



# LESSONS FROM THE KINGS

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## INTRODUCTION

There are many valuable lessons in the history of Israel in the time of the kings. In Peter's epistle believers are called kings and priests and we are also called children of the King. Many of the lessons from the time of the kings relate to human nature which is the same in every age.

One of the main themes of the sacred record of this period in history is the comparison of kings who sought the Lord, with others who forsook the Lord. Some kings sought after God for a while until they achieved some success and then forsook Him. Others only sought the Lord when a strong righteous influence was asserted upon them, and as soon as that influence was removed, they forsook the Lord and His law and house.

We certainly may learn from the sacred record, the value of a seeking spirit. We also should clearly discern the need for consistent principles by which we may govern our own lives. The study is interesting historically, but is invaluable in the Kingdom lessons exemplified during this era.

These lessons were written for the Emmanuel Pentecostal Sunday School by the pastor, Robert D. Kalis. This is the fourteenth in a series of twenty quarterlies (5 years) covering the greater part of the historical portion of the Bible. Now available are:

The Men and Women of Genesis	Wilderness Examples
The Personal Ministry of Jesus	The Days of the Judges
Lessons From Exodus	Israel's Early Kings
Possessing the Land of Promise	We Beheld His Glory (John-I)
The Parables of Jesus	Full of Grace & Truth (John-II)
The Miracles of Jesus	Lessons From the Kings
Matthew: The King and His Kingdom-I & II	

## REHOBOAM, THE FOOL

Read: I Kings 12:1-24; 14:21-31; II Chronicles 10, 11 & 12

Memory Work: Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. Psalm 1:1

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *We should be wise enough to learn from the mistakes of others.*
2. *Exploitation inevitably breeds revolt.*
3. *Kindness and consideration will win friends and inspire devotion.*
4. *Harsh and rough words discourage and alienate those around us.*
5. *Seeking the Lord brings the help and blessing of God. Forsaking the Lord results in defeat and disaster.*

I The Necessity of Reformation: Rehoboam was born before Solomon became king. He was over twenty when Solomon, his father fell into that terrible decline, brought about by his love of many "outlandish women". He should have learned from the mistakes of his father, but instead he continued in the same error. Rehoboam's mother was Naamah an Ammonitess, whom Solomon, of course, should never have married. Solomon must have married her while he was very young for he came to the throne at about the age of twenty and Rehoboam was born before that. But Solomon developed his fleshly lust for women to unpardonable proportions. Many of his wives were heathen women. He indulged their frivolous desires and built them palaces, and temples for their idol gods. His administration became extravagant in its luxurious splendor. The cost of all of this became tremendous. The money came in large measure from the taxation of the people. The man who struggled to support his wife and children inevitably would come to resent

the ever increasing taxation used to support the self-indulgent king who had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, and an administration that denied itself no luxury. When Solomon died there was great need for reformation.

II Disastrous Decision: Because of Solomon's extravagance and compromise, the prophet Ahijah had foretold Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, that God would divide the kingdom of Solomon. He prophesied that Jeroboam would reign over ten of the twelve tribes of Israel. When Solomon learned of this he attempted to kill Jeroboam, who fled to Egypt. But when Solomon died Jeroboam returned and the people who gathered at Shechem to crown Rehoboam in the place of his father appointed Jeroboam to be their spokesman. He petitioned Rehoboam with all Israel to relieve the heavy burden of taxation. Rehoboam asked for three days to consider the proposals and the alternatives. He first called for the old advisors from his father's administration. They wisely counselled him to be kind to the people and to please them. They perceived that if the king would do this the people would love and serve him loyally all the days of his life. But Rehoboam was not disposed to accept this advice. Both narratives reveal that Rehoboam foolishly forsook and rejected the counsel of the wise old advisors before the counsel of the younger impetuous group was even considered. They told him to tell the people that he would add to the heavy yoke which Solomon had put upon them. They thought, no doubt, that such a course would establish Rehoboam's authority over the people. The younger advisors counselled Rehoboam to answer the people roughly and threaten them. The foolish monarch fell right into the trap. On the appointed day he appeared before the people and spoke roughly to them. He promised to add to the heavy yoke of taxation and servitude his father had laid upon them. "My father chastised you with whips," he threatened, "but I will chastise you with scorpions." The result was totally predictable. "To your tents, Oh Israel," they cried, "what portion have we in David." So ten tribes revolted from Rehoboam just as the Lord had said through Ahijah, the prophet. When Rehoboam attempted to collect the taxes from the ten tribes, his tax-collector, Hadoram, was stoned, and Rehoboam hastily retreated to Jerusalem. Here is a valuable lesson in human nature for us. Kindness and consideration will produce much greater loyalty and faithful service than authoritarian threats, and rough scolding. An encouraging

compliment will inspire greater effort where a belittling insult may discourage honest effort. Husbands should learn this sensible psychology and thereby encourage and inspire their wives who serve them so faithfully. And the wife should learn to speak kindly to the good man who has put in a hard day on the job to support the family. Parents will do well to learn how to speak to their children. The politicians have learned, only too well, the art of promising relief and kindness while running for office. Too few remember and carry out these promises once elected.

There is too much harsh and rough speech today. Voices are raised in anger. Louder and louder they rage. Let us lower the voices and learn the law of kindness. Instead of provoking one another to anger, let us inspire one another to love and good works. Let us learn to help one another.

So one bad decision cost Rehoboam the greatest part of the kingdom. Many lives have been wrecked by one bad choice. Terrible enslaving habits are begun by one bad decision. One moment's weakness has stained forever the purity that makes for a happy trusting relationship and home. The adversary would like to devour you and your Christian usefulness. Be alert. Be watchful. Don't be afraid to ask for counsel from experienced men and women of God. Above all seek the wisdom and guidance of God in every choice. Do not lose the kingdom through one silly choice or decision. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths.

III A Few Good Years: Rehoboam returned to Jerusalem and set about to raise an army to fight against Jeroboam to reunite the kingdom. One hundred and eighty thousand troops were assembled. But the Lord sent a prophet, Shemaiah by name, to Rehoboam, forbidding him to fight against his brethren. To the credit of Rehoboam, he hearkened to the man of God and abandoned his military excursion. The Lord honored Rehoboam for this. The Levites and priests and the truly Godly people from the ten northern tribes began to come to Jerusalem to worship. Jeroboam had set up abominable idols to keep his subjects at home. This caused the truly Godly people to forsake their homes and join Rehoboam in the south. These Godly people strengthened the religious climate of Judah and for three years they walked in the ways of David.

