulation. When they have finished their ministry, they will be slain and then raised three days later and taken into heaven.

Elisha testified at the catching up of Elijah in the whirlwind of fire in a chariot, that Elijah was the power in Israel, not the king. When Enoch was "translated," he was half-way from Adam to Abraham. Elijah's transport to heaven was half-way from Abraham to Christ in which he had been ministering to a nation rather than all of humanity like Enoch. Elisha knew immediately what he was called to do, and stepping out in faith, used Elijah's cloak in the same way as his teacher and it worked. When we act on what we know has been tried and proven, we can expect to experience unknown results by the guidance of God and His divine power working through us.

The other prophets had not learned personally the power of an active, vital faith at work. So, they went looking for the body of Elijah. Their own limitations kept them thinking like natural men rather than spiritual. Principles of faith that Elisha had learned from Elijah, were put into practice for our learning. He used a "new bowl" that had never been polluted by an earthly use to hold the salt that was symbolic of the covenant a faithful God has with His people. God was still working on their behalf in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness to Him.

The healing of the water; the death of those vocal, mocking, apostate young men who came out of Bethel to mock the servant of God, as well as the parting of the Jordan River, give witness to the fact that God was with Elisha as He had been with Elijah. We are not called to be exactly like those who have taught us, nor is God limited to act in certain ways through us. It is our responsibility to do what we do "as unto the Lord," and not merely to please men.

For our learning we need to understand some things we do for our Lord will be the same as those who went before us. Then there is implanted in those who serve God, a spirit of discernment, put there by the Holy Spirit who gives us common sense to know when something is appropriate to use or not. Also, we need to be aware of the power of God behind decision-making that may bring judgment on others. God is using His chosen servants to lead His people today in similar ways as He used the prophets of old.

2Kings 2:13. *“He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan;”*

SUCCESSION.

He had shown his commitment on an altar of fire.
Ten years of ministering showed he was not for hire.
Now the time had come for him to reach out and take
The mantle of leadership that there be no break
In the leadership of the people where God had him placed;
The spirit given for leadership was seen in his face.
The successor was confirmed when he received the double portion
That was given by custom to the firstborn son.

There are things to be done among the people of God -
That needs the vigor and enthusiasm of those able to shoulder the load.
Guidance from the older should be given to the next generation,
That will give them principles to apply to each situation.
The first one to be assured of, is the approval of the Lord -
When answers to earnest prayers come to them from God's Word,
Or a response in circumstances that are given to prove
We are in the mind of God's will when obstacles are removed.

Some people will look on with skepticism and doubt
For quite some time until they see you are about
The work God gave you and then they can see
God's approval of you and what you have come to be.
There will be those who oppose and speak with disdain,
Because they wanted things their own way, not God's way again -
But don't despair though you may have to rebuke them,
For God sees and hears all, so leave consequences to Him.

“Father, I am going to meet with a number of Thy finest servants shortly. They have been left without very much guidance from those who are older. Please help me to speak for Thee in a way that is obviously guided by Thy Word. Let me teach them principles that they need to hear. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

2nd Kings 3

STRANGE COALITION

The reputation of a person may live on long after they are dead, especially if they are noted for doing evil. Idol worship had been instituted throughout the kingdom of Israel by Jeroboam, and to a greater or lesser degree was carried on by those who followed him. Once some action that leads to a practice is initiated, it is very difficult to stop it. We must be aware of the fact that if we are responsible for making any changes to the work of God to which we are called, it must be scriptural and able to be carried out in fellowship with God and His people. A task or an action may seem trivial at the time, but the outcome of the matter or event is what is important.

The people of Moab had been in subjection to Israel since the time David was king over a united Israel. The land of Israel was the most strategic and most fertile part of the Near East and was envied by other nations that wanted that land. Perhaps it was because of the death of Ahab that Mesha thought Israel under Jehoram (Joram) was weak and so he refused to pay the annual taxes. To maintain the income received Jehoram mobilized his army and asked Jehoshaphat of Judah to join in attacking the kingdom of Moab. It is not uncommon for us as the servants of God to act on our own initiative without taking the time to be assured of the mind of the Lord about a matter.

As the two armies went the round-about way through the wilderness of Edom, the king of Edom and his forces joined in the coalition making it three. Jehoshaphat was still recognized by the Lord as one who feared God and maintained the priesthood and the temple worship under divine authority. The king of Edom was actually under the authority of Jehoshaphat. Even though he should not have been allied with the kings of Israel and Edom because of their idol-worship and rejection of the Lord God of Israel, the Lord honored him and his request. It may have been the Moabites were even more wicked than the Edomites and those of the northern tribes of Israel.

To link up with those who are in the world and of the world is not right for those who follow the Lord and His word. We are called to separate ourselves from that which is not of God and has self-motivated intent

behind the action. Even when it may seem advantageous financially, socially and religiously, the command is still to "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord."

The lack of water for the men and animals would have effectively stopped the invasion of Moab. Jehoram blamed the Lord for the set-back even though it was his initiative that started the whole venture. When their plans seemed to fail, then the three kings turned to the Lord. This is not uncommon when we act on our own. We have our own interests at heart, but when they seem to fail, we turn to the Lord. It is wisdom to seek the Lord before taking an action and then we are assured that whatever the outcome, it is according to His will and purpose, not ours.

Elisha must have been with the forces of Israel under the guidance of the Lord who was preparing the whole event to demonstrate to all, the fact that God was still in control of the affairs of men and nations. Jehoshaphat had been in a similar situation before with Ahab and knew that ultimately it is the Lord God only who knows the end from the beginning. The prophet's challenge to them to seek advice from the false gods Israel and Edom were following, was really a test. Jehoshaphat must have been embarrassed to have even been there. Compromising situations can leave us with a sense of guilt and shame unless we truly believe the Lord has us there for a reason.

Jehoram, in spite of his actions, had a certain fear of God and an awareness of that which was right. In this event he was sure of the leading of the Lord for some reason. Even though his interests were financial, the Lord was using the event for a greater purpose. To the background of music, Elisha set a tone and then gave a clear statement as to what the Lord was going to do for them for the sake of Jehoshaphat. It can be expected by those who live and act by faith that "Them that honor Me, I will honor." The interests of God are for the well-being of those who trust Him.

The resulting victory was because the Moabites thought the water in the valley was blood, and they walked right into the ambush. This was without a doubt to all involved, God's intervention. The Moabites knew the strange coalition of kings was unusual, but their anticipation of victory ended in the almost total decimation of the men of the nation. It must have been well known that Jehoshaphat was different in his beliefs and actions from the other two kings. Unless the Lord is in the plan men devise, it is to be expected that unholy alliances will fail. God can override the plans of men and bring victory in the most unexpected ways.

The last desperate attempt of the remaining men of Moab to turn Edom against Israel and Judah failed. The king of Moab actually sacrificed his oldest son to the false gods in the plain view of everyone. This was totally abhorrent to all the Israelites who saw it, but instead of pressing ahead and grasping full victory they turned back in anger and never finished what they had begun. To leave evil influences is like leaving a "little leaven" to leaven the whole lump. Even though we may experience positive results in our labors if we join with the world in some benevolent work, that does not justify stopping short of that which God intends and expects of us.

2Kings 3:11. *"But Jehoshaphat said, is there not here a prophet of the Lord, that we may inquire of the Lord by him? And one of the king of Israel's servant answered and said, here is Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah."*

PRINCIPLES OF SERVICE.

It seemed like a menial task at the time -
To serve an older prophet didn't make his name to shine.
But what Elisha did when he ministered to God's man,
Was serving God Himself when pouring water on Elijah's hands.

There are things we do that seem trivial in the eyes of other men -
But God looks on with favor when we do even small things for Him.
We may not have considered it much - may even have forgot
The little things done long ago, but God forgets them not.

Even a cup of cold water given in a disciple's name -
God says has a reward; it refreshed the traveler who came.
Who knows - maybe an angel stopped for a little rest -
And the simple things of hospitality, God looks at as the best.

When we have learned the little things, God trusts us with things bigger.
Principles of service we have learned to apply when we stop to figure
How to deal with problems that many people will affect,
And we must come up with a plan of action which we dare not neglect.

The will and work of God, falls into a pattern we see.
He gave His Word to guide our decisions, and says, "He has done it unto Me."

If it is the least of His brethren, or the company as a whole -
The service rendered whether small or great, begins within the soul.

Love for the Lord shows in deeds for others done in the spirit of love.

We observe a need that has to be met and give of what we have.

The Lord takes the little and makes it large, the enemy is defeated -

And we learn that some water poured on hands is all that was really needed.

“Father God, who knows every need and is the source of all supply - Make me aware of how I can best respond to the needs of those I will serve today, and in the days to come. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

2nd Kings 4

OUR CARING, FAITHFUL GOD

When apostasy is active in both the government and in religious circles, we have a tendency to think that God has abandoned His people and the only thing we can look forward to is judgment. However, among all the declension and departure, God works in tender concern as He cares for those who love and obey Him in spite of all that is going on around us. The miracles recorded in this chapter show us areas in our lives in which God works to meet the needs of those who call on His name.

He met the financial needs of a poor widow. He gave life when hope was gone. He purified that which would have brought death. He created what was needed out of nothing when he provided bread for one hundred men and had some left over. He is the God of all grace. He is the Giver of life. He is the Power over death. He is the Creator who creates much out of nothing. He is our caring, faithful God.

The creditor to whom the widow owed money did not act according to the law of God toward the widow and her sons. It is true debtors were allowed to settle their debts by becoming indentured servants until their debt was paid or six years had passed, but the Israeli creditors were not to take advantage of debtors in times of extreme need. The law is the standard it is true, but compassion for the needy should be shown. When the Lord worked a miracle for the widow through the oil that flowed from her almost empty jar, His provision kept coming as long as there were containers to receive it. Faith and obedience work in the lives of God's people when we do not limit God to work within the limits of our boundaries. His grace is sufficient and abounding beyond all we can ask for or even think.

The term "A holy man of God" was used by the Shunemite woman to describe Elisha to her husband. This is the only place we read of this when referring to a prophet. Even though she was "great" in the sense of being prosperous, she recognized the importance of one who served the Lord among His people even in their time of apostasy. In Elisha's service for the Lord, he passed by her home often and stopped to eat. Out of the kindness of her heart she sensed a need he had that she was able to meet. The word "hospitality" means that a need is being met. By us being hospitable, we can serve and help others and that is recognized by the Lord. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." A place to stay, a meal provided, and an invitation to the lonely are all ways we can practice hospitality to the benefit and the well-being of others.

The room, the stool (chair), the bed and the candlestick were a comfort to Elisha, and to show appreciation he wanted to do something for the woman of Shunem. Gratitude and appreciation expressed is never out of place and should be given to one who has shown us kindness and been a help to us. "A man's gift maketh room for him," still holds true today. A token of appreciation is often remembered for a long time.

To have a son was certainly the desire of the woman's heart, but the fear of disappointment seemed to be her concern even more than lack of confidence in the prophecy of Elisha. What Elisha said did come to pass and confirmed the fact to her that he was a true prophet. In these dark days in which there is so much said by those who lead us in various areas of life, and yet little is produced that has been promised, we may forget that "God is still on His throne, and He will remember His own."

The birth of the boy was evidence that God cared for the woman and in grace provided that which she wanted most. His word is reliable today even as it was to her when He promised her a son. But the death of her son was a test of her faith. "Women received their dead raised to life again," stands in the hall of faith in Hebrews 11 as a testimony to the Shunemite woman's faith. Great loss and tragedy may come to us as a test of our faith rather than just an act of life and death. When we are exercised before the Lord to live by faith, then testing times usually come.

The woman of Shunem did not settle back and grieve, but in faith went out to the one who had promised the blessing of God upon her. In faith she stated the cause of her distress and left the results with the Lord. In

the Lord's own time and way, He demonstrated again His love and grace. Our God is trustworthy. We may wonder what is going to happen next, but the power of God is not limited when He chooses to act on behalf of His own people. Elisha knew it was God who was the Giver of life, and so he prayed before taking the action of resuscitation. Elijah had acted similarly and that may be the reason Elisha took the action he did. The grateful woman acknowledged the blessing of God on her knees when she bowed down in thanksgiving before taking her son and moving on with her life. For any and all blessings we receive it is appropriate to express our thanks to God and move on with a strengthened faith.

"Death in the pot" in a time of famine indicated that there was a need that exceeded the normal careful preparation of food. Famine was in the land because the people of God had ignored the covenant relationship, they had with Him. The young man who gathered the wild gourds did it innocently seeking only to contribute to the needs of those who with whom he was associated. We are not able to disassociate ourselves from the results of departure, but need to be consistent in our lives before the Lord in spite of departure from the truth of God by the majority of people. Death in the pot does not limit God and the meal put in the pot was the means by which the Lord assured His faithful servants that He was still in control of life and death. He alone has the power to give life and has authority over death.

The loaves of bread that came from the first fruits of the harvest were given by someone who looked on Elisha as the true representative of God, not the idol-worshipping king and false priests. Some things may seem insignificant to us as of little value, but even bread when given to the Lord, can be a source of blessing to many because He adds His blessing to the gift. God didn't create something different but used the same thing and enlarged upon it until it was more than sufficient for the needs of one hundred men. When we do something, or give something that is in accordance with the word of God, He can use that in ways that we never even thought of. This miracle is a foreshadowing of the miracle the Lord Jesus Christ did when He was here. When we give to the Lord, He can use that to multiply blessing that reaches far beyond our capacity.

In passages of scripture like this one, we are brought to consider the blessing, the kindness and the care of God even in times of departure, not just the righteous judgment of God. There are consequences for sin that will surely come to pass. But there are also blessings for faithfulness in dark times that shine like lights to guide us to the way in which the Lord wants to lead us. Perhaps in these times we may be the light to guide others.

2Kings 4:10. *"Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither."*

MEETING NEEDS.

There are different ways of meeting needs
For we are all quite different.
The miraculous things may be well known,
And the simple things stay hidden.
In the miraculous things God's power is shown -
Meeting needs is a way to reveal Him -
In the little things, though to most unknown,
God's gracious care through you is given.

To a weary traveler a little private room
With a bed, a table and a stool -
Plus, a light to chase away the gloom -
Are all that is needed as special tools
To prepare one for the coming day
When new tasks are there awaiting
Our attention by what we do and say
In a time, which soon is fleeting.

Providing money from a source at hand
Or nursing one back to health -
Purifying food that has potential of hurting every man
Even multiplying food by using personal wealth.
Whatever means God chooses to use,
Is marvelous to behold -
But even the simple things we are willing to lose,
Can evidence of God's grace to others unfold.

God knows each need but will often plan
A way that with Him we can share -
The work of His kingdom even though we're only men.
Through us He reveals His care;
If I look around, I am sure to see
A way to assist some others.
A fundamental principle for me
Is to see those in need as brothers.

“Gracious Father, I thank Thee for believers who have made bed chambers for me to use. I am so grateful for those people. Bless them I pray, for blessing me. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

2Kings 5:1. *“Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was great man with his master, and honorable, because by him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria: he was a mighty man in valor, but he was a leper.”*

BUT HE WAS A LEPER.

Admired and Accomplished; Brave and Beloved; a Courageous Captain – but he was a leper.

Decorated Deliverer; Experienced leader; Famous soldier – but he was a leper.

Great with his master; Honorable with his people; Judicious in judgment – but he was a leper.

Keeper of the king; Leader of his household; Master of his servants – but he was a leper.

Naaman was his name; Opportunity came; Prophet to see – because he was a leper.

Quickly to go; Recovery to get; Simple instructions – for he was a leper.

Turned away in a rage; Understood not God's ways; Victim of his pride – he still was a leper.

Wash and be clean; Exactly what he was told he did; You are clean – no longer a leper.

Zeal for self or the wrong reasons, cannot cure a leper. Zeal for God is evidence of being clean.

It's not enough to know what's right, or even where to go;
This information, though it's good, can never heal the soul.
To face up to a problem, and our helplessness to face;
Is probably the first step taken by all sinners saved by grace.

Pride is a dangerous enemy; it triggers all the rest -
Self-will and evil anger, follow after pride's bequest.
The only way to overcome pride's stiffened back for sure,
Is to stop and humble down oneself, and to act on grace's cure.

I learn from this great man of old, how not to act when told,
Of the simple act of faith to take, when of grace I do take hold.
The alphabet of this man's life, makes it very plain to see;
The pride that almost damned his soul, can be the pride in me.

To listen to instructions, though simple they may seem;
Is the first faith-step that I can make, that my soul can be made clean.
Grace is always waiting for the humbled, longing soul,
To come in true repentance, and the sinner will be made whole.

“Holy Father, I learn a lesson again today that I have been taught often before - pride is a dangerous foe. I am asking here today for willingness to learn the lesson of humility, and how valuable it is. I need grace, not pride. Amen.”

2nd Kings 5

SIMPLY BELIEVE AND OBEY

North of Israel is Syria that seldom has ever had peaceful terms with Israel. The Arameans under the military leadership of Naaman was the dominant force in that area when Elisha was a prophet in Israel. When David was king of united Israel, tribute was paid by the Arameans, but by Elisha's time the weakened tribes of the north were raided by them, and it was then Naaman got a captive girl to serve his wife. Of interest is the fact that it was the Lord who had given the victory to the Syrians. In the sovereignty of God, He uses who He will no matter what nation or religious persuasion to fulfill His purposes. When His own

people fail to fulfill their responsibility, He may use the unconverted to accomplish His sovereign intentions. God has not limited Himself to a particular group of people or to some protocol to follow. He is Lord over all.