The mercy of the Lord is great. He is ever ready to salvage whatever can be saved. This gives hope to the many who have failed or made tragic mistakes. The Lord will do all

He can to bless and to salvage some usefulness for His kingdom.

IV Foolish Failure: After three years of walking in the ways of the Lord, Rehoboam forsook the way of righteousness. He took eighteen wives and maintained sixty concubines in his harem. His favorite wife was Maachah. She was the granddaughter of Absalom who was the son of David by Maachah the daughter of a heathen king. So the error of David was repeated in several generations of his descendants. Maachah the favorite wife of Rehoboam outlived both her husband and her son Abijah, who followed Rehoboam as king. Her grandson, the godly Asa removed her from her place of honor in the king's court because of her idolatry (see II Chron.15:16). The writer of the sacred history notes that Rehoboam desired many wives (II Chron.11:23).

As soon as he felt secure as king, Rehoboam forsook the Lord and all of Judah followed his example. The Lord stirred up Shishak king of Egypt against Rehoboam. The Egyptians captured many of the cities of Judah. Even then, when Rehoboam humbled himself before the Lord, God tempered His judgment with mercy. But all the treasures of the house of the Lord were taken away. The golden shields which Solomon had made were taken. Eventually, Rehoboam replaced the golden shields with others of brass which looked like the originals but were comparatively worthless. Rehoboam reigned for seventeen years. "And he did evil because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord" (II Chron.12:14). He lost the great part of the kingdom through his foolish policy of toughness. Then he lost the valuable treasures of the house of the Lord and was content with brasen imitations. Let us take heed that we do not lose the kingdom of God through foolish choices. Let us guard diligently the riches of the reality of the power and Presence of our Lord. May we never be satisfied with imitation, or outward religion, in the place of the reality of Christ within.

## JEROBOAM CAUSES ISRAEL TO SIN

Read: I Kings 11:26-40; 12:1-33; 13:1-10 & 33-34; 14:1-20

Memory Work: But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. Psalm 1:2

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *The word of the Lord must be obeyed if we expect to claim His promises.*
2. *The way to prosper is to seek the Lord with the whole heart.*
3. *He that trusts the reasonings of his own heart is a fool.*
4. *Things which one may consider a small compromise may lead others into terrible sin and damnation.*

I The Rise of Jeroboam: Some men are gifted to become leaders. Such a man was Jeroboam. His zealous and industrious character made him outstanding in any crowd. Solomon took note of his aptitude and made him the head of the king's affairs in the tribe of Ephraim. Jeroboam's father, Nebat, was dead; but his mother, Zeruah, had trained her son well. It was while Jeroboam was working on the building projects of Solomon at Millo and in the city of David that he caught the eye of the king. Ephraim, the native tribe of Jeroboam, was second in importance only to Judah. The promotion to chief ruler of the tribe of Ephraim was a great honor.

As Jeroboam walked one day just outside the city of Jerusalem, Ahijah the prophet met him. His recent promotion, perhaps, had prompted him to purchase a new garment. Ahijah caught hold of the new robe and tore it into twelve pieces. The prophet gave ten of the twelve pieces to Jeroboam and explained by the word of the Lord that God would rend the kingdom from Solomon and give ten tribes to Jeroboam. The Lord, through Ahijah, also explained the reason for this punishment. It was



because Solomon had forsaken the Lord and all Israel with him, and they worshipped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, and Chemosh the god of the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon. The reason for the division should have been a warning to Jeroboam to be faithful to the Lord and to avoid idolatry. The Lord explained that the entire kingdom would not be Jeroboam's, but one tribe, Judah, would be given to Solomon's son in deference to David, who kept the word of the Lord and walked in His commandments. The Lord made a tremendous offer to Jeroboam. He promised to build a sure house for Jeroboam as He did for David, and promised to be with him, if only Jeroboam would hearken to all that He commanded and would do that which was right in the sight of the Lord. What an opportunity lay before this promising young prince!

The immediate response of Jeroboam was questionable. He began, apparently, to speak out critically against the oppressive tyranny of Solomon. Perhaps his rebellion went further. At any rate, the inspired record is that "he lifted up his hand against the king" (I Kings 11:26). He was impatient for the fulfillment of his destiny. Unlike David, who waited patiently for the Lord to make him king, Jeroboam attempted to force the issue and hasten his own coronation.

There is a lesson here for us. We must learn to await God's time to fulfill His will in us. The activity of the flesh only hinders God's perfect plan. Let promotion come from the Lord. He can and will make you the vessel He has ordained you to be if only you have faith and wait on the Lord, obeying His commandments and following His leadings.

Solomon heard of the prophecy of Ahijah regarding Jeroboam, and taking occasion by Jeroboam's rebellion, sought to kill him. So Jeroboam had to flee for his life. He went to Egypt and was there until the death of Solomon.

II Disastrous Beginning: Jeroboam returned to Israel for the coronation of Rehoboam. He was spokesman for the oppressed taxpayers of Israel when they appealed to Rehoboam for relief from the oppression of Solomon. When Rehoboam contemptuously rejected the appeal, the ten tribes rebelled and set Jeroboam over them. He made Shechem, the very city of Rehoboam's coronation, his capital. Unfortunately, Jeroboam began to reason with his natural understanding. The prophet had urged him to obey the commandments of the Lord, so that his kingdom would

be established, but Jeroboam attempted to establish his kingdom on natural reasoning. He figured that if his people went to Jerusalem for the three annual feasts that they would soon return to Judah and Rehoboam. He devised, by his own reasoning a scheme to hold his people at home in their own land. He set up two centers for worship. One was at Bethel, quite near to Jerusalem and in the southern extremity of his territory, and the other in Dan which was at the northern border. He told his people that it was too much for them to travel all the way to Jerusalem to worship and so they should go either to Bethel or to Dan. He made two golden calves and set them up, one in each center and quoted Aaron, "Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (I Kings 12:28). The Levites then deserted Jeroboam and went to Judah, so he made the lowest of the people priests of the high places. He also changed the date of the feast days. Jeroboam, himself led the people in the idolatrous worship which, before long, opened the door to Baal worship. He acted as a priest himself and offered sacrifices on the altar at Bethel to the golden calf which he had made. The whole thing became a great snare to the foolish people of Israel. They plunged ahead, down the road to destruction and oblivion on the way which seemed wise to "Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin."