A person with leprosy was thought to be contagious, and was isolated from society when that disease became obvious. Likely a number of the diseases we have today would be called leprosy then. Some are extremely contagious and some are incurable. That is why leprosy is often spoken of as a type of sin. People think some sins are worse than others because of their effect on society, but open or private, blatant or subtle, inward or outward - sin is sin. The consequences of sin are death. Separation from society because of leprosy is like the separation of sinners from God. By nature, we are "Dead in trespasses and sins" which describes the condition of unbelievers. "You hath He quickened (made alive) whom were dead ..." is what happens when faith takes root and one is born again into the family of God.

An unnamed child was used to bring hope to the mighty general Naaman. In God's plans He arranged for a little girl to be placed in a particular place, at a particular time to give lessons to us that need to be learned, not just to bring healing to a leper. When God works through people, there is no reason for pride to enter no matter how great or small the position one may hold in life. In His sovereign grace, He provides opportunities for us to pass on our faith to others who are in the place of spiritual death. We may never know in our lifetime the results of one act of faith or how it has been a benefit to others.

The maid to Naaman's wife did not hold bitterness against her master but had the spirit that is expected of a child of God in any situation in which we may be found. To bless others is our calling in the world today. There are answers to the problems and needs that people have. What people need is what we have already found in our Lord Jesus Christ. We know that "There is no respect of persons with God," and that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son..." The need of salvation and eternal life for every man, woman and child in the world should motivate us to pass on what we know, even if our understanding of divine things is limited. The maid knew who represented God and that moved her to pass on a message of hope.

We cannot help the misunderstanding of people when they hear the Gospel because most people have preconceived ideas about how God works in the lives of people. Even though Naaman took matters into his own hands and did things in his own way, his step of faith to leave Syria and go to Samaria was a start in the right direction. People still think in their own frame of reference, but our sovereign God can use even a wicked king to give some understanding of a matter, even when it is in the negative. Worldly wealth, a wrong idea about God, opposition from others can all be used in a way to open the door to seeking the Lord with all of one's heart. We may never know what word or action will be used when God saves a soul, but we know He knows the thoughts and intents of one's heart and can direct one to the humbling of pride and obedience to a simple thoughtful comment.

The instructions from Elisha who was under divine authority; the attitude of a proud man; the caring words of a simple man were all used to bring the proud man down to yield his will to the will of God. When that happens, God is willing to reveal Himself in saving power, and in this case healing power, to the humbled soul. One has well said, "God is determined to bring the proud man down, and He is determined to bring the humbled man up." God "gives grace to the humble" regardless of who they are or what they might have done. There is a preciseness in the divine order of salvation. "Repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," cannot be substituted with "I did it my way."

"Seven ducks in a dirty river" was a simple instruction. Some people, think it is "too easy" to be saved by grace alone "and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." They seem to think there should be some physical or metaphysical reaction from themselves to give them the assurance of the value of that which Christ has done for them. To not accept the gift of eternal life without some emotional response to make it real, or physical experience to assure one, of the reality of the offer, is to doubt the words of the Giver. Naaman had to act on the authority of divine instruction, not on his perception of what should be done. There are some who want salvation and ask for that assurance by the word from a preacher. They want him to say, "You are saved." If they could see a light or hear an audible voice or feel some unusual emotion they would be satisfied. But it is by grace alone we are saved. It is through faith in Christ we are saved. It is the work of Christ that saves and the word of God that makes faith real.

The results of Naaman's action of faith were obvious the moment he did what God said through the prophet. It is not a gradual process that brings the healing of one's soul. It is the instantaneous action of a satisfied God that produces life. The evidence of this new life is then seen in the changed life of a one who has believed in Him. The change is the result, not the reason nor the process. A whole new attitude was seen in Naaman when he went back to the house of Elisha. Now he was able to speak directly to Elisha and testified

as to the reality of his faith. No longer was he looking for some magic power to maintain this new life he had received. Now he got assurance from the prophet that God would be with him and he was told to "Go in peace." Rest to the soul is a result of knowing one has been accepted by God.

Obedience to God begins with humility. God's ways are best and He wants our obedience to Him. Then He can accomplish His will in a way most suited to Him. God's salvation cannot be earned by works, paid for by labor or money nor bargained for. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ - His Person and His work is what He expects of the seeking sinner. Naaman did not add God to his worship of other gods. He testified to his faith in the one true God, but knew he still had his duty to perform to his king. We may have obligations from which we cannot escape but there is a way to please God when we are willing to submit to His divine authority in living as well as for salvation.

Elisha's servant Gehazi was involved in serving God's man but his motivation was not love and devotion to God. It is impossible to 'serve God and mammon' at the same time. He accepted money that had been offered to someone else. He thought God's blessing could be valued by money. He was willing to lie to cover his motive of getting what did not belong to him and he had no right to claim. Greed and deceit are in direct contrast with grace and faith. Naaman was blessed by God's grace and responded in faith. Gehazi was cursed by greed and responded with deceit. Both of these are lessons of which we need to be reminded.

2Kings 5:11. *"But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, behold I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper."*

OBEDIENCE BEGINS WITH HUMILITY.

The plans of God are so different than ours -
What we often overlook is in every fact -
As it unfolds in our life, from His hand there pours
Blessings on many to complete one act.
A little captive maid had learned in her youth
Of the one true God who can meet every need.
Her parents, though absent, had taught her the truth -
Of humility and obedience when to God we pay heed.

As we get older, pride raises its mean head -
So, we think we are in full control.
We forget the consequences when by pride we are led,
To where pride brings damnation to the soul.
But even then, if we stop to listen
To one who can see beyond here to the end -
It may be with humility and even tears that glisten -
God will act for us when our head and knees bend.

Our thoughts are not God's thoughts, nor our ways His -
Obedience demands our submission to His will.
It begins with humility and obedience follows this -
The path of faith seldom leads downhill.
So, when people of faith pass on what God says -
We are wise when in silence we wait to hear God's voice.
It may come through a child or through unusual ways -
But obedience with humility guides to the right choice.

It happens every day in things both big and small -
I have to act in faith about many things.
The just who live by faith will consider that they all -
Are allowed or directed by God who blessings bring.
I need to start each day with this thought engraved on my heart,
"It is God who is in control of each unfolding event."
When humility is there, and obedience at the start -
I will rejoice in whatever result my God has sent.

"Father, I am reminded of the meekness and lowliness of Christ. It makes me ashamed to think I often fall into the deep pit of self-exaltation. 'Preserve me, O God, for in Thee do I put my trust.' Amen."

2nd Kings 6

UNSEEN REALITIES

In the teaching process, to follow chronological order is not always the best way to learn a lesson. Some subjects are best addressed in settings that are most suitable for the lesson to get maximum impact. The miracles the Lord performed through His servant, Elisha, covered a period of about fifty years. In the account of the axe-head that floated, the point of the incident is made for the benefit of those who are unbelievers. Is God interested in the small things that happen to us personally? Or are His concerns only with the life of a nation and the impact faith in Him has on the greatest number of people?

The "sons of the prophets" were not the greatest bunch of people. They didn't take care of the needs of a widow of one of their group even though it meant she would have to sell her sons as slaves. At least one of them was not aware of what was good and bad to eat so he probably was not used to going out on a regular basis to meet the needs of others. A third was not used to the physical labor needed to cut logs and lost his axe-head. Elisha was there to use his wisdom and maturity in divine service to meet the need of those who were incapable. His answer to the problem was to "cut" a stick and throw it into the water and the axe-head floated. Someone else was there who knew how to use an ax. When we fail, we need someone to turn to who knows what is needed and how to do it.

Making a larger meeting place for the people of God to meet does not escape the interest of God. To borrow a tool from another person is not wrong, but it is to be expected that it will be returned in good shape when one has finished. It may seem like a small thing, but one's character is made evident if when it is returned it is in as good or better condition than when it was borrowed. A broken tool that is brought back to the owner is a testimony that you are not as important to him as his own self-centered interest. Some will even lie to cover up their failure in some way.

The prophets needed a larger place. That was a good thing. They took steps to meet the need and during that time the axe head was lost in the river. That was a bad thing, particularly if it was caused by carelessness. It may have been simply an unfortunate problem if it was totally a surprise. In either case, "The borrower is servant to the lender," and it is up to the borrower to make restitution. To replace an item that would have been as scarce as an axe-head in that society in that day, would have been very difficult. God knows the circumstances of every situation and is able to meet the need according to His will. He chose to use His power to supersede the gravitational pull of nature, and that which could not happen, actually took place. A testimony of trustworthiness was maintained. A man's faith in the God he served was strengthened. Elisha's calling as a prophet was affirmed. The people of God have been assured of God's interest in the small things of life all through the passing generations.

Another lesson for us to learn is that no matter what is happening in the world at large, our omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent Lord is aware of it all. Decisions made by people in secret; plans made in self-interest; attitudes held - even "the thoughts and intents of the heart," are open before the Lord. The Syrian king could not get ahead with his invasion plans because of divine intervention on behalf of the people of God, even though they were not in obedience to Him.

Faith makes us conscious of the presence of God in every situation in life, whether it be good or bad. God's power is not limited even if our spiritual eyesight is. On the occasions when difficulties seem impossible to overcome, we need to remember there is a greater strength available to us because "greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world." Those who are "heirs of salvation" obey His commandments and listen to His voice, are ministered to by an "innumerable company of angels" who serve and care for us, even though we never see them. The eyes of Elisha's servant were opened to the unseen reality of the heavenly host that circled the city on the high ground with their horses and chariots of fire.

The same Lord who can open the eyes to see unseen realities, can close the eyes of those who oppose to Him to earthly realities. Blindness and defeat go together at times when people are in opposition to God. The Aramean army was blinded by the Lord and led into the center of the walled city of Samaria where they were taken captive by the power of God. He can make an axe-head swim in assistance to one of His own servants. He can bring a whole army to surrender without "firing a shot." Whether a matter is great or small, He is the sovereign God who can do what He chooses - and He gives us the privilege of serving Him.

Our God can also bring a whole nation to its knees by shutting off its food supply. "The fullness of the earth" is His and it is His choice as to whether the bounty beneath our feet is released or not. The actions of people under stress reveal what is in our hearts. When poverty and hunger strikes, our faith in God is put to the test. In spite of the ways God had miraculously worked on behalf of the nation, Joram still maintained his attitude of unrepentance and unbelief. Even when his people began behaving worse than animals, he still blamed God and His servant Elisha for his own sins and the consequences thereof. In his anger against God he tore his own clothes, rather than in repentance for his sin and the sorrow sin brings. National sin calls for national

repentance. That calls for those who lead to humble themselves in repentance and turn to God. Then the citizens will be inclined to follow their lead.

Apparently Jehoram was about to surrender to the Syrians rather than bow to God. His blindness to heavenly and spiritual realities never was lifted because his faith was only in himself and the false gods he worshipped. It is wise for us to never be limited to that which is physical when it comes to the issues we face in life, whether they be small or great. God can make people blind to earthly reality and can give sight to spiritual reality. He waits for our faith to be demonstrated in appropriate actions in all matters of life we face.

2Kings 6:16. *“And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.”*

UNSEEN REALITIES.

Much around us is real though unseen.
There is present with us now and always has been
The air we breathe, the five senses we have -
All the unseen realities are what God gave
To remind us continually of His Person and Power -
That Life-Source is revealed in mountains or flowers.
We are without excuse to believe because what we can see -
Makes us to consider all the unseen realities.

There are unseen persons that are not seen by men.
Angels surround the saints and protect the children.
There are heavenly hosts that honor and praise God.
There are demonic foes we resist by the power of the Lord.
The Holy Spirit is unseen and He dwells within
The body of believers; also convicts unbelievers of sin.
The Lord himself is in our midst when we gather;
He promised to be with us, and also God the Father.

So even though we are in the world surrounded by enemies -
We are protected and guided by unseen Realities.
It is not necessary to see them for we live by faith -
And experience these realities through God's kindness and grace.
It doesn't make something right because I may see
What I consider to be true because it's a visible reality.
My eyes may deceive me and cause me to stray -
But unseen realities experienced by faith are with me to stay.

“Almighty God, revealed to us in so many ways: my mind and heart, my senses and life all remind me of Thy Person, Thy Power, and Thy grace. We are traveling today and I ask Thee that these unseen realities will guide and protect us through this journey. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

2nd Kings 7

GOD CAN DO ANYTHING

In response to Jehoram's angry frustrated comment against Elisha and the Lord, Elisha answered with a prophecy that not only would the siege be lifted, but there would be plenty to eat. The king knew the siege was against the city because Elisha lived there. Elisha knew the king had determined to kill him. The elders of the people were with Elisha rather than the king when he sent someone to murder him. The answer Elisha gave was not believed because it was not what fits normal human experience. Out of the ordinary living goes along with faith in our Lord. We need to set our hope in God when we are tempted to be preoccupied with problems rather than maintain our fellowship with God. An obstacle to us may be an opportunity to Him.

It is normal human response to focus our attention on the negative and the difficulties we face in life, instead of waiting with our faith in God for the results He has planned. If we can have, or form, an attitude of trust and expectancy in the sovereign acts of God, we will be strengthened in faith rather than frustrated and angry. No situation is impossible with God. No need we have is beyond His ability to meet. No person is able to make happen or stop from happening the events the Lord plans by His sovereign will.

The laws of Israel prevented lepers from living inside a city. That was to prevent the transmission of communicable diseases. It was a naturally impossible situation in which the hungry four lepers were found. To go into the city meant they would die from starvation even if they broke the law. To stay where they were meant death because there was nothing there for them to eat. The decision to cast themselves on the mercy of the Syrians was the only option they could see. People often wait with a fatalistic attitude for something to happen instead of considering what they could or should do to change the situation. "Why sit we here until

we die" should be the attitude of those who have been waiting for God to do more for them than He already has. Even the smallest movement of faith has a positive result.

Once a person takes the first step of faith, the second one is opened up before them. God's grace provides an abundant supply that lies just before those who respond in faith to a known need, or an invitation given. The four leprous men did not wait until morning, but acted on the decision they had made. They found that God had worked on their behalf before they even got to the camp of the Syrians. There was full provision for them that was way beyond what they "could ask or think." Elisha's servant had seen the host of heaven and the chariots of fire. The Syrians had heard the sound of the host and it made them panic and flee in terror leaving everything behind.

To hear of the power and work of God, opens the mind to pay attention and perhaps act in faith. But a premature response to what one hears without understanding, may lead one to act only in fear. What we see by the eyes of faith and understanding, is what leads us to trust in the living God and do what He says. Fear is a legitimate emotion, but to act only in fear may mislead us and make our condition even worse than before. When we can see "by the word of God," that which is true and put our trust in Him, then we can experience the blessings that come by grace. "By grace ye are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

Open before the four needy men was all they could want - and more. It is a natural response to one who has experienced the blessings of God's grace, to want to pass that on to others who are in need. The "fullness of God" makes provision for all who avail themselves of it. For the man who mocked Elisha's prophecy, and in so doing mocked God, there was no hope. To question what God says is not only dangerous, but can be fatal. To accept what God provides is to experience God's grace. To reject God's provision brings judgment.

When we have received that which God provided for us, there is no reason to "wait for daylight" or "a more convenient season" to tell others the good news. It is possible for us to be so preoccupied with our own blessings that we forget there are others with whom we should share our faith. That which God has provided for us is available to others. Our faith may be small but our God is great. Our resources may be low and our doubts strong, but God can open the doors of heaven to us and pour us out a blessing from His great abundance.

2Kings 7:9. *"Then they said one to another, we do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the kings household."*

A DAY OF GOOD TIDINGS.

Things don't always happen in the way we expect.
Life-events may not be predictable like a train on its track.
One day may seem tedious like it will never end -
The next day's so busy, it seems like it is over before we begin.
But any day can be good if we stop to count our blessings -
Even if the losses are great, we know who allowed them.
If we hunger and thirst, we know we are alive.
We may have to trust God to send us a basic supply,
But when He does that it seems to make us more thankful -
Whether our needs are met by the bushel, or a simple handful.
If we allow God to work things out in and for His way -
Whether we admit it or not, it is a very good day.
The results are not all in by the time the sun goes down -
What God has accomplished today may continue to abound.

Good tidings come in different forms - it may be a Gospel message -
Or an expected phone call from someone who had a safe passage.
It may be a doctor's report after a loved one who was ill
Has learned that recovery is on the way, though effects are felt still.
To a child it is good news when they win or get a good grade.
To an older person it is a promise a loved one is coming to stay.
When God changes a situation where something bad brings good,
The result that we hear of later, is far better that we thought it could.
Grace that brings salvation is always good tidings to hear -
For going through trying times, it is good news to know God is near.
A believer on their dying bed finds comfort that they'll soon be home.
For all those who are saved it's good tidings that the Lord will come.

“Father, may I always look for evidence of Thy hand working whenever something seems to be bad. I want to see Thy purposes being fulfilled when the normal disappointments in life come. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

2nd Kings 8

FAITHFUL IN TROUBLED TIMES

The Near and Middle East has always been a hotbed of confusion and bloodshed in the tribes and nations in that area. How wonderful it is of God to choose one of the most difficult areas of the world to unfold His truth and His grace to mankind. Against the backdrop of idolatry, departure from God on the part of His people, and on-going conflict among nations, we are given examples of faith and individual consistency in such a place. One of those was a "great" woman of Shunem who opened her home and provided a place for Elisha, the servant of God.

The prophet knew ahead of time that famine was coming on Israel from the hand of God as a covenant curse on them because of national sin. He was concerned for this family who had shown hospitality and kindness to him. Those who serve the Lord have both public and personal responsibilities to the Lord's people. It was known throughout the nations of the Middle East that Elisha was a prophet of God. How touching it is that such a famous person would make sure those who cared for him were cared for during times of national calamity. A famine of seven years is a long time to struggle to survive.