The beginning of any enterprise is very important. Several of the kings of Judah began their administration by zealous reform and return to the Lord. Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah are most notable among such. Those early acts of devotion to the Lord set the tone for their reigns. On the other hand, many of the kings, both of Judah and Israel, forsook the Lord at once and so brought disaster on themselves and on the nation. We should learn the importance of good beginnings. A good Christian home and marriage is the result of good Christian principles from the start. Many pitfalls and temptations can be avoided on the job if only the believer takes a clear stand for the Lord from the first day. The tone is often set for the school year on the first day of classes. Whatever new beginning may lie before you, take warning from Jeroboam, make a good start. Aim to please the Lord. Choose the path of obedience over cowardly yielding to peer pressure. Lay the foundation right and the building will last.

III Ignoring the Warning: The Lord sent a prophet to Bethel

from Judah. Jeroboam was about to burn incense to the golden calf when the man of God cried out against the altar. The prophet foretold that a child, would be born to the house of David who would desecrate and destroy the abominable altar at Bethel. He even named the child still many generations in the future. His name would be Josiah. The man of God also gave a sign to certify that he spoke the word of the Lord. The sign was that the altar would be rent and the ashes poured out. Jeroboam was furious at the interruption and reached out to grab the faithful spokesman. Immediately Jeroboam was smitten and his arm paralyzed. If this was not enough the altar, too, was smitten and the ashes poured on the ground exactly as the man of God had foretold. The king pled for the man of God to intercede with God that his arm might be restored. He could not pray for himself. So the man of God prayed for him and his arm was restored. Jeroboam attempted to ease his conscience by offering hospitality to the man of God. He refused this, however, and sad to say, Jeroboam did not repent but repaired the evil altar and continued in the way of disobedience and rebellion.

It takes a wise and courageous man to admit that he has done wrong. Not many are willing to repent and return to the way of obedience. Especially when people have chosen their pathway by natural reasoning, it is difficult to admit to error and turn about. So stubborn is human nature that every sign that God gives of His displeasure is disregarded and man plunges on toward disaster. Oh, for a tender conscience and a heart easy to be etreated as God deals with us!

IV The Epitaph: Caleb, had the epitaph connected to his name, "who wholly followed the Lord." Judas had the terrible epitaph attached to his memory "who also betrayed him." For ever and ever, Jeroboam is known as "the son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin." What a terrible memorial. Not only did he sin willfully and persistently, but he also caused Israel to sin to such an extent that irreversible judgment was pronounced against them. Jeroboam's son Abijah, became sick. He sent his wife to enquire of the Lord by Ahijah the prophet. This was the same prophet who originally foretold Jeroboam of the kingdom before him. He had urged Jeroboam to follow the Lord and his commandments. Now, the aged and blind prophet presided over Jeroboam's sad end. Not only did the prophet give the bad tidings of the son's death, but also pronounced the doom

of Jeroboam and his house and kingdom. Persistence in evil ways inevitably will affect the loved ones around us. Let us purpose to consecrate all our hopes and plans to the Lord. If we let Him direct our steps He will bring to pass a good and fruitful life. If we choose our own way it will end in disappointment, defeat and disaster, if not doom for ourselves and perhaps also for others around us.

NOTES:

LESSON 3

ASA'S GOOD REIGN

Read: I Kings 15:9-24; II Chronicles 14, 15, & 16

Memory Work: And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. Psalm 1:3

What we should learn from this Lesson

- 1. In times of peace and blessing we must prepare for the trials which may befall us.*
- 2. After celebrating a victory we must not become presumptuous, but continue to seek the Lord.*
- 3. It is vitally important that we continue true to the Lord all the way to the end.*
- 4. We have the opportunity to choose to seek the Lord and prosper, or to forsake the Lord and suffer for it.*

I After Rehoboam: Rehoboam reigned seventeen years in Judah. Although there were times when he hearkened to the Lord, the general opinion concerning his reign, was that it was evil. His son Abijah followed him on the throne. He executed fierce judgment on Jeroboam and the northern tribes, engaging them in battle and destroying five hundred thousand men. Abijah did dedicate precious things to the Lord, but he also continued in the idolatry which developed in Solomon's reign and also in his father, Rehoboam's reign. Abijah also took too many wives (14) and by them had 36 children. He reigned only three years. He died and was buried in the city of David. His son Asa followed Abijah to the throne.

II Spiritual Renewal: Asa began his reign with a wholesome cleanup of idolatry. He took away the altars which had been erected to strange gods. He also broke down the idols of the high places and cut down the groves of trees which hid the

unclean orgies conducted there. He also commanded the people of Judah to seek the Lord God of their fathers and to keep His commandments. As the people responded to this spiritual leadership, the Lord prospered the administration of Asa and gave him peace and rest on every side. He used this time of blessing wisely. He inspired the people to strengthen the cities of Judah. They built walls and towers and gates and bars. Because they sought the Lord, He blessed them and they built and prospered. Asa also established an army of 580,000 well equipped men during this time of rest.

There is certainly a lesson here for us. In times of blessing we must prepare for the trials and tests which may come our way. Our weapons are not carnal but they must be obtained. We must fortify the bulwarks of our souls for the onslaughts of the enemy. We are admonished to take unto us the whole armor of God that we will stand the test in the evil day. While we have opportunity let us prepare well. Let us seek the Lord now. Learn His commandments. Prayer and praise can be developed to become mighty weapons of defense and also to destroy the powers of the evil one. Do not wait until an emergency to call on the Lord for His help. Seek Him now with your whole heart. He will manifest Himself to you and cause you to prosper. He will prepare you for every battle which you must face. Do not waste your opportunities or you will be sorry some day soon.

III We Rest On Thee: It was quite an army which Asa organized and well equipped but an enemy attacked them with an even greater army. Zerah, the Ethiopian came against Judah with an army of one million men as well as three hundred chariots. Judah still had to depend on the help of the Lord. Asa led his troops in crying to the Lord just before the battle. "Lord, it is nothing with thee to help," he cried, "whether with many or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God; for we rest on thee and in thy name we go against this multitude" (II Chron. 14:11). The Lord heard the prayer of the godly King and smote the Ethiopians before the army of Judah. The victors carried away much spoil. They smote the heathen cities in the area and took more spoil including cattle, sheep and camels in abundance. When we rely on the Lord and cry to Him for deliverance in the day of trial, He will help us, also; and we will celebrate great victories. Only let us learn to rest on Him and not on our own wisdom or might.