Perhaps someone had claimed her property while she and her family were away, or the king may have taken the land himself because no one had been there during the famine. Whoever was king at the time of this event, must have been a new king who was not aware of the miracles done by the Lord through the prophet Elisha, and it must have been before Gehazi was stricken with leprosy when Naaman came from Syria. As Gehazi was recounting the incident of Elisha raising a boy from the dead, the Shunemite woman came asking for her land back.

God's timing of things, whether it be arranging events or bringing blessings or judgments, is always a remarkable thing. When a need arises, He is there. When we are not sure what to do next, He opens just the right door. When there seems to be no solution to a problem, He is able to use that very thing to fulfill His will. When we come to the place where every door around us seems closed tight, if we "wait upon the Lord," our strength is renewed, and we find instead of an open door, He gives us wings of faith to "mount up with wings as eagles" in order to go above the obstacles. Then we can "run and not be weary, and walk and not faint."

We also learn that God does not limit Himself to working only with His people. All nations and kings of the world are under His sovereign control. The Syrian king was told he would recover from his illness, but that he would die. That was not a contradiction because even though his illness was not terminal, his own servant Hazael murdered him and usurped the throne of Syria. The weeping prophet could see ahead how the Lord would use this heartless man to judge His people for their sinfulness. As much as it saddens us to know there are serious consequences for sin, we realize that God is just and righteous in all He does. Sin left unjudged leads to an increasingly wicked people.

Whether Jehoshaphat knew the kind of woman he chose for his son to marry is unknown. But he should have known the kind of person a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel would be. Parents need to seek to help their children make the right choices in the important things of life. The person our offspring marries will bring the influences of their upbringing with them into the marriage. We can expect our son or daughter to be influenced for good or bad by their spouse. Athaliah was an evil influence on Joram the son of Jehoshaphat and the evil influence she brought to the marriage affected the nation of Judah. That marriage may have been politically advantageous but it was spiritually deadly.

It was during that time that the descendants of Esau, the Edomites, turned against the Jews of Judah. Jehoram of Judah began as a co-regent with Jehoshaphat his father. When he was on his own in leadership, and under the evil influence of his wife, he took the people of God farther away from the Lord. Yet the Lord spared them because of His respect for the sake of their forefather, David. We may not realize it at the time, but much of what preserves us from the consequences of evil, is the influence of our heritage. To despise one's heritage is to invite personal judgment to fall on us. God has respect unto our forbearers and allows us to survive and prosper at times because of their faithfulness to Him, and the on-going influence of a good name and trustworthy family reputation.

When Ahaziah led the people of Judah after Joram of Judah died, he joined Joram of Israel in a war against the Syrians under Hazael's leadership. Joram, the king of Israel, was wounded in that battle at Ramoth-

Gilead east of the Jordan River. He went back to Jezreel in Israel to recover from his wounds, and his nephew Azariah king of Judah went to visit him there. It was there that "pay day" came for both kings. We may have the opinion that we will have to live with and accommodate to the evil that is increasing around us, but this is not true. "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse," but we are to continue to practice what we have been taught, and learned, from those trustworthy servants of God who were before us.

It is not in our power to stop the evil that is going on, nor to control the outcome. But it is in our power to commit ourselves to live for our Lord in spite of what others may do. The view we have to keep before us, and that motivates us to righteous living and faithful service, is to look on our Lord Jesus Christ and see what He has done for us. He has commissioned us to carry forth His Gospel to the world and to teach His people. He has promised to be with us to the end of the age no matter what may happen around us. He has promised to come and receive us to Himself at the time of His Father's choosing. In view of this we must be faithful to Him in these troubled times.

2Kings 8:1. *"Then spake Elisha unto the woman, whose son he had restored to life, saying, arise and go thou and thy household, and sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn: for the Lord hath called for a famine; and it shall also come upon the land seven years."*

A FAMINE.

It came for a reason, this great lasting hunger.
Seven years is a long time but it won't last any longer -
For God called for the famine; the nation had turned from Him -
It seems like famine in our nation is about to begin.

We have done the same things - turned away from the Lord.
So many have changed even their thoughts about God.
Often God is talked about as only some kind of force
That can briefly be called upon if we want to change course.

Not every famine is the result of a need for food.
There is a famine in the spirit caused by neglect of God's Word.
The recovery that is needed will only come when there is a return
To deal with the original problem when God we did spurn.

To avoid times of famine there must be genuine trust;
And to correct what is wrong is an absolute must.
It means times of repentance and real turning from sin.
God waits for evidence of reality before recovery begins.

Some things cannot be faked - there must be reality
Before we can be trusted with full totality -
Of things that God has planned for us to do for Him -
There will be a change of attitude toward God and toward sin.

When famine comes it is wise to stop and seek out what is wrong.
Consider why there are tears and doubt instead of faith and song.
Make every effort to be sure to change what caused the famine -
It will take time and humility as the past we do examine.

"We are in the first years of famine, O Righteous God. People are aware of something wrong, but have not, as yet, called a halt in repentance and turned in faith to Thee. Turn us, O God of our salvation, and make us again as a nation to seek the Lord. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

2nd Kings 9

FIERCE COMMITMENT REQUIRES CONTROLLED OBEDIENCE

Idolatry leads to evil practices in a person and a nation. The wickedness of those who lead has serious effects on the moral standards and spiritual life of a society, and the consequences that result can bring the whole nation down in weakness. That ultimately ends in its demise as a nation. History teaches us this when we learn how world empires that dominated certain times in history are no longer in existence. With a few exceptions like the Roman Empire, two hundred years is about the length of time a nation is influential before the historical drift overcomes the people. The historical accounts of some important events in Israel are given so we do not make the mistakes they made.

God lets us see behind the scene in which Elisha sent a young prophet forty miles to Ramoth-Gilead where the military leaders of the Israeli army were stationed. Joram, the king was at Jezreel recovering from

wounds received in battle. Ahaziah his nephew, was there also visiting his uncle. The time and setting, was right for the judgment of God to fall because of the wickedness, the leadership of the family of Ahab brought on the nation. We do not always know at the time why certain things happen, but in God's calendar of events everything is in order.

The prophet privately told Jehu, a captain of the army, when he came to where the army officers were gathered, that God had appointed him to be king and he was anointed with oil on his head. God intended Jehu to carry out divine judgment and bring justice to the leadership of Israel. When Jehu knew he was given this role and task, he realized the prophecies of Elijah given twenty years before were to be carried out by him. He did not hesitate to take action. His fellow officers had thought the young prophet was a madman until Jehu told them he was anointed king over Israel. They quickly accepted his leadership and followed him to Jezreel. It is important for us to keep in mind the fact that our choices and actions have an effect on others. What leaders do can make or break the lives of those who follow them. It is important for us to consider carefully any decisions we make because other people will be following us.

Jehu was a man of action but seemed to act without thinking things all the way through to the desired outcome. We need to have clear and acceptable results in our mind before we act. Jehu had good leadership qualities and could have been a successful king if he had taken the time to think through a matter all the way to the consequences that follow the action. He was used by God to bring an end to the wickedness of the family of Ahab. He saw what needed to be done right at the moment and did it. His commitment to the work was unquestioning, enthusiastic and immediate. But even though he obeyed and carried out the task given to him at that time, his obedience was not always under control.

The death of Joram and Ahaziah eliminated the leadership dynasty of Ahab. Jezebel mocked Jehu when he came to get her and accused him of doing what Zimri did forty years earlier when he assassinated Elah and was killed himself a week later by Omri. The prophecy of Elijah in reference to Jezebel came to pass as well and there was nothing left of her to bury except a skull, hands and feet. There was no grave or memorial as a remembrance of that wicked woman. The burying place of Joram, the last of Ahab's family was in the ground he had stolen from Naboth.

In our zeal for the Lord, we must follow the guidance of His word, and have the objective of fulfilling His divine will. There are times when the Lord seems to wait a long time to carry out that which is His purpose, and we are tempted to act prematurely. Then on other occasions, His actions are swift and immediate. It is our responsibility to be in close fellowship with our Lord so that we can be "the Lord's messenger, in the Lord's message." When that is the case, we are in a condition and position to do what is needed in the right way and at the right time.

Jezebel had defied the Lord and His word during her life. At her death everything amounted to nothing. Her family, prestige, and power were gone and her legacy was that of disdain because of her self-centeredness and treachery. There was no heritage left at all except a bad reputation of spiritual darkness. Our lives are given to us by God to be used to bring blessing to others. Wealth, power, health and all the positive things God graciously grants us, are a stewardship to be used for His glory. The course we set in life is usually done in our early years when we can see clearly without a whole lot of baggage to encumber us.

Our commitment to God and willingness to yield our will to Him for our life, involves being enthusiastic, energetic, visionary and willing to venture out into the unknown. Obedience to our Lord's divine will keep these virtues under control so we don't rush here and there without guidance. We need objectives, including personal goals, to be defined and reachable. Sometimes in our enthusiasm we make rash commitments that may have a bad outcome if we do not take the time before the Lord to carefully plan a course of action.

Jehu had a commission that was clearly given and that he carried out effectively. He came close to being the kind of leader God wanted, but he went too far on his own initiative. He failed to follow through to the end on other things. He settled for less that God wanted because he was acting according to his own personality, rather than divine direction. There is a sense in which our own talents and personality enter into our work for the Lord. These are only useful when used by God in harmony with the gifts He gives us. Natural strengths and abilities are good when sanctified for the Master's use and under His control. Enthusiasm can lead to recklessness. Obedience involves control, direction and action combined.

2Kings 9:17. *"And there stood a watchman on the tower in Jezreel, and he spied the company of Jehu as he came, and said, I see a company. Take an horseman, and send to meet them, and let him say, is there peace?"*

WARNINGS.

All is not well when difficulties come,
And those who lead are not there
To take the responsibilities God gave to them,
And the defense of truth shoulder and bear.

All is not well when tensions arise
Between saints and the problem is left unsolved.
For the tensions increase and people take sides,
Until it is dealt with and justice is served.

All is not well when in a company of people
Accusations are made that lead to divisions,
And instead of pointing out and avoiding the cause,
The offenders incite a serious schism.

All is not well if sin is not faced
And correction is not carried out in God's way.
For sin has a way of infecting the whole -
Like leaven, sin soon carries the day.

All is not well when without God's approval
We hasten to act in the flesh.
And what we had hoped to attain has failed,
Because our will and God's will did not mesh.

All is not well until sin is confessed,
And we turn and obey the voice of God.
Then we find God has long been waiting for us
To submit to Christ's lordship and His Word.

"I know nothing good can come, O God, when Thy truth and Thy will are ignored. May I always be ready to learn and act on Thy leading without being unduly influenced by pressures put upon me by the will of man - mine or anyone else's. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

2nd Kings 10

LIP SERVICE

It is true that Jehu was anointed by the prophet and appointed by God to bring an end to the wickedness Ahab and his family brought on Israel and Judah. As he carried out this task, he took control of all the events surrounding it for his own personal and political advantage. The massacre at Jezreel and Samaria, and the senseless slaughter of all whom had anything to do with Ahab went way beyond justice being carried out, to the own personal ambition of Jehu. He had been a servant of Ahab's family himself.

People have historically used the name of God as justification to carry out atrocities and condone their oppression of others. This is done in the name of "religion" but it is not the judgment of God but the use of force by people to gain political and personal ends. It is true so-called "Christians" have done terrible things, but that is not biblical Christianity. The leaders of Jezreel and Samaria were terrified of Jehu and carried out his demands, but he was the one responsible for going to the extremes that followed. It extended to leaders, friends, acquaintances and priests which was beyond the responsibility Jehu had been given by God.

Jehu could say the blame for the slaughter was on the leaders of Samaria, but that did not change the fact that he was the one who gave the orders. Shifting blame and responsibility for acts of wickedness is practiced by everyone. People look for ways to avoid the consequences of their own actions. To confess and forsake sin is not a common action taken by people unless they are found guilty by a power higher than themselves. Admission of guilt and taking responsibility for it and the consequences that follow. is the first step of repentance that leads to salvation.

The prophecy of Elijah and Elisha regarding the house of Ahab was fulfilled by the leadership of Jehu. In his "zeal for the Lord" he did bring judgment on the worshippers of Baal who had spread their insidious doctrine throughout the nation of Israel. Jehonadab and those of the conservative movement who followed the practice of separation from idol worship, materialism and intoxication by wine, were called upon to witness the cleansing of the nation from Baalism. However, Jehu did not destroy the golden calves Israel had worshipped as representations of God. As good as it may be to stop the practice of wickedness in others that leads to idolatry, it is still not right to follow a counterfeit Christianity. We are not given the right to

determine how we can please the Lord based on our opinions. He has given plain information and instructions as to the way to live, to work and to worship Him.

Jehu did not want those of Israel going to Judah to worship at the temple. Jeroboam had made the golden calves in the first place to keep those of the northern tribes at home. Jehu followed "the sins of Jeroboam." He was commended by the Lord for doing what he did to the house of Ahab, so his family was able to rule Israel for one hundred years. However, his heart was not right with the Lord. We can denounce the wrongs of others and take a stand for righteousness, but if our own sins have not been faced and dealt with, we are merely instruments of righteousness rather than servants of the living God.

The decline of the nation began slowly as the years passed. A little bit of Israel's land was lost here and there as Israel began to shrink in size. There are consequences for sin that are dramatic and powerful. They often happen at once. There are other consequences that whittle away at our testimony just a little at a time so that we get used to that loss gradually. One practice that was used to further the work of the Lord may be abandoned because it seems unproductive and a waste of time. It becomes inconvenient to attend a prayer meeting in the middle of the week. Extended Gospel activity takes too much of our time, "After all, God can save people in one week the same as He can in six weeks," is a common comment.

Jehu did what God wanted and for that he was commended. But he went beyond that and took matters into his own hands and for that he was denounced. He started out as a servant but became merely a hard-hearted man doing things for his own ends. His interest in carrying out spiritual goals was only a means to fulfill his political and personal ambitions. He did what was right but for the wrong reasons, and much of what he did was in a wrong way. He knew the law of God and what was expected of him, but his heart was not in it and he chose to act on his own initiative. He knew what was wrong and did it anyway because it suited his purposes.

Jehu ended up as one who had to pay tribute to the Assyrian leader as his kingdom began to shrink around him. It is possible for a child of God to pay lip-service to the Lord and still do his own things in his own way for his own self-interests. But payday does come and that which we do for personal and materialistic gain will not last, nor does it bring satisfaction. It is possible for one to do "Christian" things and be part of a Christian church, and not be a Christian. Lip-service for such a person can be done for a lifetime and that person can still lose their soul in hell. We must examine our hearts and our motives behind our actions. We must judge ourselves and make sure what we are not guilty of self-deception. We must make sure that what we do in service for the Lord is according to God's will and word, not our own interpretation of divine things.

2Kings 10:31. *"But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin."*

TOOK NO HEED.

All is not well when difficulties come,
And those who lead are not there
To take the responsibilities God gave to them,
And the defense of truth shoulder and bear.

All is not well when tensions arise
Between saints and the problem is left unsolved.
For the tensions increase and people take sides,
Until it is dealt with and justice is served.

All is not well when in a company of people
Accusations are made that lead to divisions,
And instead of pointing out and avoiding the cause,
The offenders incite a serious schism.

All is not well if sin is not faced
And correction is not carried out in God's way.
For sin has a way of infecting the whole -
Like leaven, sin soon carries the day.

All is not well when without God's approval
We hasten to act in the flesh.
And what we had hoped to attain has failed,
Because our will and God's will did not mesh.

All is not well until sin is confessed,

And we turn and obey the voice of God.
Then we find God has long been waiting for us
To submit to Christ's lordship and His Word.

"I know nothing good can come, O God, when Thy truth and Thy will are ignored. May I always be ready to learn and act on Thy leading without being unduly influenced by pressures put upon me by the will of man - mine or anyone else's. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

2nd Kings 11

GOD SAVE THE KING!

In Judah following the death of Ahaziah when he had gone north to see the king of Israel, there was a leadership vacuum his mother sought to fill. In order to do this, she had to eliminate every other claim to the throne. Even though they were her grandsons, she wanted them all killed. Jehoram, her husband had killed his brothers. Jehu had slain many of the royal family, and now Satan was using Athaliah to seek to thwart God's promise of David's seed continuing forever. It was, from the line of David, our Lord Jesus Christ would be born. The whole promise of the redemption of Israel, and for lost souls would fail if "God who cannot lie" did not fulfill His promise. Years earlier Solomon had prayed in faith at the dedication of the temple, "There hath not failed one word of all His good promises."

In times when we are wondering if things can get worse than they already are, and "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse," we must remember the promises of God. The Lord has promised to be with us to the end of the age. He has promised to come and receive us to Himself. He has promised eternal life to those who believe in Him. "Goodness and mercy" shall follow us all the days of our lives. The challenges against people who live by faith will continue and the attacks of Satan will also, but overriding all of this is our covenant-keeping God.

The darkness of the days did not keep the priest, Jehoiada, from remembering the promise of God and he did his part in keeping the covenant with the Lord by taking the infant boy-prince and placing him in the keeping of Jehosheba, the half-sister of the evil woman, Athaliah. It can be a great comfort to us to know our God has already arranged events and people to carry out His sovereign plans. Evil must be punished. Those who choose their own way and ignore the righteous acts of God, cannot stop the purposes of divine grace. God's will, will be done. Of that we can be sure.

There are always risks to be taken when we walk by faith, but when the covenants of God are involved, we can be sure that He will do His part when we do ours. The priest laid plans at the appropriate time, for the six years of Athaliah's reign to be stopped. The way he carried out these plans both secured the safety of the boy-king and the righteous carrying out of justice against evil. It is a lesson to be learned that when the time comes for us to act in faith, we need to take the time necessary to plan first and then carry out the work which we have been given. To jump ahead without considering how a thing is best to be done, and the consequences both good and bad of the action, is not of faith but of self-will.

Risks are always involved when we move into "uncharted territory" because we are mere mortal men who can easily fail. However, when we have biblical principles that apply to a situation and are in fellowship with the Lord and His faithful people, we can go forward in confidence. A "calculated risk" is not blind faith but a considered action that follows divine guidelines that have been tried and proven to be right. Fear of man can keep us from acting when we should, and self-confidence can make us act when we shouldn't. There will be times when like the people of Judah, we need to deliberately renew our commitment to the Lord, His work and His people.

The proclamation of Joash, a seven-year old boy as king, may have seemed to some to have been premature, but it is more important to deal with sin as quickly as possible, than to follow a protocol that we think should be followed. God who is able to make stones praise Him if He so chooses, is able to help a boy learn from his mentors and follow their advice. Children who have been saved by God's grace are able to learn when they are properly mentored. Too often believing children are left on their own in spiritual things until the early years of divine life have lost their glow and then it is hard to instill truth when they are spending most of their days learning secular things.

It takes time to learn how to define and carry out our responsibilities and obligations to our Lord. The mutual obligations of the king and his people would have been taught Joash by Jehoiada the priest. As time passed the role of leadership would have developed to the extent that he assumed the responsibility of leadership. The calmness of the city of Jerusalem after the death of Athaliah, the evil queen, would have made a big

impression on the people. Even though their king was a seven-year old boy, they rejoiced and would have appreciated the new day that had dawned in Judah.

God had promised David that his "throne would be established forever," and in whatever way He chose, David's line was going to be preserved even through a young seven-year old boy-king. We too are involved in being blessed by the promises of God. "God save the king" was a public declaration of the hope of God's people in the past. Our King reigns over His people today and the day is coming when the whole world will know "Our God reigns."

2Kings 11:12. *"And he brought forth the king's son, and put the crown upon him, and gave him the testimony; and they made him king, and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, God save the king."*

GOD SAVE THE KING.

He stood there small and silent - obediently
They stood with ancient spears and shields - definitely
Looking out towards each entrance - cautiously
Guarding a new life, a new hope, a new time - hopefully
For faith and works go together - unitedly
The time had come when he was identified as king - joyfully
God save the king!

He lay in a manger far from home - obediently
He sat with the ancients discussing scriptures - definitely
He spent years laboring in obscurity - cautiously
He stepped out publicly to call His own - hopefully
He was rejected by the leadership - unitedly
When He entered the city, people shouted - joyfully
Hosanna ... Blessed be the King!

He is preparing and waiting for His bride - obediently
Many are watching and waiting for Him - definitely
They go about life in the world - cautiously
Wondering if this is the day, and looking up - hopefully
Knowing that the living and dead saints will join - unitedly
And see the One we know by faith - joyfully
Jesus is our Savior-King!

Kings and nations come from all over the world - obediently
They have no choice but to appear before Him - definitely
They approach His throne and bow before Him - cautiously
And all over the earth a new reign starts - hopefully
Even the animal kingdom is changed - unitedly
The time will come when all creation responds - joyfully
Jesus is King of kings!

"For this day and every day, O God, I honor and reverence the Lord Jesus Christ as my Lord and King, Amen."

2nd Kings 12

GOOD START - BAD FINISH

What a blessing it is to have good mentors when we begin our lives with the Lord. They are able to guide us through the first questions we have and give us biblical answers. They can tell us what to do when choices arise and how to act when challenges come. Their guidance is invaluable when life-decisions have to be made. Because of their experience they are able to tell us what to avoid and what to put our efforts behind. Joash (Jehoash) had this kind of training from Jehoiada, the priest.

During the early years of Joash's reign, he did well as he listened to the advice of Jehoiada and acted on it. He was recognized as a good king for awhile although he didn't go far enough in dealing with religious sin. He left the "high places" where it was convenient for the people to continue their idolatrous practices. They may have thought they were worshipping God, but just because we think a thing is so, doesn't make it true. The worship of the Lord, is to be done in His way and in the place, He has "chosen to place His name there."

When we wonder about what is right, we need to be sure the Bible supports it and we must carry out the service in the way the scripture teaches. If what we intended to do is prohibited, we must not act on our own

opinion. If an action keeps me from serving God, or worshipping Him in the way He wants, or loving Him without embarrassment, then I must not do it. If I am bound to a thing to the extent I am obligated as a slave to it, or if it is not consistent with the known will of God, I must have nothing to do with it no matter how attractive it may be. If an action or service I take hinders the faith and life of other believers, then I must not go there or do that. Joash did some good things but that did not cancel out his neglect to deal with the bad things.

By blending the pagan customs with the worship of the Lord in His chosen way, that custom-made religion results in people seeming religious and spiritual, but in reality, it takes them far away from the Lord. When we honor God in some ways, and then fail to reject that which is wrong, the day will come when the evil practice becomes predominate because it appeals to our fleshly nature.

Joash saw the need of the temple to be repaired and took steps to rectify the problem years of neglect and disuse had brought on the house of God. However, the priests who received the gifts for the repair of the temple did not use that which was entrusted to them in the right way or for the right purposes. So, the work for which the funds were given was not done. It is not uncommon today for funds given by people in good faith, to end up in the wrong place used for the wrong things. In our present day there are those who have received money that is intended to be used for the furtherance of the Gospel, who use that money for other purposes. Our financial giving needs to be carefully dispensed so that it is used for work with which we can have fellowship.

To deal with this problem, Jehoiada provided a means whereby the people could be assured that which they gave was used for the purpose they intended. The Levites for some reason were not doing the work for which they had been called. The priests did not, or would not do the work for which the money was given. So Jehoiada passed the funds directly to those who could do the needed work, and they did it. The workmen could be trusted and they acted with honesty as the repairs were done. Trustworthy people do not need someone looking over their shoulders all the time. They do what they do, "as unto the Lord" and often are those who are overlooked by those who like to be noticed. Those who give will give generously when they know it will be used as it was intended and they will be able to see the fruit of their labor. When designated gifts are being used properly, the Lord's people will respond.

It must have been after the death of the priest, Jehoiada, that Joash lost his direction and commitment to the righteousness of life as he had been taught. We need to know the Lord in a personal way in order to stand against the pressures that will come. Joash turned away from the Lord and even had Jehoiada's son, Zechariah, stoned to death because of his warning that the Lord would forsake him and the nation. Part of the learning process we need to instill in those who are young is the fact that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Faith isn't something we inherit. It becomes ours when we act on what we have learned from the Lord and those who taught us His word.

Poor Joash (Jehoash) was a good king as long as his mentor lived, but when the advice he got before was not there, he actually became a spiritual failure and an incompetent leader. He began to worship idols, and as he turned away from the Lord, his went downhill personally and his life began to unravel. His kingdom went out of control and his apostasy led to his death by assassination. It is a sad commentary on one's life who began well and continued well in his younger years, but when older, to die a wicked person.

It is important for those who mentor younger people to give them the opportunity and responsibility to act on their own when possible, and give them guidance and correction when necessary. It is important for those who are younger to listen to advice given and take the advice with a view of making it our own as soon as possible. Initiative is a good thing, especially when we know there are the necessary "checks and balances" in place. Not everyone who starts well ends well.

2Kings 12:11. *"And they gave the money, being told, into the hands of them that did the work, that had the oversight of the house of the Lord: and they laid it out to the carpenters and builders, that wrought upon the house of the Lord."*

REPAIR THE BREACHES.

They are there, but people have become used to them -
Time has a way of making the conscience numb -
And to repair them will cost a considerable sum -
And there are many other ways to spend our money!

But this place is the house of the Lord!
Shouldn't we go back and search the Word -

To see what to do and how to please our God?
We are not demanding a certain amount of money!

One who remembers how it was at the start -
And another who believed we need to be set apart -
Each person who began to search his or her heart -
Set aside a proportion of their money!

As the opportunity arose, they willingly did what was right.
They gave what they could out of everyone else's sight -
And went away glad with footsteps that were light -
Because they returned to God His money!

God gives to us what we really need -
And gives us opportunities to bless others when to the Spirit we heed

It is a relief to the soul when we are freed from greed -
And for God's work we make available the money!

There are other ways we can be involved in repairing breaches -
We need to be acquainted with God's Word to know what it teaches -
And be in fellowship with Him so He can reach us -
To step in and do what is needed!

Exercise of heart and a willingness to act
In faith that is not feigned but is an actual fact
To bring God's house back until it is fully intact -
And true, sincere worship then can prosper!

“Heavenly Father, help me today to place into the hands of these workmen and women, some things that can be used to further Thy work - and repair the breaches. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

2Kings 12:15. *“Moreover they reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to be bestowed on workmen: for they dealt faithfully.”*

PEOPLE OF INTEGRITY.

It had to start way in the past
From those who labored long for naught.
Their generation in deepest night of soul -
Until a voice was heard, one of their own.
And following hard on paths of proof
That liberated them - set free to walk with God -
A God of integrity.

The passing generations each unfolded day by day.
Voices heard, and words matching deeds -
And watching, learning children - with models;
Models who acted on premises that now were habits;
Each of these passed on - heard first, seen, and practiced -
Until it remained in characters built firmly on the rock -
Of integrity.

But subtle immigration turned away from voices of the past.
True voices speaking, now drowned by Baal's noisy chatter.
Kings and priests, farmers and men of commerce - compromised.
Then choices evil, decisions selfish. Acts - not of faith at all.
Selfish, self-centered leaders - then followers - now new traditions -
And lost integrity.

But not lost to all, for there are those in darkest night,
Who walk still with the light; not yet hidden completely by others.
Light of character once formed, still shows the strains passed on.
Men and women found - next door; those we know and watch,
And see, and hear - that once their voice is heard - their true word given -
It is as good as done: not only done, but best labors reveal -
People of integrity.

The hands of such are plied to work and funds into them given.

No questions or suspicions need to pass from mouth to mouth.
The work they do, the words they say are never brought in question;
For God-like, they bend to task each day - knowing not just for men,
But God Himself observes and knows the cost, the way, the need
To build again that which sin has broken - and He watches with satisfaction -
Men of integrity.

“I thank Thee, O Father, for those who I have learned to trust and have proven over again that they have no greater joy, than to please Thee. May I too, always apply myself to those activities and actions with integrity of deed as well as word - those things which Thou hast entrusted to hands such as mine. These hands hold a stewardship that I could never deserve. Bless the efforts of these hands. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

2nd Kings 13

LIVING IN DARKNESS

The unfolding saga of the kings of Judah and Israel reveal how very seldom there is recovery when a leader turns away from God. The truth of God is light. The will and willfulness of men is darkness. Occasionally there was a glimmer of light when a king, in desperation, turned to a prophet for advice or listened to what they were told. To hear a message and to act upon it are two very different responses. Forty-three years had passed and as far as we know, no king had sought the counsel of Elisha. Yet his influence in Israel was still recognized.

Not always will a servant of God be listened to, nor will his counsel be sought. Yet influence in the things of God is still felt as long as he is around. It may be that he is an embarrassment to the Lord's people because he is thought of as "old-fashioned" or "old school." It may be that his opinion is already known and because it is different to that of the majority of people, it is not asked for or is avoided. As long as a person lives there is an influence that may not be recognized by most people, but it is by the Lord.

The succession of the kings who led the children of Israel and the people of Judah did not change because no one seemed to learn from the failures of the ones before him. Unless we are willing to learn from the mistakes of others, we are going to experience the same problems they had as well as adding the new ones that come on us. The whole point of history being passed on is so that succeeding generations learn from the ones before them. Still, history repeats itself. In our day people and things that happen are getting "worse and worse," because each generation is determined to do things "my way."

The "savior" of Israel was probably the Assyrian army from north of Syria, but even that respite from oppression didn't last because Israel did not repent nor change. To be diminished from 2,000 chariots in the time of Ahab's reign, to 10 chariots was total defeat. Ten "patrol cars" was not much of a force to be reckoned with. The Lord does hear and answer prayer, even of those who fail when they call in desperation, but unless there is genuine repentance and turning from sin to the Lord, punishment for sin will happen. Sadly, the next generation continued in the same downward course. True, often the generation following may seem superior in some ways, but the sinful practices to which they have become used to usually continues, and they even go farther than the previous one. Each person is responsible for their own actions, but we do influence others for good or bad. We do not have to do that which is obviously wrong, so if we do we must suffer the consequences.

When it was known that Elisha was suffering and likely going to die soon, Jehoash the king, became afraid, because he knew Elisha was a real prophet. He must have thought the state of the nation and its survival depended on Elisha instead of God. He did not know God nor His ways, so made his appeal to Elisha by using the same words Elisha had spoken when Elijah was taken up to heaven. This would certainly testify to the fact that Elisha's influence was still there in spite of the ungodly kings that ruled the nation. The accounts of Elisha words and works regarding the capture of the Syrian army or giving directions to defeat another enemy would have been talked about for a long time.

Elisha was willing even at the end of his life to identify himself with the nation and respond to the ungodly leader, to the extent of giving some hope. The bow and arrow event may not have seemed all that important to the king nor have been what he wanted or hoped to have happened. When he was told to hit the ground with arrows, he half-heartedly humored the old, sick prophet. Very seldom do people realize the significance of events or the consequences that may follow unless they have learned from history or paid attention to advice given by those who are older.

Each rising generation has an opportunity to be a power for God if and when those who lead learn from the past and teach in view of the future. Sadly, there seems to be an inevitable drift that follows early enthusiasm. This happens in nations and it happens in religious movements, even in scripturally gathered assemblies. Family units start to disintegrate as succeeding generations forget their roots, their family history and their heritage. The lack of enthusiasm on the part of those who are older leads to a rather blasé attitude in their children. The lackadaisical attitude of the king who hit the ground only three times was obvious. Elisha knew the lack of spiritual understanding was evidence of unbelief.

We may not realize it at the time, but the influence of a man or woman of God can be felt even after they are gone home to heaven. Many are forgotten soon after they die, but those who have made a point of living for God leave a positive influence on those who knew them. Often their words are quoted and stories told about things they had done and their service for the Lord. "The memory of the just is blessed." Some write books about themselves hoping to be remembered. Others have books written about them by those who were positively influenced by them. Still others are talked about at special times when old friends get together. For every servant of God, "My record is on high."

It is not easy for a child of God to live in a dark place at a dark time, but it is important that we do so. The life of a believer is like a "shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." We should remember the value of our testimony not only while we are alive, but the effect it may have on generations yet to come.

2Kings 13:23. *"And the Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and neither would he cast them from his presence as yet."*

THE LORD WAS GRACIOUS.

There was serious departure from the ways of God's heart.
Leadership had failed to keep God's people apart
From the evil they had followed for several generations -
Yet they persisted in continuing the same abominations
That kept them from experiencing the blessings God gives,
And claiming the promises God meant for those that are His
That He might be with them and give them the peace
He has provided from the storehouse of His bounties of grace.

Even when there is failure, God is there to provide
From His riches of grace all we need, and more beside
To meet our need though it is often unappreciated
By those who think living by faith is so antiquated
That they choose rather to follow the ways of the world
Attracted by the temptations Satan has unfurled
Before the eyes of those belonging to God, not him -
And God's own redeemed children may fall into sin.

But the Lord is so gracious and His compassions so real,
That He stays right ready to pardon, forgive and heal -
When repentance of heart brings the necessary change
And the erring children of God turn back to honor His name.
He has covenanted with our fathers when they paid the price
Of leaving the walk of sight to living by faith.
So now we experience even in days of departure,
The blessings of God's grace that faith in Him nurtures.

"Father, the Lord's people are conforming to the ways of the world around. Help me to help them see how we can all benefit from putting our trust in Thee without any hesitation. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

2Kings 13:33. *"And the Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast He them from His presence as yet."*

BECAUSE OF HIS COVENANT.

Don't ever take for granted that you have a right to hear.
There's more to this compassion than meets the eye.
Way in the past, there were those from year to year,
Served God faithfully, nor did His name deny.

There was a cost to make, and they were willing each to pay,

So, the Lord they covenanted with would thus be honored.
And the Lord looked on with grace, and in His word did say,
"Them that honor Me, I will honor," is His promise.

When God makes a covenant, with those who He can trust -
Then the final results of that act are guaranteed.
God looks upon us here, and for the sake of those long passed -
Blesses us with more than we deserve or need.

Though we fail in our choices, and often make grave mistakes -
He remains a faithful God, to saints of old.
We may act in haste, and sometime, the wrong path take;
But God is patiently waiting to recover us to His fold.

Whether those of ancient times, or the older ones of my relations,
Our gracious God, for their sakes, has blessed me.
All around there is failure, and despair in many nations,
Yet the God of my salvation, continues faithfully.

His Gospel truth goes out, souls are saved in many lands -
And His servants serve their Master from the heart.
Amidst the sounds of war, there are holy happy bands,
Who God uses because of the faith of those who start.

With real believing trust, these saints of by-gone days
Leave us with a legacy that we should follow.
The compassion of the Lord, and the example of their ways
By God's gracious acts of love - His name we hallow.

"Father, I am from a long line of the blessed who lived by faith. I do not, in any way, want to break the chain of blessing their legacy has left for me. I have a dangerous heart that can get turned aside if I am not careful. I am trusting You to empower me and keep me in Your fear lest I do something stupid. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

2nd Kings 14

GETTING USED TO SIN

The history of the nations of Israel and Judah remind us that when people turn away from the standards of the righteous law of God, there is no return. To serve God means we are committed to live by faith. To serve idols is to live by sight. Idols are tangible things with human characteristics that are easily understood because they are devised by men who can easily manipulate idolatry to suit our own opinions and the lifestyle that appeals most to sinful human beings. Self-centered materialism lets us do what we want including sexual immorality. In contrast to this is a holy God who wants His people to be holy and committed to righteousness in life including moral purity and focusing on serving others. This involves self-sacrifice and being unwilling to be manipulated by others even as our heavenly Father remains unchanging. There is no physical representation of God to which believers bow. We bow to our unseen living God.