IV A Second Blessing: When the victors returned to Jerusalem, the Spirit of God came upon a man named Azariah. He came out to meet Asa and the victorious army. By the word of the Lord he spoke to Asa and his army. "The Lord is with you while you are with Him," he declared. "If ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him he will forsake you" (ch.15:2). He concluded his anointed message with a call to "be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded" (ch.15:7). This was a timely warning and call to Asa and Judah. Too often, the people of the Lord, and their kings in particular, forsook the Lord immediately following a major victory. Asa and his men responded well to this timely call. They renewed their zeal for the Lord. They went through the land and searched out the idols and destroyed them. It was probably at this time that Asa deposed his grandmother, Maachah, from her position as queen-mother (a powerful office) because she had built an idol in a grove. He destroyed the idol and burned it by the brook Kidron. This action took real courage and dedication on the part of Asa. He also destroyed the sodomites out of the land. Would to God, that the sexual perverts and homosexuals, male and female, could be taken away out of our land. An unchanging holy God cannot overlook the multiplying abominations of our land after overthrowing Sodom and Gomorrah for the same sins which are ever more prevalent in our society. The only right these homosexuals need to fight for is the right to repent.

Asa not only cleaned up the idolatry and immorality, but he also called the people of God to Jerusalem to worship. They gathered in Jerusalem in the third month (probably at Passover time) in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. Many forsook the evil climate of Ephraim and Manasseh and joined Judah recognizing that the Lord was with them. They offered a multitude of sacrifices to the Lord and entered into a covenant to seek the Lord with all their soul. It was an emotional time of great blessing. The description sounds like a real Pentecostal meeting. They swore to the Lord with a loud voice and with shouting. Trumpets and cornets sounded the praises of Jehovah and all Judah rejoiced at the manifestation of the glory of God (ch.15:12-15). So the Lord gave them twenty more years of peace and blessing.

No doubt, there are many among us who should experience a new outpouring of blessing from the Lord. Let this study from the life of Asa be your call to seek and find the Lord

and to renew your consecration and make new sacrifices to the Lord. He will pour out a new blessing upon you and add fruitfulness to your life in the years to come.

V Unfortunate Wavering: Another test befell Asa in the thirty-fifth year of his reign. Baasha, king of Israel (10 northern tribes) had assassinated Nadab the son of Jeroboam and usurped the throne. He came against Judah and began to build a fortress at Ramah. Asa took silver and gold from the house of the Lord and sent it to Ben-hadad, the king of Syria, to hire him to attack Baasha. Ben-hadad did attack the northern cities of Israel and caused Baasha to stop the building at Ramah. Asa immediately conscripted all of Judah to go to Ramah and they took away all the building materials and used them build Geba and Mizpah. But the Lord was displeased with Asa because he trusted in the heathen king and never sought to the Lord for help or direction. Hanani, the prophet, rebuked Asa for his foolish actions. He reminded the king how the Lord had enabled him to defeat the much greater host of Ethiopians twenty years earlier. He told Asa that, "the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (ch.16:9). But now the king got angry at the man of God and had him imprisoned. Asa also began to oppress the people at this time. Several years later he began to suffer a terrible disease in his feet. Unfortunately, he sought to the physicians and not to the Lord in this time of great need. Such an account is a serious warning to the saints of God who have known the Lord as their guide and provider and healer in the early years of their lives. How unfortunate that the glowing account of the victorious life of Asa is marred by his wavering in the last few years of his life. Our Lord will be faithful to us and keep us to the end, but we must be careful that we do not depart from Him and trust our own wisdom and the arm of flesh in the later years of our lives. Don't let your testimony be marred by failure in your golden years. Keep seeking the Lord as long as you live. His eyes are still running to and fro over the earth to find those who trust Him wholly so that He can show His strength and glory. He will not fail. Don't you fail!



LESSON 4

JEHOSHAPHAT'S AFFINITY

Read: I Kings 22; II Chronicles 17, 18, 19 & 20

Memory Work: The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Psalm 1:4

What we should learn from this Lesson

- 1. The blessing of the Lord accompanies the faithful teaching of His Word.*
- 2. We place ourselves in grave danger when we associate ourselves with the ungodly.*
- 3. The Lord will fight for those whose hearts are perfect before Him.*
- 4. Praise will win victories that cannot be obtained any other way.*
- 5. If we choose to associate with the ungodly we may adversely affect our children for years to come.*

I A Good Beginning: When Asa became diseased in his feet, Jehoshaphat, his son, became co-regent with him. For the last five years of Asa's reign, the father and son ruled together. When Asa died, Jehoshaphat took full control. He strengthened all his military outposts. Even more noteworthy, was his devout obedience to the law of the Lord. As he sought the Lord, God blessed him. The people of Judah brought presents to their King. Jehoshaphat purged Judah of the high places and groves where the people had worshipped contrary to the law of the Lord.

In the third year of his reign Jehoshaphat was inspired to sponsor a program of teaching the law of the Lord to his people. He sent a delegation of his princes with a group of Levites and two priests throughout all the cities of Judah. They took with them the book of the law. This was a unique endeavor on the part of Jehoshaphat. Not until the time of Ezra and Nehemiah was there such a concerted effort to teach the

people the law of the Lord. The Lord honored Jehoshaphat for his earnest effort to instruct the nation in the truth of God. The fear of the Lord fell on all the kingdoms round about Judah. Not only did they fear to make war against Judah, but they also brought presents to Jehoshaphat. The Philistines brought silver and the Arabians gave flocks of sheep and goats. So Jehoshaphat, with the Lord's blessing, became strong and great.

There is great blessing which flows from the teaching of the word of the Lord. The ministry of Jesus is summarized as "teaching, preaching, and healing" (Matt.4:23 & 9:35). The "teaching" is significantly listed first each time. When Jesus commissioned the disciples to evangelize the world he told them to go and teach all nations". They were also instructed to teach the people to observe all things which Jesus had commanded (Matt.28:19 & 20). The gift of teaching is listed among the gifts of the Holy Spirit after apostolic and prophetic ministries. It is a great privilege to teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. An earnest and sincere teacher always teaches himself the most. There is a great satisfaction which comes from teaching the truth. The Lord is bound to bless the teaching of His Word.

II An Unfortunate Affinity: Jehoshaphat had one besetting sin. He befriended and joined the wicked king of Israel, Ahab. He probably felt that he could influence Ahab to become faithful to the Lord. Perhaps he and his family spent a "vacation" with Ahab in Samaria. The foolish friendship resulted in the marriage of Jehoshaphat's son to Ahab's daughter. That daughter, of Ahab and Jezebel, Athaliah, almost wiped out the royal line of David (see II Chron.22:10). Many Christian parents have lost their children to unbelievers because of too much fellowship with the ungodly. Be careful where you go and where you take your family.

This friendship with Ahab continued over the space of some years. While Jehoshaphat visited Ahab on one occasion, the wicked ruler of Israel urged Jehoshaphat to join him in a military excursion to recover the city of Ramoth-gilead. The good king of Judah made a terrible mistake when he answered, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war" (II Chron.18:3). Jehoshaphat must have had some misgivings after he had consented to join the fight, for he asked Ahab to enquire for the word of the Lord. Ahab called for his prophets and four hundred of them prophesied

"with one assent" (vs.12) that they should go, for God would deliver Ramoth-gilead into the king's hand (vs.5). Jehoshaphat had still some discernment and asked if there was not another prophet of the Lord from whom they could enquire. Ahab admitted that there was indeed one, but he hated him because he prophesied evil and not good. When Jehoshaphat insisted, Micaiah was called for and informed of the unanimous prophecy of the four hundred. He would not bow to the pressure, but prophesied not only the defeat of the endeavor, but the death of Ahab. The wicked king brazenly remanded Micaiah to prison on starvation diet till he should "return in peace." Micaiah explained that he had seen how a lying spirit had been sent forth from the spiritual realm to entice Ahab to this battle where he would perish. Zedekiah, one of the four hundred prophets, smote Micaiah and asked him which way the spirit had gone from himself to Micaiah. Despite Ahab's brazen front, he obviously felt uneasy, for he determined to go to the battle disguised as an ordinary soldier. He let Jehoshaphat go dressed as a king. Thus when the king of Syria ordered his men to pursue and kill the king, they went after a somewhat stupid Jehoshaphat. That was his reward for befriending Ahab. Do not trust the friendship of the children of the world.

The Syrian soldiers, thinking that Jehoshaphat was the king of Israel pursued and surrounded his chariot. When he finally awoke to the predicament he was in, Jehoshaphat cried out and the Lord helped him and moved the pursuers to leave him (vs. 31). Meanwhile, a Syrian archer shot an arrow by chance, without aiming it. The Lord directed it however, and it struck the disguised king of Israel exactly at the joint of his upper and lower armor. The arrow shot "at a venture" mortally wounded Ahab. He had his chariot driven out of the battle but at evening he died and the proclamation was made for every soldier to return to his city and country. Dogs licked up the blood of Ahab from the floor of the chariot (II Kings 22:36 & 37). The word of the Lord by Micaiah was fulfilled.

Jehoshaphat barely escaped with his life and returned to Jerusalem. There, Jehu, a seer went out to meet the king and reproved him for his fellowship with the ungodly. "Shouldest thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord?" the prophet protested; "therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord" (II Chron.19:2). Jehoshaphat took the rebuke and did not get angry as his father had done before him. There is a very important lesson to be learned from this story. The

followers of the Lord Jesus Christ are not to become involved with the endeavors of unbelievers. A Christian should never consider a business partnership with an unbeliever. Our holidays and vacations should not be spent with the wicked and ungodly. We are to have friendship and fellowship with the people of God. Avoid the weddings and retirement dinners and celebrations of the wicked. Your influence will be the greater in the long run for refusing such invitations.

III A Miraculous Victory: Once again, after Jehoshaphat's narrow escape, the king set his heart to seek the Lord. He traveled through the land and led the people "back to the Lord God of their fathers" (ch.19:4). He instituted a judicial reform and insisted on God-fearing judgments. He forbade them to accepting gifts and inspired them with good supervision to deal courageously and faithfully.

Suddenly, three armies joined forces and attacked Judah. This was a great test. The king passed this test with flying colors. The Moabites and the Ammonites and the children of Mount Seir (Edomites), joined forces to overrun Judah. Jehoshaphat "set himself to seek the Lord" (ch.20:3). That is always a wise thing to do. All Judah soon joined their king in seeking the Lord. The king stood in the midst of the multitude and prayed a wonderful prayer of faith. He admitted that he did not have the might to fight against such a host and invoked the help of God Almighty. While he stood in the midst of the people of Judah, wives and little ones included, the Spirit of God fell upon Jahaziel in the midst of the crowd. His voice rose above every other sound and he prophesied that the battle was not their's but the Lord's. They had no reason to fear. He told them where to meet the enemy and even promised that they would not need to fight in this battle. Jehoshaphat and all the people bowed down and worshipped. They followed the wisdom given them and Jehoshaphat encouraged the people to believe the Lord and His prophets and so to prosper (ch.20:20). They appointed singers to precede the army worshipping and singing praises. They sang, "Praise the Lord, for his mercy endureth for ever" (vs. 21). As they sang and praised, the Lord set ambushments against the enemies. They began to fight amongst themselves and by the time the children of Judah came upon their enemies, they had slaughtered each other. For three days the children of Judah gathered the spoil from the dead enemies and then returned with rejoicing to Jerusalem.

We do well to seek the Lord in time of testing and trial. As we wait upon Him, He will somehow give us the wisdom concerning what we are to do. When we follow the wisdom of the Lord, we can expect miraculous results. When we believe the Lord, we will not be put to shame. When we believe His vessels, we will prosper. It is clearly illustrated by this history, that our praises cause God to work mightily. There are some victories that cannot be won any other way than by praise.

It is sad to note that the last incident recorded of Jehoshaphat is that once again he joined the wicked Ahaziah, king of Israel, the son of Ahab, in a joint naval venture. They jointly built ships at Ezion-geber and endeavored to sail them to Tarshish to trade. The Lord again sent a prophet to reprove Jehoshaphat. The endeavor did not succeed. The ships were wrecked. Jehoshaphat had not learned his lesson the first time. It is important that we overcome the faults and besetting sins as we are made aware of them. If we don't deal with God and get the victory, those sins will return to haunt us again.

Jehoshaphat reigned 25 years and overall was one of the better kings of Judah. We can take warning from the one besetting sin of his life. Let us come out from among the ungodly and touch not the unclean. We dare not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, in marriage or any other endeavor. "Be ye separate!"

NOTES:

## AHAB AND ELIJAH - I

Read: I Kings 16:29-34; 17, 18, & 19

Memory Work: Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. Psalm 1:5

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *The marriage partner we choose for life can have a tremendous effect on our lives; for good or for evil.*
2. *Our spiritual life will become a barren wilderness if we forsake the Lord and live for this world.*
3. *When we give our best as to the Lord, the blessing of the Lord will enrich our lives.*
4. *The God of Elijah will send showers of blessing today when His people prevail in prayer as Elijah did.*
5. *Discouragement can hinder us from completing the work God has ordained for us to do.*

I Disciplined by Drought: When Jeroboam the son of Nebat died, his son, Nadab reigned in his stead, over the ten northern tribes of Israel. He continued in the sinful manner of life which his father had begun. In two years, Baasha, of the tribe of Issachar conspired and slew Nadab and wiped out all the house of Jeroboam. Baasha made himself king and did evil in the sight of the Lord, continuing in the sins of Jeroboam. He reigned for twenty-two years. He was not excused for the murder of Nadab, but God pronounced judgment against him and his house. Elah, the son of Baasha followed his father on the throne, but lasted only two years. Zimri, the military commander of the chariots, murdered the king who was drunk, and wiped out all his house according to the word of the Lord. Zimri set himself up as king but the people made Omri, the top military commander their king. Zimri lasted only one week.