The two Jewish nations had gotten so used to idolatry that even in times of half-hearted revival there was no lasting reality to the changes they made. Amaziah, king of Judah, did much of what was right even to the sparing of the children of those who killed his father, but he did not stop the idolatry to which the people had become so used. Respect for the law is good and commendable but that doesn't keep pride from raising its ugly head. The defeat of the Edomites and getting the city of Petra was certainly a victory, but victory in one place doesn't mean we are invincible. Every situation in which we are found calls for assurance that we are in the path of God's will. Often when we have been victorious in one way or event, we find ourselves most vulnerable to failure. The lowest most challenging point of life often follows the highest.

Amaziah must have thought he could bring Israel under his rule as well as that of Judah and unite the Jews, so he picked a fight with Joash (Jehoash) and lost. Not only was he captured along with other hostage, but the defenses of Jerusalem were greatly compromised by part of the wall being torn down. Also, anything of value that could be found was taken by the army of Israel. One wrote

"He that is down need fear no fall,
'He that is low no pride.
He that is humble shall ever have,
God to be his guide."

It is possible for us to do a lot of good and still be a failure. The prophets who spoke for God at this time must have been ignored by most people, because the downward path was continued.

The future kingdom of God was prophesied by Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, Jonah and others. Amos and Hosea particularly warned the king of Israel, Jeroboam the second, of the need of the hour and that the prosperity they were enjoying would not last. Amos was plain when he told Israel to "Prepare to meet thy God." "Seek the Lord and ye will shall live." Then a warning, "I will not again pass by them any more." People can get so used to sin that they do not, or will not, pay attention to warnings of consequences. They think nothing has happened that has been too bad up till now, so they think they can just keep on the way they have been going. True prophets are those who are willing to say what needs to be said even if they are not liked. Their concern is for the people and they know they are speaking for the Lord.

When Azariah, the son of Amaziah, began his reign, Isaiah the prophet began his prophecies relating to the coming Messiah. We wonder at the lack of response to words such as "Come now, let us reason, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." How patient and longsuffering the Lord was during those times of departure and apostasy. Now it is our turn as a nation. For some reason there is no fear of God, and no willingness to submit to the standards of righteousness that have guided us for over two hundred years.

Azariah was king in Judah for some years before Amaziah his father died as a captive. The prophet Isaiah knew him as Uzziah who sought to rebuild that which was lost to Israel and regain independence from the northern tribes. Jonah also was a well-known prophet during this time and there were prophecies in relation to Israel that he gave, as well as that of his journey to the city of Nineveh in Assyria. That spiritual revival brought a period of freedom for Israel from the Assyrians. It may have been for this reason that Jeroboam II may have been politically successful in spite of following the sins of the first Jeroboam.

There was bitter suffering in Israel and no one was able to help them, so the Lord used Jeroboam in spite of his evil actions. How grateful we should be to know that "God is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." If it wasn't for His grace being shown to us, we would have cut off and lost long before this time. Injustice, apostasy and formal religion all undermine the moral fiber and well-being of a nation. Wealth and material prosperity do not indicate the blessing of God. Rather it reminds us of the longsuffering of God toward self-centered people.

Believers should know that everything we have really comes from God to us, and is given to us to use for His purposes and His glory. What we do with what we have been entrusted is a reflection of our gratitude and obedience to our Lord. If we rely on what we have, our security and our power more than on our God, we are in danger of losing everything including our reputation, testimony and perhaps our life.

2Kings 14:10. *"Thou hast indeed smitten Edom, and thine heart hath lifted thee up: glory of this, and tarry at home: for why shouldest thou meddle to thy hurt, that thou shouldest fall, even thou, and Judah with thee?"*

WHY MEDDLE?

God has brought you to where you are -
Now leave well enough alone.
Don't set your wishes on a distant star -
Be content with what you have at home.
Avoid the temptation of comparing with others;
Be thankful that God has enabled you to cover
Your needs, and even assist your sisters and brothers -
Don't meddle in what others have done.

Stop and consider God's grace to you -
You have all you need and more.
He has given salvation and His Spirit too -
And daily blessings on you pour.
So be content with what you have -
Use with wisdom and compassion all God gave -
You will find from trouble yourself you will save -
If you don't meddle in someone else's store.

Ten years from now what will it matter -
If you find you're in the same place.
But if you listen to the world's false chatter -
You may find six feet long is your space.

Commit yourself to living by faith -
Never despise or underestimate God's mercy and grace -
Make it a point to daily seek God's face -
And don't meddle in what others chase.

“Gracious Father, I ask Thee now to keep me this day from putting my nose in places where it shouldn't be. If there are things I should do and say - please help me to follow Thy leading; but keep me back from any meddling in things in which I have no business. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

2nd Kings 15

COUNTDOWN

Generations of leadership passed in both Israel and Judah and occasionally there were temporarily recoveries to prosperity and spirituality. Under the leadership of Jeroboam II in Israel the nation prospered financially. Under the leadership of Azariah (Uzziah) Judah enjoyed peace and prosperity. The walls of Jerusalem were repaired and the city fortified. The devotion of Azariah to God affected the positively on the whole nation. But like those before him, he did not remove the pagan shrines that caused the people to mix their worship of God with other forms of religion.

We should not follow the practices of those who have gone before us without question. It is important that everything we do as individuals, assemblies and nations is according to the plans and will of God as revealed in the scriptures. It was good of Azariah to "do what was right in the sight of the Lord." It was wrong of him to not remove the places of pagan worship that misled the people. He did not use the authority that he had to accomplish that responsibility.

In his zeal for the Lord, Azariah (Uzziah) offered incense on the altar which was a priestly work, not the privilege of a king. He was smitten with leprosy by God and from then on served in a dual leadership with his son Jotham. This practice was not uncommon for those who were old and needed help, or were training the next generation to lead. In the case of Uzziah leprosy would keep him away from public life and a public role as the leader of the nation so Jotham ruled with him until his death.

As much as we appreciate the example and leadership of those who have gone before us, the only perfect example to follow is our Lord Jesus Christ. The limitations of others and ourselves are negative influences, but in our Lord, there was no limitations. We see in Him what God intends in one who leads and we should consciously seek to be committed to His example. There are those from whom we can learn such as the apostle Paul who said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

In Israel the four generations of leadership promised to Jehu were coming to an end. Jeroboam II brought prosperity, power and a period of peace to the nation. When Zechariah, the son of Jeroboam became king, the nation started to disintegrate. He did evil and was also evil, so he was assassinated after being king for only six months. God kept His promise to Jehu, but payday always comes and evil will be punished. He had been warned by the prophet Amos that promoting idol worship would bring death. Sin is serious in every case, but when we are responsible for leading other people into sin by our influence, divine justice brings inevitable consequences.

Shallum had taken matters into his own hands when he killed Zechariah. He was only king for one month when what he did happened to him. He was assassinated by a man who was more evil than himself. The disintegration of Israel followed rapidly as one after another the leadership either died after only a short reign or were assassinated. The nation came under the domination of the Assyrians who began by exacting tribute from them and finally took much of their land and many of the people as slaves into Assyria. It is possible that in one generation, people who seeing the failure of their leaders to follow the Lord and followed them anyway, to go right from prosperity to slavery.

The people cannot avoid being seriously affected by their leaders. Leaders either encourage or discourage their people by their example. The way they organize the activities of their family, assembly or nation will make or break the work of the unit. It is important for fathers, elders and national leaders to promote faith in God rather than put obstacles to faith in place. Our influence will be felt for generations to come whether we like it or not. The last king of Israel was Hoshea, the man who killed Pekah, the leader before him.

While Pekah was king in Israel, Jotham the son of Azariah (Uzziah) became the king in Judah. It was during the time of Pekah's reign that Uzziah died and Isaiah saw the vision of the Lord "high and lifted up." He saw God's holiness and Israel's destruction. But he also saw beyond the imminent doom of the nation to the

promise of the Messiah who would be born of a virgin and whose name would be "Immanuel" (God with us). It was then he prophesied of the future blessing that would come under the reign of our Lord.

In this day of departure from truth, morality, righteousness and integrity - deterioration and disintegration of a normal society will follow. We who know the Lord can look ahead in faith and see beyond the terrible things that are going on presently and that will happen, to the blessings yet to come. Even the united nation of Jews will have the promise of God fulfilled and will live in peace in the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The lessons of history should awaken us to the reality of what happens when people get used to evil and the consequences that are sure to follow.

God is not done with His people. Israel is a chosen people who are unique in the world of nations. It was to them the earthly promises of God were given. It was through that nation the Messiah came to "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." It was from them the nations of the world are blessed. Those nations that favor Israel will be blessed even though Israel is such a small nation. Because Israel is the chosen nation to bring blessing to mankind through Christ, it has an undeniable influence on all the nations of earth. There are fewer citizens in Israel than there are in some states in this country, and yet the leaders of earth are rightly concerned when threats are made against Israel. They are the earthly people of God. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ need to remember that we "who were not a people," are "now the people of God." We have obtained mercy and are Christ's "peculiar people" - His "purchased possession."

2Kings 15:34-35. *"And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord: he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done. Howbeit the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burned incense still in the high places. He built the higher gate of the house of the Lord."*

SERIOUS EXCEPTIONS.

It is a good thing when people return to the Lord
It is a good thing to see people reading God's Word
It is a good thing when people turn from evil to God -
But what about those idols you keep?

It is good when those who lead are compassionate and fair
It is good when the needy are shown genuine and tender care
It is good when the rich and the poor both share -
But what about promises to God you don't keep?

It is good when a nation finally has some peace
It is good when parents tell the young about God's grace
It is good when churches and families talk freely about faith
But what about obedience to God you don't keep?

It is good to see people enjoying the blessings of life
It is good to see obvious love between husband and wife
It is good when the children grow up free of domestic strife -
But what about inconsistencies children see?

It is good to see benefits from the labor you expend
It is good to see the workers have some money to spend
It is good to have confidence in the economy so people can borrow and lend -
But what about illegal practices others can't see?

It may be God is blessing us, but are we blessing Him?
It may be things are better for us now than they have ever been
It may seem like a better moral climate is about to begin -
But half-hearted response to God's will should never be.

"O God of all nations, I heard of Thy acts of blessing and retribution in other countries. Now both are seen in our country. Our losses are huge and our assets are too. We are the problem. As a nation we haven't done away with evil in our attempts to do good. I pray for divine assistance that I will not allow evil to remain when I ask to do what is right. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

2nd Kings 16

CALLOUS DEPRAVITY

Some of the ancient kings shared the throne with their sons until they came of age or there were some extenuating circumstances that made this practice necessary. Ahaz king of Judah apparently was one of those who did this. His sole leadership lasted sixteen years, but the change done to the nation and its

people in sixteen years affected them even to this day. Because of God's promise to David, Judah continued to exist as a nation longer than Israel, but under the reign of Ahaz there were extremes of depravity. Even the "good kings" of Judah had left the "high places" where pagan practices and altars allowed idolatry to continue. To please people in the name of religious freedom undermines the work and word of God that is practiced by people of faith. The comparison between that which pleases people and that which pleases God is not contrasted but mixed in a "people pleasing" way.

The action of Ahaz to have his son sacrificed in the fire was a depraved practice of those nations around Judah that were supposed to have been driven out of the land rather than tolerated. To this day in the religious practices of some cults similar sacrifices are made. Even in society the sacrificing of unborn children by the choice of the mother for her convenience and personal freedom is legally accepted by our nation. Other ways to undermine the potential faith in Christ of children is to promote personal pleasure by immediate gratification at the expense of living by faith in God. To them games are more important than God. Fun is more important than faith. The pursuit of pleasure is more important than "preaching peace by Jesus Christ, He is Lord of all."

When the pressure came on the nation of Judah from Israel and the Aramean's, Ahaz made an arrangement with the king of Assyria to come to his aid and stop the invasion from the north. Rather than turn to God and call upon Him, Ahaz paid tribute to the Assyrian of the gold and silver that belonged to the Lord's house. His gratitude and loyalty were given to a pagan ruler and he was responsible to submit to Tiglathpileser instead of the God of heaven. He had cause later on to regret asking for his help. Some things may appear to be expedient at the moment, but to act in haste usually means we will have to repent in leisure. Compromise and careless action have lasting consequences.

In the case of Ahaz, his first journey as a vassal of the Assyrians to the city of Damascus led him another step further in depravity. The pagan altar he saw appealed to him more than the altar of the Lord. The reproduction of that altar was further evidence of his submission to the Assyrians and disregard for the commandments of God. If we try to fit the Gospel message and the practice of church life into our personal preferences, we are doing the same thing Ahaz did. A callous disregard for God and His word is a form of idolatry rather than "relevant Christianity." We are to preach the message of the Gospel as it is given to us in the scripture. Church doctrine and practice is not up for "private interpretation." It is defined in the word of God. God is God, and we come to Him and worship Him for who He is, not what we perceive Him to be to suit our opinion.

We learn from Ahaz that one step away from that which is right leads to others, and a downward fall that cannot be stopped without true repentance and forsaking of sin. If for any reason we allow leadership over the lives of people other than that which is of God, we will be swallowed up by practices and customs of an ungodly world. To try to please others by copying them means that we are allowing them the place of God in our lives. The effect of such actions, go beyond us to those who are influenced by us. That includes our family and the assembly of which we are a part.

Because of Ahaz's actions as a weak king without convictions, he influenced a weak and compromising priest to do what was wrong. He not only made an idolatrous altar, but he replaced the altar of God on which holy sacrifices had been made for generations, and used the true altar as no more than a "good luck charm" for divinations. The pagan altar that was appealing to the flesh was used for offerings and sacrifices which God hated. We may not realize at the moment the influence of a careless action, but the consequences are real and lasting. It is inevitable that the consequences of sin will come.

The northern nation of Israel was soon taken into captivity by the Assyrian empire and dispersed. Discipline follows sin and the consequences of sin cannot be avoided. In some cases, consequences cannot be reversed. Even today the sins of that chosen nation have kept many of the Jews separated in nations all over the world. There has been an identifiable nation since 1948 but that was not established by faith in God. It is the hope of being established and recognized as a nation that guides the will of the people in Israel rather than carrying out the will of God. There will be no lasting peace in Israel until they submit to the leadership of the One who will sit on the throne of David.

It is not a small thing for believers who have been called by God's grace and responded in faith to Him, to be His representatives in this world. A callous disregard for His will has consequences today the same as in the past. It is expected of us to yield to His revealed will and do what we do in our lives and in the assembly of which we are a part, to His glory and according to His word.

2Kings 16:10. *“And king Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglathpileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus: and Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the fashion of the altar, and the pattern of it, according to all the workmanship thereof.”*

ACTS OF APOSTASY.

They don't all turn in just the same way -
Apostasy shows up in more than one might say.
Some with a condescending face silently reject
Things they had learned were true, but now don't accept.

The light they once had, now to darkness has turned.
The God they once said they believed now they have spurned.
Grace they once had experienced, to them now is a joke -
And Satan has bound them to his diabolical yoke.

The pattern of God's worship they now have scorned.
They practice the world's pattern - the Lord's, they abhorred.
The workmanship of idolatry they have gladly embraced,
And substituted evil practices in the place of true faith.

Objects of God's design have been altered or removed.
The apostate changes to suit himself what God had approved.
For reasons of rebellion he turns away from God -
And like Cain, the first apostate, goes to the land of Nod.

Many don't understand the seriousness of such actions.
Even when confronted, apostates refuse to make retractions.
Ultimately the end of these is judgment without repentance;
And the final destination is an eternal death sentence.

“Holy God, I know it is not my right to identify apostates because I can only look on the outside of a person. I do see what seems to be evidence of turning away from what they once said they believed. I guess this is the spirit of apostasy. Preserve me, my family and spiritual children from this terrible sin I pray, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

2nd Kings 17

CAPTIVITY!

Even though Hoshea, the last king of Israel, did not do all the evil of those before him, he had been born and brought up in an evil time, and evil practices were normal to him. The sins of those who follow us have been learned from us or those of our generation. To us it was abhorrent at the beginning. But soon with the adapting of the laws of the land to the will of the people rather than the other way around, it becomes hard for the succeeding generation to even know the difference between right and wrong.

Who would have thought the day would come when the children of Israel would seek an alliance with Egypt to preserve them from being attacked by the Assyrians. History does repeat itself and we see similar practices today among the nations of the Middle East as they war and maneuver among themselves. Their forefathers forsook the Lord and ignored the righteousness of life and the laws He gave. Now we as a nation do the same. "God is not in all their thoughts." Plans, treaties, peace talks and failing alliances are all failures because God is left out and the idols of materialism, man-made religion and personal opinions are what is directing the affairs of those nations. Sadly, it has come here as well and our nation is following the same path of failure.

The practice of spreading captives throughout the Assyrian empire was probably to keep people of the same background from uniting and rebelling. Moving Assyrians into captured lands seemed like a good thing, but historically it didn't do well past the first generation. People quickly adapt to a new environment and form a loyalty to a geographical area that supersedes that which their forbearers had. A nation of immigrants from many foreign countries soon unites as a new entity that is established and maintained by local interests and local concerns. The plague of lions from the Lord led to the establishing of a mixed religion that contained some good things from the worship of God, and then was mixed with the evil practices of pagan idolatry. It ended up as a terrible perverse religious form without power or morals.