Omri prevailed over Tibni, another contender for the throne, and reigned for twelve years. He moved the capital to Samaria and did evil above all that were before him. When he died, his son Ahab took the throne.

The situation in the northern kingdom, called Israel, was deteriorating quickly. It had a bad beginning, and not one of its kings was godly. They all did evil and lived in idolatry and rebellion against the commandments of the Lord. Things got worse and worse. Ahab exceeded his father in wickedness. He married the daughter of the heathen king of Zidon. Jezebel was her name and Baal worship was her game. Ahab was led into Baal worship by this wicked woman. He built a temple for Baal in Samaria, the capital, and also a grove where gross immoral orgies took place. He did more to provoke the Lord to anger than all the wicked kings who had reigned before him (I Kings 16:32,33).

It was at this time that Elijah suddenly appeared upon the scene. If we were not specifically told that he was a man of like passions to ourselves, we might think that he was a heavenly warrior. Elijah was a man of sudden appearances and disappearances, even in the New Testament on the Mount of Transfiguration. Now he suddenly appeared and pronounced judgment against Ahab. He announced that, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (I Kings 17:1). We would not know, had not James recorded it, that this pronouncement was preceded by earnest prayer (James 5:17).

The Lord told Elijah just where to go when he had pronounced judgment on Ahab. He went to the brook Cherith, and the Lord sustained him there. Ravens brough Elijah bread and flesh morning and evening daily until the brook dried up. The drought devastated the land. Ahab searched everywhere for the man whose word had shut the heavens and could reopen them. Elijah could not be found.

II The Widow of Zarephath: When the brook dried up, the Lord told Elijah to go to Zarephath where He had commanded a widow to sustain him, As Elijah appraoched the gate of the city he saw a woman gathering wood for her fire. He asked her to get him a little water. As she went to get the water, Elijah called to her to please bring him "a morsel of bread" also. Then she explained that she was gathering sticks for the fire to prepare the last meal for herself and her son. The drought

had ravaged the area and all her resources were exhausted. She and her son would eat this last meal and then face inevitable death. Elijah told her not to fear, but to do as she had said, but to make a little "cake" for him first, and then to make for herself and her son. "For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth" (ch.17:14). This gentile widow believed the word of the Lord and did as Elijah had requested. Not only was there enough for the three of them that day, but they were sustained for many days by this miraculous provision. It always works to our own advantage, naturally and spiritually, to give to the Lord and to sustain those who serve the Lord. How fortunate the widow was to have Elijah as her guest, for her dear son became grievously sick and died. She applied to the prophet of the Lord in bitter grief and he took the body of the lad to the attic loft and prayed three times, stretching himself upon the body until the spirit returned to the son. How good it is to be close to those who know God and have power in prayer.

III How Long Halt Ye? Finally, the word of the Lord came to Elijah, to go to Ahab and to give the word that the Lord would send rain at last. Elijah first met Obadiah the chief servant of Ahab. He told Obadiah to bring word to Ahab that Elijah was there. Obadiah was afraid that the Spirit of the Lord would carry Elijah away and thus jeopardize his life. He explained to Elijah how Ahab had searched everywhere for him. But Elijah assured Obadiah that "as the Lord liveth," he would surely meet Ahab that very day (ch.18:15).

When Ahab saw Elijah he accused him of being the one who troubled Israel. He passed the guilt off onto the prophet of the Lord. But Elijah boldly declared that it was Ahab and his house which had troubled the nation of Israel by forsaking the commandments of the Lord and by worshipping Baal. Elijah proposed a contest between himself and the prophets of Baal to prove who was the true God. So Ahab called all Israel to Mount Carmel. Elijah chided the people for halting between two opinions. He challenged the 400 prophets of Baal to make a sacrifice of a bullock and to call on their god to ignite the fire to consume the sacrifice. The challenge was accepted and the four hundred worked themselves into a fanatical frenzy calling on Baal to hear them. Elijah mocked them, suggesting that



Baal was busy talking or out walking or perhaps asleep. They wildly cut themselves with knives and lancets until they were covered with blood. But it was to no avail. The greater part of the day was spent in this hysterical futility.

Then toward evening Elijah came forward. He simply built an altar of twelve stones, for the twelve tribes, and laid the sacrifice on top. He then requested that 4 barrels of water be poured on the sacrifice and the wood prepared under it. This was done three times until the water not only soaked the wood and sacrifice, but also filled the trench around the altar which Elijah had made. Then simply Elijah prayed, "Let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again" (ch.17:36,37). At once, the fire of the Lord fell. The soaked sacrifice ignited, as did the wet wood. The fire of the Lord even licked up the standing water around the altar. Then the people cried out and fell on their faces; "the Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God!"

Elijah took the 400 priests of Baal and executed them at the brook Kishon. The prophet of the Lord told Ahab to eat and drink for "there is the sound of abundance of rain." while Ahab feasted, Elijah fasted and prayed for the rain. Even though he had the promise of rain from the Lord, Elijah had to pray it through. Seven times he prayed on the summit of Carmel. Each time he prayed, he sent his servant to see if there was any sign of the rain. At last, after praying seven times the servant saw a cloud "like a man's hand". That was all Elijah needed to hear. He sent the servant to warn Ahab of the impending storm. Ahab rode in his chariot from Carmel to Jezreel. Meanwhile the sky grew black and poured out great rain. The power of the Lord came upon Elijah. He caught up the skirt of his garment and ran before the chariot of Ahab supernaturally, all the way to Jezreel, a distance of some twenty miles.

IV Disheartening Result: No doubt, Elijah expected that Israel would turn back to the Lord with their whole heart. Perhaps he expected Jezebel to be deposed, or certainly to be suppressed from promoting Baal worship. To his dismay the great assembly of witnesses to the fire of God on Mount Carmel melted into the scenery and Jezebel vowed to avenge the death of her prophets

by executing Elijah before the sun set the next day. It must have been a great disappointment to Elijah who had risen to such high hopes for Israel just 24 hours before.

Now Elijah fled to Judah into the wilderness. There he asked the Lord to take his life. But the Lord had other thoughts and plans for Elijah's life. Indeed, the Lord intended to take Elijah without death. An angel ministered to the prophet and brought him food from heaven. He went in the strength of that food for 40 days and nights. God gave Elijah several commissions to fulfill and manifested himself to him in a greater way than ever before (see ch.19:11-13). So Elijah took courage and picked up his work for God again. The servants of the Lord are subject to discouragement, when they labor earnestly and zealously and see great manifestations of the glory of God and yet no apparent results. We must learn to faithfully carry on and leave the results with the Lord. Let us not be weary in well doing, in due season, we shall reap, if we do not give up.

NOTES:

## LESSON 6

## AHAB AND ELIJAH - II

Read: I Kings 21 & 22; II Kings 1 & 2

Memory Work: For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish. Psalm 1:6

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *Dark moods of depression open the door to the powers of the devil to lead unwary victims into the deepest sins.*
2. *Ill gotten gains will bring us neither joy nor satisfaction.*
3. *The end of the wicked is terrible itself; and then eternal judgment faces them too.*
4. *God's thoughts toward us are far beyond any thoughts we might have for ourselves.*

I Sold To Work Evil: Ahab did not turn from the idolatry he had fallen into, even though he had witnessed the fire of God falling on the sacrifice at Mount Carmel. The terrible influence of Jezebel, his heathen wife, quickly erased any impression made upon Ahab by the fiery ministry of Elijah. Ahab and the people of Israel did not repent after the manifestation of the power of God at Mount Carmel. To the great disappointment of Elijah, they went right back to their evil ways. The disheartened prophet fled from the vengeful Jezebel into the wilderness of Judah where he asked the Lord to let him die. But God had something else in mind for his faithful prophet.

Meanwhile Ahab persisted in his evil ways. He sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord. When the Lord delivered Benhadad, the king of Syria into the hand of Ahab, according to the word of an unnamed prophet, he foolishly let the heathen king live, and called him, "my brother" (I Kings 20:32). Another messenger of the Lord rebuked Ahab for this action and warned him that, "Because thou hast let go out of thy hand, a man I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy

life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people" (ch.20:42). When Ahab heard these words he went to his house in Samaria heavy and displeased (vs.43). He was a moody man and given to fits of deep depression. Such moods of depression open the doors of the spirit to the powers of the devil. Any and every evil can be expected from one given to dark fits of depression. Saul is another king who opened the door for the devil by allowing fits of depression to overpower him. Praise and singing in the Spirit will drive the spirit of depression from you, if such temptations come your way. Be aware that dark moods are dangerous works of Satan to tempt us into greater evil. No believer need stay prisoner to this evil temperament. Grace and power to overcome is freely offered to every follower of Christ.

Ahab built a palace for himself at Jezreel. He attempted to get the vineyard of Naboth, his neighbor, for a garden of herbs for himself. But Naboth would not give up nor trade nor sell the land, which was his inheritance, for anything. We all ought to value the spiritual inheritance which is ours, like Naboth valued his natural heritage. When Ahab was refused his desire, once again he went home "heavy and displeased." He did just what people do today who are in "a dump". He flopped down on his bed and turned his face to the wall and would not go to supper. Jezebel asked him what was troubling him and when he explained the situation she derided him. She asked him what kind of a king he was, and insisted that he eat and be merry. "I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite," she promised. No scruples held her back from obtaining that desired ground. She wrote letters in the king's name and sealed them with his seal demanding that Naboth be accused and convicted of blasphemy against God and the king. She ordered that Naboth be carried out and stoned. All this was carried out to the letter by the weak officials in Jezreel and when it was accomplished Jezebel announced to Ahab that Naboth was dead. She told him to go and take possession of the vineyard. This Ahab did, but there he also met Elijah. The prophet of God was surely the last man that Ahab wanted to see at that moment. "Hast thou found me, O my enemy?" the guilty monarch inquired. "I have found thee because thou hast sold thyself to do evil in the sight of the Lord," Elijah explained. "Hast thou killed and hast thou taken possession," the prophet demanded? Then judgment was pronounced upon the wicked king. He was held responsible for the murder of Naboth,

and Jezebel was also sentenced by the word of the Lord. "In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood," Elijah declared. Further the Lord foretold that, "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel" (see I Kings 21:19 & 23). Sentence was passed upon the whole house of Ahab. The Lord promised to cut off every member of the house of Ahab just as He had cut off the house of Jeroboam and Baasha. The word concerning Jezebel was fulfilled to the letter. She was thrown out of the palace window and eaten by dogs so that only her skull and the palms of her hands remained (see II Kings 9:30-37). Ahab, however, humbled himself at the word of Elijah and so, despite the fact that he had done very abominably, selling himself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord beyond all who were before him, yet the Lord tempered His judgment with mercy, postponing the execution of the sentence upon the household of Ahab to the next generation.

II The Death of Ahab: The judgment of Ahab himself was accomplished in the battle of Ramoth-gilead with Jehoshaphat. We have already observed the details of the unfortunate alliance of Jehoshaphat with the wicked Ahab. The godly king of Judah barely escaped that battle with his life. Ahab was not so fortunate. The arrow shot "at a venture" found its mark. Ahab bled to death in his chariot and died at evening. Before the chariot could be washed down, the dogs came and licked up the blood of Ahab who had sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord. Fourteen years later, Jehoram, the son of Ahab was executed by Jehu. He was shot with an arrow and killed. His body was cast into the portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite. At that time Jezebel, too, was slain and the seventy sons of Ahab were beheaded. The heads were brought in baskets and put in two heaps at the gate of Jezreel. All came to pass according to the word of Elijah. Jehu killed all that remained of the house of Ahab (see II Kings 10:11).

III Elijah Taken Up: The contrast is striking, between the end of Ahab and the end of Elijah. The prophet of God had been discouraged when the people had not renounced Baal worship and returned to the Lord after the incident of Mount Carmel. He fled from Jezebel to the wilderness in Judah. There he asked the Lord to let him die. But the Lord had something else in mind. There was still work to do. God manifested Himself to Elijah in a most remarkable way (see I Kings 19:11-13). Twice

the angel of the Lord brought food to the prophet and he journeyed in the strength of that heavenly food for forty days. God commissioned Elijah to anoint Jehu to be king of Israel; Hazael to be king of Syria; and Elisha to be prophet in his own place. A great part of the great work of Elijah followed. Elijah outlived Ahab. He anointed and trained Elisha to carry on his work. During the brief reign of Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, Elijah twice called down the fiery judgment of God on the impudent army captains and their fifty soldiers. The prophet also survived Ahaziah who died according to the word of the Lord through Elijah, after he had fallen through a lattice (probably drunk).