High places for idol worship were erected in every town, on hills and under every big tree. Sinful practices, perhaps even religious prostitution, witchcraft, spiritism and the worship of the sun, moon and stars were all added to the name of God. This great insult against the holiness of God continues in various religious forms

and practices today even under the name of Christianity. God is longsuffering and allowed Israel a long time to repent and turn to Him before He finally shut them down - national identity and all. We need to beware because that same pattern of departure and depravity is happening here in our day. Israel was led away in captivity and dispersed among the nations. What will happen to us remains to be seen. We do know that it is a principle - whatever we sow, we reap.

The resulting mixture of people became known as "Samaritans" who were despised by the tribe of Judah which included some of Benjamin, Simeon and Levi. Most Jews today trace their lineage to one of these. The other tribes are known as the "ten lost tribes." However, it is likely that the poorer people who labored on the land were left to till the land. Those who were leaders of one kind or another - business, political, military or government would have been taken away to other parts of the Assyrian empire. In grace God has shown kindness to the mixture called "the Samaritans" and saved the woman at the well, many during the preaching of Philip and likely many more. Our "God of all grace" looks upon the hearts of individuals and is willing that they come to Him and He will receive them in spite of who they are or what they have done.

Israel lost sight of God in whom we trust by faith, and turned to those man-made things that are seen - even though they are not real. The imagination of man can create all kinds of false impressions which, if they are followed, soon become real in the depraved minds of those who are "dead in trespasses and sins." People claim to believe in God but they refuse to reject sinful practices both personally and religiously. They do what God denounces, and do not do what God commands. They add to that which God has done, and ignore what God has completed. Our words and actions must correspond to what God says and does in order to be right.

Israel lost sight of who God is, what He had done for them and the importance of following Him. Consequently, they lost their identity, they lost their testimony, they lost what they had personally had and, in many cases, lost their lives. They said they worshipped the Lord but mixed in with the service of their own gods and ended up with nothing but captivity. We are not immune to such consequences when we allow other things and opinions to cloud our judgment and spiritual life.

God must come first in everything we do. His word shows us where we are and where He intends us to go. To add or take away from divine revelation is a form of idolatry in that it promotes self-worship and an "Up with man" attitude. "I know best what is good for me." "If I think it is right, I will do it." That attitude is the attitude of idolatry that leads to captivity and final destruction.

2Kings 17:40-41. *"Howbeit they did not hearken, but they did after their former manner. So these nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images, both their children, and their children's children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day."*

STRANGE TIMES.

God chose a people to bear His name.
For many generations, onlookers came
To observe and wonder at God's amazing grace,
And the order of worship in His chosen place.

But as time went by, they did secretly things not right.
At first, they thought it was okay if it was not in plain sight.
Instead of those around turning to God in faith -
God's people hardened their necks and went down in disgrace.

They made themselves idols like the sinful world around.
They sold themselves to do evil that increased by leaps and bounds.
Their children went down in flames following that terrible course -
The nation was rejected by God who had made them His original choice.

Others came in from afar to take over their privileged place.
They did what they wanted in God's sanctified space.
Lions and false priests - God can use what He chooses
To bring judgment down on those who the fear of God loses.

When God's chosen people fail to walk in His ways -
He may take up others who don't know Him but see through a haze
Of spiritual gloom evidence of the true God they don't know -
And because of a glimmer of faith is there, God's grace He will show.

We who know so much have so much to lose.
Those who know little are still able to choose

Based on creation and conscience to turn towards God,
And the very little light they have grasped pleases the Lord.

How strange that those who know, and were favored so much -
Turn away from faith in God to those things they can touch.
They and their children and all those who followed -
Fall under God's judgment, because Satan's lies they swallowed.

“Father, as I hear of all the disasters caused by acts of nature, and then hear of children of believers taking their own lives, I am wondering if I have failed in my calling. O Lord, have mercy on me and others around me, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

2nd Kings 18

HE TRUSTED IN THE LORD GOD

The contrast between Hezekiah and his father Ahaz was so different that one wonders if his mother, or perhaps it was Isaiah the prophet who had impacted his life and decisions for good. Likely he shared in leadership with his father for a time, but when he was the sole king of Judah, he brought about great reforms. He opened up the temple for use again and broke up the brass serpent Moses had made hundreds of years before in the wilderness.

The name of the brass serpent was "Nehushtan" (meaning: a piece of brass) and sadly the Israelites had been burning incense to it. In essence that had made an idol out of that which was a symbol of salvation because sin had been judged when the serpent was lived up. It had become an object of worship rather than a reminder of the One whom we are to worship. Idols do not make themselves, nor do they become objects of worship by themselves. When we add anything as an aid to worship, that stops true worship. A thing becomes an idol by the way it is used. People now talk about "worship music" or "worship drama." We must be careful not to let anything interfere with our worship of God alone.

As a historical artifact, the brass serpent could have been used as an instructive teaching tool to remind the children of Israel of the righteous judgment of God and the gracious provision of God in saving those who looked in faith to the serpent and lived. The cross is not to be an object of worship but it was the object upon which the sacrifice of Christ was made for our salvation. In itself the cross has no value. But when Paul wrote, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," and "He made peace through the blood of His cross," he meant the value of those pieces of wood that made up the cross was because of the "Son of Man (who must) be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish but have eternal life." The life was not in the cross but in the One who gave us His life when He died there on our behalf.

"There was no one like him (Hezekiah) of all the kings of Judah. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel. His uniqueness was in his trust in the Lord. He chose to follow God more than any other king. Josiah was careful in his observance of the law of God and so was one of a kind to that extent. Even though we may have a spiritual heritage that places us in a position of favor, we must personally "Trust in the Lord with all thine (our) heart, and lean not on thine (our) own understanding."

When one has placed their trust in the Lord, there will be the necessity of acting with courage to right wrongs. Hezekiah found his strength in God because he placed his faith in Him. That enabled him to act in obedience to God against an ungodly world in spite of the obstacles and dangers he had to face. To stand up against the threats of a force that seems overwhelming takes the power of God in us, not mere human resolve. To reclaim that which has been lost is never easy, but when one knows this action is the Lord's will and He gives the needed strength to accomplish the task, then we can move forward to correct those things that are wrong and promote those things that are right.

It must have been disconcerting to Hezekiah when the Assyrians totally captured the ten tribes of Israel and took them away as captives, dispersing them to different parts of the empire. When the Assyrians came after Judah, Hezekiah gave tribute to them, but that did not satisfy them. The Assyrian king sent his second in command (vice president), the chief officer (secretary of state) and the head of his army (secretary of defense) along with a large military force to get Hezekiah to surrender Judah without a fight. Intimidation is really quite effective if we only are relying on ourselves to defend our position. The greatest response we can give to challenges made against us and/or the truth of God is, "Thus saith the Lord."

Of special interest to us is the fact that the place where the demands of the enemy were made, was where Isaiah prophesied of the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. He had told Ahaz that "Immanuel" was coming

and He would reject the wrong and choose the right. But Ahaz ignored the prophesy and formed an alliance with the Assyrians to against the Arameans and the northern tribes. Now Assyria had come against Judah. With the design to demoralize the people who heard the challenge, the Assyrians used psychological, calculated intimidation in an attempt to get Hezekiah to surrender. These same practices are used by the enemy of souls to try to get those who live by faith to capitulate to the designs of those who do not want to wholly follow the Lord. To drive a wedge between those who lead and those who follow is still a practice used to pressure the Lord's people to accommodate to the wishes of society or at least the majority.

There will always be a degree of resentment between those who have learned the lessons of life and lead by virtue of their maturity and wisdom, and those who want thing their way. The changes Hezekiah made to bring people back to where God wanted, by destroying the "high places" and bringing about spiritual reformation, may have been a "sore spot" with some who liked religious sin. The threat of a long siege may have affected some others. But the king had made them to understand what the lies they were being told meant and told them to not say a word. The arrogant boasting and the challenge against the Lord Himself was a great flaw in the Assyrian demands.

It is to be expected that righteousness and holiness will be challenged by unbelievers because it exposes the evil in the hearts of willful, self-centered, arrogant people. Humility still has an impact on others because it trusts in God to bring the desired results according to His will. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." When Hezekiah's representatives told the king of the challenge of the Assyrians, and their torn clothes testified to their own emotional response, the king also tore his clothes and went a step further by putting on sackcloth and going into the temple to plead with the Lord.

One who trusts in the Lord, knows where to go and what to do in times of distress and challenges against holy, righteous living in this ungodly world. The efforts of the world, the flesh and the devil to bring down God's people and defeat the spread of the kingdom of God, will not cease until the Righteous King rules. It is our responsibility to be aware of those things that are not right and respond in a biblical way with humility, grace and faith, knowing that it is God who is working in and through us to fulfill His divine objectives.

2Kings 18:4. *"He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan."*

NEHUSHTAN.

A sign of hope and healing, standing in a solitary center place

And people stopped, and looked, and lived - and praised.

A symbol of death, hung shining in the sun's bright glare -

Its flashes of reflected light giving guidance to the sufferers.

The hidden, darkened, dangerous venom of murmuring discontent -

Coursing through veins of bodies as good as dead.

The type is real: the results the same today as in the distant past -

Lifted high upon a cross before the soul-suffering of the sin-bitten nation.

No longer a symbol, but the Anti-type hangs before the needy eyes -

Needing the healing, seeing only the darkness, until the triumph is declared.

A new day of healing - not just body but soul, and new birth

For spirit long dead, but now alive - reflecting light coming from the Son.

But wait, what is this strange notion leading folks years later to places high -

Amidst the symbols of man-kind's perverted mind; the light-reflecting brass.

No long healing rays, but tripping cords stretched tight before the feet of sinful men.

Instead of blessing - that which blessing brought when, told by God, brings darkness -

Darkness of mind and soul, when man puts sin-polluted hand to change a work of God.

The only remedy? Make broken pieces of that which blessing once brought, but now -sin.

Even today, the symbols of redemptive grace - a loaf of bread and cup of wine so simple -

Has been replaced by hands of those who think they know the minds of men.

But God who knows the thoughts - the intents of men's hearts, knows what is needed.

Not a Roman-cross form of wood or gold or brass or flowers - can meet the need of man.

But the Person lives who once, in act of love and grace supreme - did die.

And in His death and life again - is blessing; not in empty symbol before which men bow.

"Righteous God, I can see clearly, how easy it is for people to get turned aside or tripped up by what is visible and self-perceived, rather than God-given. May the symbol-crosses that dot the landscape of our country, never lead us to bow before

them. Our knees and heads and hearts must bow low before the rays of the heavenly Son, who offered Himself on our behalf to Thy righteous justice. Amen."

2nd Kings 19

THE WORD THE LORD HATH SPOKEN

Attitude in prayer is not just demonstrated by the words we speak or the tone of voice we use but can be recognized by the posture we hold and the sincerity evident by the respect toward seen in all of these put together. Hezekiah needed support in the national crisis he was facing and gathered those he trusted in the house of the Lord. Isaiah had been a significant voice for God for forty years and Hezekiah needed his intercession. It often is a reassuring and strengthening aspect of fellowship when we let others who know the Lord, particularly mature believers, know the problems we are facing. They can join in intercessory prayer on our behalf and we are comforted when the burdens we bare are shared by those we trust.

Isaiah's spiritual understanding brought divine light to Hezekiah and his prayer was answered. Prayer in any matter should be our first response to any situation that arises. When we understand our God is involved in every activity of our life, we will not wait until things seem hopeless, but recognize God can use these difficulties for His own opportunities. One earnest, effective prayer can be the means of changing the course of a nation, let alone our own life.

God knows all the things we face in life and it must bring satisfaction to Him when we take each matter and spread it open before Him. No secrets remain when we open the whole thing before the Lord like Hezekiah spread the threatening letter open before the Lord. It is indicative of our sense of dependence and faith in Him when we speak of a matter openly and let Him know we have confidence in His word and His promises. His guidance is given as a result of praying in faith.

God dwells with His people even though He is the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. The insults and blasphemy made against Him by unbelievers is known by Him and He will deal with them in His own time and way. The ranting and ravings of the ungodly against those who believe in and love the Lord, are no more effective than the howling of a dog at the moon. Our responsibility when the "heathen rage" is to leave the matter with the Lord who waits in grace for their repentance. When or if that does not come, He will "have them in derision" and act with divine justice.

Hezekiah acknowledged the sovereignty of God when he prayed in dependence and faith. We should never take God for granted in any way and pray as if He owed us anything. Nor should we be casual or off-hand when we speak to our heavenly Father. He is the Supreme Authority and has power over every situation. Isaiah sent and unsolicited message to Hezekiah that assured him the Lord heard his prayer. How wonderful it must have been to him to get that message in his time of need.

The Assyrians ridiculed the people of God and God Himself. In the lengthy answer Isaiah sent, he told the king of the judgment of God that was coming on the Assyrians. He was reminded that God rules over nations and people. The family relationship God had with Israel was that of the Father and His daughter. Every father wants to protect and defend his daughter from those who would do her harm. More than that, God identified Himself with them as the "Holy One of Israel." The boasts, the arrogance, the presumption of the Assyrian king was all noted in the Lord's reply. The same things he had done to others would be done to the Assyrians.

For the children of Israel, Hezekiah was told by Isaiah there would be a difficult year ahead. The people would be able to live on what was "volunteer" grain that grew without being planted. Seeds that fell during the previous harvest would produce enough for them to survive. God would sustain them by giving them from the "fullness" of the earth. By the time they would be able to plant and harvest a crop the Assyrians would be gone and they could get back to normal living. There would be "a remnant" that would survive throughout the years who would be involved in the plans of God for the future. As long as there is a spark (remnant) a fire can be started again. There may be only a small remnant who live by faith, but God can use that to bring real commitment to Him, both in assemblies and in individual believers.

The word of the Lord assured Hezekiah that the Assyrians would not enter Jerusalem because the Lord God would defend it Himself for the sake of the promise He made to David. How He carried out that defense cannot be explained as an act of nature or any explanation people try to make. In this extraordinary event the death of 185,000 soldiers without any human agency was surely a supernatural action taken against those who mocked, ridiculed and despised the Living God and those who belonged to Him. Catastrophic events are not always able to be explained no matter how hard people try. There are divine principles of life

and death in the universe that are beyond human control because they are under the authority of the One who "created all things by the word of His power."

Sometimes, the things that happen are not only that we might call - "Save Thou us out of his hand," but are done that "All the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou art the Lord God, even Thou only." Prayers of desperation are not out of line when they are made in faith with the assurance that our requests are in the range of God's will. Not only were the children of Israel saved by God's intervention, but the arrogance and boasting of Sennacherib ended when his own sons murdered him when he was bowing before is idol-god.

It is a lesson for us to learn that when the Lord speaks, every word is true. Every promise will be fulfilled. every pronouncement of judgment will take place. There are no idle words with God. We can count on what He says and act on what he commands even when we do not know the outcome. By faith we step ahead in confidence because He opens the way before us even when we are afraid. We can trust His word without any reservation.

2Kings 19:19. *"Now therefore, O Lord our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only."*

SAVE THOU US.

They gathered there but God turned them back
They were trying to point out everything we lack -
When they come again, they'll take a different tack -
To try and defeat God's people.

It may be in a letter like one that came long ago
To a servant of God to let him know -
They would not be satisfied until there was no -
Testimony left of God's people.

We can learn through that God already has a plan -
That He will carry out in spite of what man
Thinks he can do with strength or élan -
To discourage the work of God's people.

But the Lord is not confused - He can read the mail -
And knows what enemies do and how they rail -
We know those who trust in the Lord do not fail -
To fulfill the needs of God's people.

Let those who intimidate when they roar and rant
Stop to consider when they oppose God, they can't
Win against God's people when their feet they plant -
On the promises God made to His people.

For the sake of His Son, God will protect His "city,"
And deal Himself with those who show no pity -
Leaving behind all those who were not willing or ready -
To be identified with God's people.

"There still are attempts, Father God, being made against those who seek to further Thy work in Thy way. Strengthen, I pray, the hands and feeble knees of those who work and stand for Thy truth. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

2nd Kings 20

PEACE AND TRUTH (SECURITY)

We may never make a lot of difference to the world as a whole, but each of us can affect the small world in which we live and the generation of which we are a part. Our family and friends, the community in which we live and the assembly of which we are a part can be positively influenced for good and for God when we are committed to serve our Lord Jesus Christ. There will be those who avoid those who "walk in the Spirit" but a believer who is faithful to the Lord and consistent in life and testimony, can leave a legacy behind that will bless many in time to come.

The events in this chapter in 2nd Kings probably took place before the invasion of the Assyrians recorded in previous chapters. Hezekiah had shown the messengers who came from Babylon everything of value in his palace and kingdom before he took the gold and silver to pay tribute to the Assyrians. it was a serious mistake on his part to reveal all to potential enemies. Perhaps the infected boil that would have taken his life was either allowed by God or an act of God to humble him and bring him to a place of repentance and tears.

Anything that awakens our conscience to reveal sin and draw us closer to God is good. Many have said during very painful and difficult times, "It was extremely hard to bear and it was painful, but I wouldn't trade the experience for anything. It made me realize what is important and brought me closer to the Lord."

Hezekiah's prayer was not an appeal for favor from the Lord because of his good works and faithful devotion. It was a recognition that he knew God looks upon those who call upon Him from a pure heart. He can act in grace toward them in the deepest trial. Because God is sovereignly disposed to show grace toward His children, prayer is a means of establishing the petitioners' understanding of where they are in God's plans. The message of imminent death was put off because of the sincerity of Hezekiah's response and the tears that made his remorse real. The Lord heard his prayer, saw his tears, understood the reality of his repentance and had Isaiah go back immediately with the promise of healing. The poultice of figs applied on the boil was the means God used to bring a conclusion to the sickness, and in three days he was able to go to the house of the Lord.

The physical sign of affirmation of the sun going back 10 degrees (stair steps) was for the benefit of Hezekiah himself. The Creator of the sun and the earth is able to use that which He made in the way He chooses to produce the results He desires. When Hezekiah saw this, he was certain that the promised healing would take place. We do not always understand, or need to understand, the way our Lord responds to our prayerful and earnest requests. But this we do know; our Father hears us and how He answers is up to Him. Our demands do not make something happen.

Why Hezekiah showed the messengers from Babylon who brought letters and a gift from the king of Babylon, all of his treasures, is not clear. If he was trying to impress the foreigners with his wealth, that would be wrong. For any of us, all credit for the blessings we have received goes to God alone. We must avoid vanity and self-exaltation. If it was a desire to strengthen the security of the nation by friendship with Babylon, it may be more understandable but it was still wrong. Cooperation with the world and its system leads to friendship with the world, and "Friendship with the world is enmity against God."

No wonder Hezekiah had nothing to say in answer as to the diplomatic reason for the visit and his strange behavior. They had come to commiserate with Hezekiah in his illness. He acted on his own without prayer and showed them everything. The prophecy of Isaiah clearly said that whatever Hezekiah expected would be opposite to whatever he had hoped. It would be Babylon, not Assyria that would take the people of Judah captive. The very ones he wanted to impress would defeat the nation. The leaders of the nation as well as young people like Daniel with their life before them, would be taken away as captives and placed in the palace of the king of Babylon. Babylon became the world power that would crush the Assyrians' empire and take world leadership.

Hezekiah's response seems to be a humbled acceptance of the Lord's judgment rather than a self-centered reply relating only to himself. In essence he was saying, "At least we have this time of peace and security where truth can still be taught to our children and practiced by us." It may have been that in the years following many of those who had places of leadership carefully taught their children to love and serve the Lord. Daniel was only young when he along with other young people were taken captive, but they seemed very conscious of God in everything from what to eat, to how to conduct one's self in the presence of those in authority.

Hezekiah was an effective ruler and realized how vulnerable a besieged city could be. The pool and the tunnel through which water could come into Jerusalem in time of siege were great engineering feats. We may not be able to do much about events that are happening around us, but we can prepare ourselves and those who come after us for eventualities that may be in the future. It is true, "the coming of the Lord draweth near," but we do not know the length of time between now and then. We need to live with the conscious knowledge that the Lord may come today, and work with awareness that He may not come for a long time yet. Our children and grandchildren may even grow old. It is our responsibility to teach them how to live and please God in whatever situation they are placed.

The death of Hezekiah closed an era of effective leadership that has not been experienced in Israel since. His son who followed him as the ruler of Judah was a man notable for the evil he did. How can one explain why the children of God-fearing parents go the opposite way from what they were taught? We cannot explain that, but lest believing parents of unbelieving children despair, remember God is able to do for them what we cannot do. The only person I can change is myself. It is up to me to conduct my life in the way God wants under His divine leadership. Hopefully I will be able to influence those around me for good - but what they do with truth, peace, God, righteousness and God offered salvation is up to them as they come to maturity. "God our Savior will have all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth."

2Kings 20:1. *"In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, thus saith the Lord, set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live."*

SET IN ORDER.

We have decisions to make - consequences to consider -
The effects of which make things come together or scatter
To the four winds of chance if we do not choose wisely
These matters to be urgent and act on them timely.

At the beginning of life order needs to be taught -
For important things will be overlooked if we expect them to be caught.
Whether it be parents or teachers, or maybe some others
There is discipline we learn when things are in order.

Then we go out on our own as the years pass us by -
And self-discipline and orderliness are not things we can buy.
To act with discretion and orderly planning takes time -
But it pays big dividends when the convictions are mine.

As old age approaches, we should take time to plan -
For the things that are important and what to leave behind.
Our reputation has been formed but others have a right to know
What to expect when it is my time to go.

When that time comes for me to bid farewell -
If things are in order no one will have to try to tell
What I meant to be done or who gets what -
Because that was already done before my life's door was shut.

If things are set in order in every phase of my life -
I will have avoided much that potentially causes strife.
And perhaps there will be a memory every now and then
Of a man who in an orderly way previously considered them.

"Father, the things I need to be aware of and put in order are coming to my mind a little bit at a time. I am praying for a sense of order to be granted me that I may not leave a lot of unattended business for others to attend to when Thou dost call me. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

2nd Kings 21

EVIL ACTIONS, DESECRATION -- "FORGIVENESS?"

Some things are hard for us to grasp or even imagine. How could a young man, the son of a righteous man who did right personally and taught what was right to those under his leadership, turn out to be as mean as a "junk yard dog" who was so perverted by false religion as to actually sacrifice his own son in the fire. Manasseh actually served with his father in leadership for ten years and would have been learning how to serve and please God. But when his time came to lead the people, he totally and deliberately rejected all he had been taught.

A person can be born into favorable circumstances in a "Christian home;" be taught the Bible truths from childhood; share in the practices of believing parents; seem like they are believers themselves - and turn away from it all in a very short time. The only reasonable explanation is their heart is not right before God. Because they were under parental authority, they did what was acceptable by others and expedient at the moment for them. Once they get on their own, who they really are is obvious. They may even claim to be "Christians," but "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it.

Manasseh's deliberate rejection of God; his desecration of the temple by putting idols there; the practice of divination and occultism lead to sickening acts. Perhaps he had heard of Ahab and all the evil things he did in Israel. It may be his own grandfather Ahaz had stirred a dark fascination in his sinful heart for forbidden things. To be kept away from worldly activities by parents who love the Lord does not keep our children who are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit from wanting to try those things that had been prohibited. A life of faith in God who is not seen by natural eyes is not as exciting to an unbeliever as the immoral attractions of the world that appeal to the flesh and are promoted by the devil.

For a self-centered man who is in a place of leadership to do the things Manasseh did even to his own son, is so abhorrent to us that we are surprised God would allow him to even live. The we remember God is a God of mercy and grace. If we compare ourselves with others, we would think they should be more like us. But there is really no difference. We have "all sinned and come short of the glory of God." It is not because of our supposedly sterling qualities that He saved us. We were sinners just like everyone else. We can only live to please Him because it is Christ "the hope of glory" who is in us. It is because of the new nature He planted in us that has preserved us from doing the same things as other people. Beside this, we have the Holy Spirit in us at all times so that we are able to fulfill the "lusts of the flesh."

Manasseh went farther than just the practice of evil in himself, but the bitterness in his heart and the evil he did extended to others. He went to séances, consulted with soothsayers and wizards, and went farther into idolatry than the idol-worshipping people who inhabited the land generations earlier. Not only did the king do these things but he led others into the same practices. Evil overtook the nation in one generation. The Lord warned him through prophets and he would not listen to them but killed them.

Isaiah gave warning that God was measuring their evil by His divine standards, and the king had failed in every way. There was no redeeming feature in him and those who followed his leadership. The measuring tools used in building were used to show what was wrong and were symbolic of the destruction and judgment that was coming. When Manasseh "killed the prophets," despised the Lord, desecrated the temple and led the people astray - "the cup of iniquity" was overflowing. The judgment that had been promised would inevitably come.

Innocent people who were likely those who lived godly, were being killed because of their opposition to the evil that had come upon the nation under king Manasseh. It may have been that Isaiah was one who was killed during that time. Jewish tradition suggests that he may have been sawed in half in a hollow log. In our minds there doesn't seem there could possibly be hope for one who has gone so far away from the faith of his father. He had done so much evil and influenced so many people to do that which is wrong, that there could be no possible way grace could reach him.

However, when Manasseh was a captive in Babylon there was repentance on his part that was genuine and he turned to God for mercy. For a time, he led the people of Judah again and there was a brief period of revival under the leadership of the same man who led them astray. We should never underestimate the extent and power of the grace of God. For those who mourn for the waywardness of their children - fear not. God is able to do what we cannot do. He can bring the prodigal to his senses and perhaps use them in some way for His glory, even after we are gone.

Sowing and reaping are principles which cannot be avoided. Manasseh's son, Amon, became king and he followed the practices of his father during the dark days of his leadership. He walked in willful disobedience to God. Even though the nation had a revival, once again it fell under the influence of an evil leader. It may have been that the people had been appreciative of the change in Manasseh that they resented the evil leadership of Amon and so some of his servants assassinated him. The confusion that followed continued when the people killed those assassins and chose his eight-year-old son to be their king.

It is possible when apostasy comes upon a people that they become sickened with the senselessness of what is happening and say, "Enough is enough." This gives us hope even though this does not happen very often; there can be at least some recovery. In Manasseh's case his repentance and God's forgiveness was unexpected, but it happened - his life was changed and he was given the opportunity to right some of the wrongs he had done. Amon his son quickly undid the good he had done, but the people had a brief taste of what was right, and under Josiah, his son there was recovery. When one comes to his senses and calls out to God for mercy, God hears. When repentance is real, forgiveness is real and a new attitude toward the Lord is obvious and the changes in one's life are not superficial.

2Kings 21:13. *"And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab: and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down."*

UPSIDE DOWN.

What is happening in the house of the Lord?

What are they building in there?

All those strange altars, what are they for?

God doesn't with evil worship share!

To place altars there to the host of heaven,

Is sacrilege of the worst kind!

As God looks down where He once dwelt with men

I wonder what now He can find?

What is happening in the house of the king?
What is he teaching his son to do?
Surely, he's not going to the world's fire bring
His son so that the fire he must pass through?
In the home of a leader there will be indelibly impressed
On the minds of his family - truth or lies?
The children know well what their father possessed -
Where his morals and main interests reside.

God is the same today as He was back when
He wiped the city that turned from Him - like a dish.
With the plumb line of His justice He dealt with them then,
And made their heritage no more than a wish.
Upside down and empty without a thing to offer -
Is the family or house of God that turns away
From God and His truth to what the world proffers
Because we let ourselves fall under the world's false sway.

“O God: places that once held and taught the truth of Thy Word have adapted to what the world system offers. They think it is right because it is more acceptable to everyone. Please keep me from wrongly influencing my family and the whole family of God I pray, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

2nd Kings 22

TAKING GOD SERIOUSLY

When a young child whose father was a notably ungodly man, becomes a believer who wants to do what is right, we wonder who or what had such an impact on his life. Undoubtedly the sovereign God is able to bring about in the heart of an innocent person an interest in divine things. It may have been that Josiah's grandfather Manasseh, took a special interest in the boy during the days in which he was converted and promoted revival in Judah. Amon the father of Josiah, was likely a negative influence for righteousness in his son during his brief reign. It seems like Josiah and his great-grandfather Hezekiah, were alike. Both knew the Lord God personally and wanted to bring the people back to God. Both promoted reform and a return of the nation to worship in the way God intended. Both were obedient to the word of God even when those before them were not.

There is a sense in which people are able to adapt to pressure to do that which is right because that is socially accepted at that time by the majority of people in their circle of friendships. When a nation is united by some calamity, there may be a brief turning toward righteousness and justice, but unless there is a change in the hearts of individuals, that doesn't last too long. Any work for God that is done for the sake of children is very important. Their uncluttered minds are like a clean slate so that the things taught them in a way that impresses them will still be there even when secular darkness settles over the life of a nation. Those things we teach our children, and others, are not lost. Whatever Josiah learned when he was young from Hilkiah the priest, Hulda the prophetess, and or Jeremiah and Zephaniah the prophets, seemed to have molded his mind and life.

Children can sense when things are wrong. They may go along with what they are told to do for quite some time, but then they begin to either take what they have been taught as true and follow the Lord in a personal way, or reject what they have been taught. When one rejects the truth of God, they are open to anything that appeals to their fleshly interests and will likely turn from righteousness to self-pleasing. Josiah served as king for 8 years, mainly being obedient to those who were his mentors. By the time he was 16 he had begun serving the Lord by his own volition. When he was 20, in the 12th year of his reign, he had begun purging the nation of idolatry. When he was 26, in the 18th year of his reign, he started the repairs of the temple.

Not everything happens at once. There are times when change is made rapidly but often that does not last. There has to be a solid base of scriptural truth when changes are made in one's life, in a family or in an assembly. The early changes that started in the nation ten years before had set a tone for true reform that led to repairing the temple in preparation for renewing temple worship. When a need is seen that should be addressed, there will likely be a period of time when we gradually take action with care and consideration of the effect the change will have on others.

The workmen at the temple were trusted people who were obviously thorough in their work. They found a hidden copy of the word of God, likely the books of Moses, that had been preserved during the times of

apostasy. The desire of Josiah to have the temple repaired and the people of God return to worship there, was met with God's revealed word. The "righting of wrong" can lead to blessing for many people. When the word of God was read to Josiah, the effect was obvious. He was overwhelmed by the holiness of God and the sinfulness of sin, probably in himself and in God's people. The reading and understanding of the scriptures have a great impact on the lives of those who are exercised to truly know God. There is a great gap between the practices of the "Christian religion" and the holiness of God.

The understanding of holiness becomes evident when there is conviction of sin. Guilt revealed brings conviction, and conviction bring repentance. When repentance is genuine, then faith in Christ alone for salvation is not hard to accept. One who has sinned will not find it hard to admit to the fact they have sinned and come "short of the glory (holiness) of God." But to take ownership for their own sin is very hard because most people want to find someone else to blame for their sin. Some blame society, others peer-pressure, others circumstances of life - some even blame their parents for being the cause of their sin because of their strictness and rules at home. This barrier is removed when one is willing to stop comparing themselves with others, or trying to find a reason to shift blame to others - and face themselves as to who they are in the presence of a holy God.

Josiah's reaction to the reading of the word of God was genuine as he found himself exposed before God. He tore his clothes as an admittance of his nakedness before God. The contrast between Josiah and his son, Jehoiakim is worth considering. Josiah was immediately convicted and sought help to understand and know what to do. Jehoiakim in anger, took a knife and cut up the scrolls and burned them in the fire. The actions of Josiah preserved the nation for a few more years. Jehoiakim's actions brought the final disaster upon the nation.

The scriptures are not given to only read and study as some form of literature and information. They are God's most precise way of communicating His will and His truth to us. They are given to us to live by and practice the principles of life that are taught there. When, and if, we do that, we will find that every situation we face in life has guiding principles by which we can make right decisions and take right actions that please our Lord. If we practice what He says, our lives will be what He intends.

Hilkiah the priest, and Hulda the prophetess each had a role to fill in the life of the young king. Each one respected the fact that God chooses who He will to fulfill His plans. Whether one is a king or a slave, a man or a woman, or whether they are rich or poor does not keep God from giving us the responsibility to do His will in the role for which He equips us. The prophecy of Hulda was plain and authentic. God was going to bring disaster and defeat on His people as He had warned hundreds of years before and warned again and again through people of faith. The warnings were written in the book of the law. Judgment was going to happen. The people could not blame God. He had warned them. Apparently, Josiah understood this and tore his clothes and wept in the presence of the Lord God. In mercy God spared Josiah from seeing this final disaster fall because of his true repentance.

It is not easy to face the consequences of sin without bitterness against those who caused it, or even against God for not stopping it but allowing it. When our sin has affected others, we owe them restitution if that is possible and certainly an apology as evidence of our sincerity, remorse and repentance. Unconfessed sin and avoiding facing sin, leaves a person unhappy in spirit with a burden on the soul that remains. There is relief when we face our sin, confess and forsake our sins, repent of our sins and turn to God for mercy. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Facing and dealing with sin, whether it is ours, the assembly's or the nation's, of which we are a part, means that we have learned to take God seriously.

2Kings 22:2. *"And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left."*

AN AWAKENING.

A child of eight may be ignored by many
Or considered not able to understand.
But when guided in early years by not just any -
But one who recognizes this young man
Can be used by God to bring His people back
To the way God intends His people to go:
He can supply the leadership needed and what they lack,
When he learns what God wants them all to know.

A view of God's house based on scriptures of truth,
Is what people need reviewed from time to time.

The young leader needs to know what a good example is worth,
And that people will follow him when from within his convictions shine.
An awakening in one can by nurturing soon spread
To others who when guided see what needs to be done.
He needs to define the work, then others when well-led,
Will rally to that task almost as one.

The leader needs to see through eyes God has anointed,
How the difficulties of the work can be accomplished.
He saw the gifts and talents, then wisely appointed
Each to a special work until is finally finished.
The one who guides and leads will find many who are willing
To lend their strength and goods to a goal clearly defined.
Especially when its purposes are inwardly fulfilling -
They are glad to see a bright future and not look behind.

“Father, there seems to be such a lack of enthusiasm for Thy house and Thy work. I pray today that in some way I might be able to generate interest in these things and help to provide leadership that will be able to stir Thy people into action with a fresh vision of the kingdom of God. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

2nd Kings 23

BACK TO BASICS

Covenants are established when agreements are made between two parties, individuals or groups. Each has to understand and accept the agreements and then the sincerity of both is tested by each dying to self-interest only and living with the welfare of the other covenanter as our basic objective. This is what is involved in our redemption. Christ died for us - we die to self and live for Him. The same is true in marriage. One dies to a self-centered, self-occupied life, and chooses to live with the interests and well-being of the one with whom we have formed the marriage covenant. When each fulfills the terms of the covenant, there is meaning, purpose, beauty and happiness in life.

God had formed a covenant with Israel generations before Josiah became king. Apparently, he was not aware of the terms of the covenant, nor even understood how serious those terms were. Hezekiah was notable as a king for his faith. Josiah was notable for his obedience to the Lord. When he heard the words of the book found in the temple, he was frightened, humbled and shocked by what God had said compared to what was going on in the nations he led. Wisely, even though he was a comparatively young king, he called the nation together to hear what had made and kept them as a nation. The people came together, heard him read the word of God, responded out of respect for Josiah their leader, but never took it personally for themselves by repenting of their own guilt before God. Their worship was no more than a temporary change of religion. They pledged themselves to the terms of the covenant, but not to God.

It is possible to go along with that which is accepted because it is the easiest way to adapt to the present situation without having a personal relationship with God and thus the terms of the "New Covenant (Testament)." When one is truly humbled before the Lord and is conscious of the holiness of God and one's own sinfulness, that person realizes their need of cleansing from sin and new life in Christ. The gap between what God expects of us as His children and the honest recognition of who we are, brings us down in repentance to where we put our personal faith in Christ. That in turn generates a desire in our hearts to obey and serve Him.

When Josiah stood by that pillar and read the word of God to the people, there must have been a great silence as they listened and stood to pledge themselves to take action according to what they heard. From the lewd carvings that made up the "groves" in the "high places" to the grinding up of the images that had been placed in the temple; all the things that had led the people to idol worship were destroyed. Even to spreading ashes over the graveyards was with the intention of ridding them of the defilement of the sexual idolatrous practice in which they had been involved. There were altars to the stars on the roof that had to be destroyed; altars that had desecrated the temple to be thrown into the fires of "gehenna" in the valley of Kidron. The "Mount of Corruption" was the mount of Olives where Solomon had built "high places" for the worship of idols.

When we realize things are wrong and the terrible state that sin caused to bring God's work to a stand-still; it is not enough to bemoan the state of affairs. Something must be done. Action is called for to correct the wrong. It is also important to do what is right even though it may have been ignored for years. To "clean house" of every thing that is wrong in one's life or the life of an assembly - even a nation, leaves us "empty,

swept and garnished." That leaves us open to the intrusion of satanic influence and worldly attractions that leaves us in a worse condition than we were in before.

The "Great Passover" was certainly an indication of the desire of Josiah to do what was right. It seems like the Feast of Passover was carried out in a way that seemed right. Instead of each family being responsible to do what was right according to the word of God, the Passover was conducted in a setting in which the Levites killed the lambs and the nation celebrated this in Jerusalem rather than in their homes as responsible families.

It is possible for us to forget the spiritual significance of an event and just consider it a ritual we observe. When that happens, we are inclined to do what we do to suit ourselves instead of a sincere commitment to recall the origin and meaning behind an observance. The intention of the Passover was to keep alive the memory of Israel's divine deliverance from bondage in Egypt which was the foundation of their existence as a nation. It is good to a degree, to observe holidays and the reasons for them, but unless there is a response in the hearts of those who participate, there will be very little impact on the lives of those who keep these days. The Lord's Supper in many "Christian churches" has been demeaned to a mere ritual rather than a vital memorial of our Lord Jesus Christ - His death, burial and resurrection.

From the beginning of Josiah's reign under the teaching and influence of godly mentors to the end, he did not stop in bringing about the reforms and renewal to the Lord's people. With total dedication he served the Lord by doing all he could to cleanse the land from the polluting influences of idolatry and spiritual decay. He recognized sin for what it was and acted to eliminate the sinful practices that had become common-place. But he went a step farther in that he went after the causes of sin to remove not only the sinful practices, but that which made them happen in the first place.

Relationships that are formed with other people who do not want God to interfere in their lives, is a cause for departure on the part of a child of God. The practices of our lives including our habits, daily routines and the patterns of living we have accepted also cause departure and must be rejected and/or changed or totally forsaken. Temptation is constantly placed before us by the world, the flesh and the devil with the objective of bringing us down and defeating the covenant relationship God has made with us.

Unfortunately, Josiah ignored the prophetic warning against going out to battle against the king of Egypt and he died at Meggido. We are never immune from self-will and can make serious mistakes even though we may have done much good. The results of revival and renewal do not remove the consequences of acting independently of the will of God. The respect people had for Josiah was only outward, and in a short time under the leadership of Josiah's sons who did not have respect for the word of God, the people returned to their old ways and were taken away as captives. One son became a captive in Egypt, another was a greedy, dishonest and unjust leader whose name was changed and ultimately became a captive in Babylon.

As much as we desire the best for our children and teach them the word of God in the hope that they will accept Christ for themselves and live for God - we cannot make that happen. Our will for them is not the controlling power in their lives. They have their own will. If they personally choose to take responsibility for their own sin in the light of God's word; if they repent of sin and turn in faith to Christ for salvation; and if they are obedient to the Lord and God's word - they will find what they need and we will be glad. But it is not in our power to make it happen. "Salvation is of the Lord." "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land" - Isaiah wrote.

2Kings 23:2. *"And the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord."*

THE BIBLE READING.

They came together every one,
Father and mother, daughter and son -
And in a voice loud enough to hear so all could take heed
To what God had said to His people in the past,
The king read, so they would understand covenants were made to last -
And God intended that each and every one should hear
The positive and negative results of reverential fear.

Now they come in, in companies of one or two
If it is convenient and the game is through.
And someone asks where we read last week -

As people are thumbing through their Bibles trying to seek
Some verses to compare the reading with those in another place
Instead of reading the passage and taking its value at its face -
They give elaborate explanations to something that is very plain -
Missing the simple truth, they would learn if they read it again.

A number of old men walk in with Bibles so big
And mount a platform before watchers - these men know how to dig
Things that the common people are bound to miss -
We need to hear them if scriptures we are going to properly assess -
And we won't get the point if we don't know the tenses
Which in turn results in young people breaking down the fences -
And everything fails miserably because they don't understand
All the explanations given by a bunch of old men.

Why not go back to the early reading where people listened to God
Make things plain to His people as a king read God's Word,
And paid heed to His will by applying the simple truths
Given in writing and by the reading of it was revealed the worth
Of acting on what we already know, then come back for more
So we are not relegating or relating scripture to ancient folklore,
But accept it as relevant to our present day and age -
Finding truths there to live by on every single page.

“Father, may it be true that I have learned Thy truth in Thy Word by Thy Spirit, and from it practice Thy will in Thy way, In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

2nd Kings 24

PROPHECIES FULFILLED

After the revival and positive changes made during the reign of Josiah, and after his death, things rapidly deteriorated in Judah. One of his sons, Jehoiakim, had only a brief evil reign and was taken captive to Egypt. The next son, Jehoiakim was also an evil ruler and served as a puppet king under the authority of Nebuchadnezzar. When he rebelled against the ruler of Babylon, it wasn't long until he died. The prophecies against Judah and the kings of Judah were being fulfilled. Apparently Jehoiakim was personally evil as well as being an evil leader. He was taken "bound in fetters" to Babylon where he died and was "buried with the burial of an ass."

God's justice is righteous in every way. Many people have the idea that God will overlook sin. They say, "After all, He is a God of mercy!" implying that He will never judge the guilty. However, mercy had been extended to those of Judah for hundreds of years, and grace had been shown in the fact of God sending prophets to warn the people against evil and to teach them the way back to God. There is a day of reckoning when the evil practices of people have gone so far for so long that it must be stopped. The effects of sin are felt by those who follow. Generations following often do the same evil practices of those before them and go even farther.

Jehoiachin, Josiah's grandson, was the king for only three months when the prophecy regarding the captivity of Judah was fulfilled. The Babylonian army laid siege against Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar came himself and Jehoiachin, his family, his servants, the nobility of the nation and all the leadership surrendered. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah would have been teenagers then and among those taken captive to Babylon. All the trained leaders, craftsmen and whose who would have been a threat to Babylonian rule were taken captive and their skills and leadership qualities were used in Babylon.

the Assyrians had scattered captives throughout their empire and moved foreigners in to tend to the captured territory so that area would be subservient to the new ruler. The Babylonians used a different tactic. They took all of those who were skilled, had leadership qualities because of their training and family connections, and moved them to the cities of Babylon to strengthen the empire and weaken the captive areas. Those who tended the land and were poor were left at their homes to work and rule the land, which elevated them to positions of authority which before were denied the .in that way they would change their loyalty from the Israeli king to the Babylonian king.

By permitting those taken captive to live together, work together and become part of the Babylonian society, the Jews were able to retain their identity. Some of them remained faithful to the Lord and years later some were able to return to Israel and rebuild Jerusalem, the temple and the city walls under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah.

Teaching our children and grandchildren the word of God when they are young is very important. We never know where they will go or what their work will be, but if we have been diligent in impressing on them the value of the word of God, they will not totally forget the standards of righteousness. Some may willfully reject what they have been taught, but instilled in their consciences and minds are the unchangeable truths of God. Our prayer for them is when they have had their fill of evil, they will realize the truth of what they were taught and return to the word of God for the light they need. When they have tried and tested that which we forbade when they were under our authority, they will hopefully realize what God says can be relied on. That which is sinful does not bring satisfaction. The "pleasures of sin" are only for a season.

When Jehoiachin was in Babylon another of Josiah's sons, Mattaniah, was designated by Nebuchadnezzar to be the king of those left in Judah. His name was changed to Zedekiah to remind him and those he led that he was in subjection to Nebuchadnezzar. He had not learned anything about repentance nor accepting responsibility for our own sin, and consequently continued the evil practices of those before him that led to captivity. Many prophecies were fulfilled when the Jews were taken captive and put in bondage to the world-powers.

Weakness of character leads to moral weakness. Moral weakness leads to spiritual weakness. Spiritual weakness leads to captivity by the world. The attractions of sin seem to be real. The habits that bind are things like alcohol, drugs, entertainments and anything that captivates the minds of those who ignore the word of God. We do not make prophetic utterances and predictions based on our own opinions, but we can warn people, including our own families that "Thus saith the Lord" can be counted on to be unchangeable facts. The wise person, even if they have experienced failure or a fall, can return to the Lord and He will have mercy.

Those ancient kings seemed to ignore the word of God, the godly people who lived before them and the prophets who warned them. When that mind-set is in place, divine justice sets in and "pay-day" comes. Zedekiah had not learned from his father, Josiah, nor had he learned from his failures of his brothers nor his nephew who ruled before him. He even apparently thought he was in control and succumbed to the enticements of those who were against being governed by Babylon. Even though he had sworn allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, he took matters into his own hands to seek independence from Babylon.

One's word should be able to be counted on, even by those who do not know the Lord. To say one thing and do another has always been challenged by those who expect us to honor our word. There are occasions in family life when without thinking about consequence, we make unreasonable and dogmatic statements. When we are wrong, we need to admit we are wrong. To defend one's independent actions when they are not right is foolish. Every person is under some authority and it is important that we make the foundation of our life and commitment, our obedience to God and His word as the first and foremost authority over us.

The laws of the land may be changed and the social mores of society are usually adapted to a time, place and culture. We can only submit to those when they are consistent with the word of God under whose authority we live. Our family, the family of God and society in general have a right to expect us to live under biblical authority and the fact that what God says (prophecies) is right and can be counted on.

2Kings 24:15. *"And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land, those he carried into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon."*

INTO CAPTIVITY.

The past finally caught up with the present -
The Lord would not pardon the shedding of innocent blood.
There is no more recourse for the unrepentant -
They still insisted on doing evil in the sight of the Lord.

The forces of darkness have serious power -
When faint light by men is deliberately extinguished.
That same darkness continues to grow darker than ever -
And righteous judgment ignores the cries of the anguished.

The unalterable principle of sowing and reaping -
Is carried out in all the seasons of life.
When the will of God, people no longer are keeping -
That moral darkness becomes that of deepest night.

The warnings we receive from the lives of the ancients -

We do well to heed and act on them now.
Their lives were lived in rebellion so blatant -
Is an example to us lest our obedience is slow.

Grace was extended for hundreds of years -
But when truth is forsaken then it will end.
When God's means of judgment finally appears -
The full cup of His divine wrath He soon will send.

It seems in our day it is the same -
We have been blessed but have taken blessings for granted.
In our world today we have despised God's name -
And our judgment like those in the past, on God's calendar is slated.

"I am a citizen, O God, of a nation that has in reality forsaken Thee. We have our churches and our gatherings but we are catering to the wishes of people rather than to Thy will and Word. I intercede on behalf of a rebellious people, and pray Thou wilt guide me to souls that still are willing to listen to Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

2nd Kings 25

BACK INTO SLAVERY

Three times the Assyrians invaded Israel over one hundred years before the Babylonians invaded Judah three times. Neither Israel nor Judah repented and turned from evil and idolatry to seek the Lord as His sons and daughters should. In grace the Lord gave them ample opportunities time after time to repent. The prophets had preached and warned in Israel. Circumstances in life were allowed to make them aware of the wrong they were doing, but they persisted in the downward course they were on and were scattered. Israel have been known as the "ten lost tribes." Now three times the Babylonians invaded Judah and God dealt in grace the same way He did to Israel. Still evil practices continued. Even the famine in which Jerusalem was starved out did not bring an earnest call for mercy to the Lord.

Our gracious God still does not hasten to judgment but is "longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Patience and longsuffering (a long-temper) are virtues that need to be cultivated in the people of God. Quick snap-judgments may be made and because they are premature, the consequences may not be satisfactory. Evil that continues in spite of warnings does have to be dealt with in our families, assemblies and country, but it is important to give opportunity to repent and turn to the Lord and do that which is right.

Even though Zedekiah and the whole army escaped at night through a passage between two walls, they were soon captured. Just as Ezekiel had prophesied, Zedekiah saw Nebuchadnezzar but didn't see Babylon because his eyes were put out after his sons were killed before his eyes. Willful acts on our part because of self-interest, has an effect on others and leads ultimately to failure. If Zedekiah had listened to the prophet Jeremiah, the destruction of Jerusalem would have been prevented and lives would have been spared. The sorrow of the prophet was deep and real (the book of Lamentations) as he watched the city being torn down, all the valuable treasures taken away, some broken in pieces so they could be carried, and the last of the leadership led away as captives.

There are many kinds of bondage today that people are in, and for some reason do not reject. Substance abuse, moral perversions, materialism, pleasure and self-centered motivation has captured much of society. Even professed Christians fall into this trap of the world, and when the flesh is catered to, the devil takes advantage of such people so that they are enslaved physically, morally and spiritually.

Jeremiah and Gedaliah the governor who was appointed by the Babylonians, both urged non-resistance to their captors. Jeremiah knew that God was allowing these events to take place because both Judah and Israel had turned away from their covenant with Him. Exile was the greatest of the curses when the terms of the covenant with God were rejected. Now it had happened inevitably even after the periods of grace that had been extended to the Jews. People make a serious mistake when they take God, His mercy and His grace for granted. "Without faith, it is impossible to please God," is an unchanging principle.

Jerusalem was demolished; Judah was no longer a functioning entity and all of those who were leaders or were capable of becoming leaders, were taken away. Yet both in the land and in Babylon, God had His servants like Daniel and Ezekiel who kept the Lord before the minds and hearts of the people of God. The spiritual kingdom of God was not taken captive. The hope of the nation to gain back that which they had lost, was gone because of their willful sin. But some of the people like Daniel and his friends, and doubtless

others, had been prepared ahead of time by godly parents and instructors who could see what was going to happen. They were able to keep alive the promises and principles of living by faith.

We may not understand all the reasons for the events that take place in life, but we can trust in the grace of our God to enable us to pass through dark times without compromising our light. In spite of declension and departure, God has His people all over the world giving light in dark places. Elijah was carried into heaven in a whirlwind at the beginning of the book of second Kings. Now the book is closed with the people being carried away as humiliated captives who have lost everything because of sin and unwillingness to follow the Lord.

Our consciences can become seared and unable to help us discern what is right or wrong when we choose to ignore God's will and word. Like He was toward the Jews, God is ready and willing to forgive His people when they repent and turn from sin to serve Him by faith. More than one of His children have gone down a wrong path, until there is no real evidence, they are even a child of God. Then they stop for some reason, and are willing to turn again to the Lord who is willing to forgive and let us start again.

For some reason, the son of Nebuchadnezzar who followed him as king of Babylon was inclined to show kindness to Jehoiachin who was the last of Josiah's sons. In this way the line of David was preserved and promised by God. We learned from 2nd Kings what happens when we do not obey our Lord and/or give Him the first place in our lives as His children. When we take matters into our own hands without considering what God wants and says in His word, we make a ruin out of a life that could have been fruitful.

Thankfully, we have the Spirit of God within us as the Person who gives us the understanding of that which is right, and who warns us of that which is wrong. Being under the authority of the New Covenant is certainly a great privilege and blessing as long as we keep the terms of the covenant. If one chooses to ignore the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit, it is possible for us to become like those who "go down into the pit."

Wise people read and pay attention to the lessons taught by those who have gone before us. It will preserve us from the failures and consequences those people in Israel and Judah went through. The challenge to us is to read, listen, learn and act upon that which is written in the word of God, is right and pleases God. Then our history will not be a dark period of time which is given as a warning to our children and our children's children.

2Kings 25:6. *"So they took the king, and brought him to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him."*

DEFEAT AND DESPAIR.

It is bound to come: payday is someday -
When a nation chooses to turn away from the Lord.
It may not be identical but there will be some way
What once was a power, now falls by the sword.

It may not be with the sword of an army -
Or a great battle that is pitched and fought -
But the inward weakness becomes so wormy,
That truth is sold and righteousness comes to naught.

Leaders failed; the wise men stopped thinking -
Religious leaders forsook the ways of the Lord.
Only the poor remained to keep from permanently sinking
Into oblivion the memory of God's Word.

It seems to be repeated over and over -
Because lessons we should often have learned -
We ignored and despised and can no longer cover -
The awful results of the wrong road where we turned.

The God of the past is still the God of the present -
We may think He has changed His word and His ways.
But that is not true, when we refuse to repent our God doesn't
Compromise at all what He does and He says.

Let none ever think that sin has no wages -
Those wages God has declared is spiritual death.
Today it is the same as down through past ages -
Men bring on themselves His judgment and wrath.

“I thank Thee, O God, for giving us examples of failure for our learning and admonition.’ Help me to be alert to any practices that will bring about defeat and despair to Thy people. Give me courage to stand and declare the righteous acts of God.’ In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”