When the work of Elijah was finished both Elijah and Elisha sensed that the old prophet was going higher. What Elijah would have missed, had the Lord heard his earlier prayer and let Elijah die! God had something better in mind for this great prophet. Elisha stuck to his master like glue. At Gilgal, and at Bethel, and at Jericho, Elijah suggested that Elisha remain behind as he journeyed on. The "sons of the prophets" at Bethel and at Jericho were aware that Elijah was to be taken, but nothing could keep Elisha from following his master that day. His persistence was rewarded, for after the two had miraculously crossed Jordan the old prophet offered to grant any request of Elisha. He wisely asked for a double portion of the Spirit of Elijah to come upon him. The old prophet acknowledged that Elisha had asked a hard thing. "Nevertheless," he promised, "if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee" (II Kings 2:10). Suddenly a chariot of fire with horses of fire appeared and parted Elisha from his master. A whirlwind lifted Elijah up from the earth into heaven and Elisha saw it all. "My Father, My Father," he cried "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." The mantle of Elijah fell from him as he went up and Elisha took it up. Also the double portion according to the promise came upon the young follower.

Jesus is our Elijah and the double portion of His Spirit is offered to us as we look to Him in faith. A greater than Elijah is here and a greater portion of the Spirit is available if we seek with all of our heart. For the believer death and the grave are not the goal, but resurrection and glory. Let us look up and keep on believing.

LESSON 7

JOASH AND JEHOIADA

Read: II Kings 11 & 12; II Chron.22, 23, & 24

Memory Work: Review Psalm 1

What we should learn from this Lesson

- 1. There can be terrible consequences from friendship with the wicked of this world.*
- 2. Despite the prevalence of wickedness, God always has a few who are faithful to Him and His commandments.*
- 3. We should be thankful to those who teach us the truths of God and grateful to those who help us.*
- 4. Those who change their principles of living because of the influence of those around them lack real character.*

I The Consequences of Friendship With the Wicked: If Jehoshaphat could have foreseen the terrible consequences to his family and to his nation, he certainly would not have chosen to have fellowship with the wicked Ahab and his house. So evil were the children of the union of Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram, with Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, that they are obliterated in the genealogy of the royal line in Matthew 1. Ahaziah the son of Jehoram and the grandson of both Jehoshaphat and Ahab, as well as Joash and Amaziah are omitted from the royal line. Although the specific reason is not recorded in the scripture, it is quite evident that God considered those three kings as belonging to the house of Ahab. The royal line jumps from Jehoram to Uzziah passing over 87 years during which time Judah was dominated by the vile house of Ahab. For 6 of those years, Athaliah the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, actually reigned on the throne of David. When her son Ahaziah was executed by the zealous patriot, Jehu, she killed all the seed of the royal family and usurped the throne for herself.

The sister of Ahaziah, Jehoshabeath, saved her infant nephew, Joash, and hid him and his nurse in a bedchamber. She was married to Jehoiada, the godly priest. God used her to preserve the royal line and the promise made to David that there would always be a descendant to occupy his throne.

Surely the consequences of fellowship with the world and with the wicked unbelievers are disastrous. "Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). The born again believer has no business to have unnecessary contact with unbelievers. We are to come out and we are to be separate. We are not to touch the unclean (see II Cor.6:17).

II Jehoiada's Faith: The character and faith of Jehoiada, the priest, stand out like the rock of Gibraltar between two seas of wickedness. In the midst of those terrible evil years one man brought about a brief but blessed return to the fear of the Lord, and honor to the house of the Lord. Jehoiada and his wife hid the child Joash for 6 years in the neglected house of the Lord. He did this, of course, at the risk of his life. During those years Athaliah reigned. It was the only time that a woman reigned over Judah. She worshipped Baal and there was indeed a temple for Baal in the city of Jerusalem.

When little Joash was in his seventh year, Jehoiada could wait no longer. He took 5 army captains into his confidence (see II Chon.23:1). They went throughout all Judah, calling the Levites to assemble at Jerusalem. There they made a covenant with the king in the house of God and carefully organized a coronation for Joash. The Levites were divided into three companies. The captains of the army were given weapons from the days of David which had been in the neglected house of the Lord. They, with their armed people, were to guard the little king. When all was secure, they brought the king out. The royal crown was set upon his youthful head. Jehoiada and his sons anointed him with oil and said, "God save the king" (vs. 11). The trumpets sounded forth their equivalent of "Hail to the Chief" and the people sang and praised the Lord and the king.

Athaliah heard the commotion and came to investigate. When she saw what was transpiring she rent her clothes and cried, "treason, treason." But it was she who had committed the treason. Jehoiada instructed the captains to chase her out of the house of the Lord and then to slay her. Any who followed that



daughter of Jezebel were also to be slain. The captains caught her by the horse gate and there they executed her.

Then Jehoiada proposed and made a covenant with the people "that they should be the Lord's people" (vs.16). They proceeded at once to the temple of Baal and broke down the house and the idol-image. The priest of Baal, Mattan by name, was slain before the altars of Baal. The godly old priest, Jehoiada, set up the order of worship once again in the house of the Lord. All the people of the land rejoiced and the city of Jerusalem enjoyed peace and quiet after Athaliah was slain (II Chron.23:21). One godly man turned the tide of iniquity. This story is certainly a source of encouragement to the individual believer who stands alone in his home or on his job or in his community. One godly man or woman can bring about real revival through faith and persistent obedience. Be faithful, you who stand alone, the Lord will ultimately crown your faithful efforts with success.

III Restoration of the Temple: Jehoiada was a faithful guide to the young king. When he was of age, Jehoiada chose two wives for him. He surely trained Joash to fear the Lord. Joash must have learned to read and he obviously read the law of Moses, for he asked Jehoiada on one occasion, why the collection was not being taken as set forth in the law of Moses (II Chron. 24:6, comp.Ex.30:11-16). Joash wanted this collection to be used to restore everything in the house of the Lord which had been broken or taken by the wicked sons of Athaliah. The young king issued the proclamation that all of Judah and Jerusalem should bring the money required by Moses for the repair and maintenance of the house of the Lord. The people gladly did their part. They were soon able to hire carpenters to repair the temple and indeed so much was gathered from the people that they were able to make precious vessels for the service of the house of the Lord.

IV The Decline of Joash: But Jehoiada was very old and died at the age of 130. It was fortunate for Israel and for Joash that he lived as long as he did. We ought to be thankful and praise the Lord for the godly, influential lives of our older saints. Their experience is of great value. We do well to ask counsel from their great store of knowledge and experience. This great statesman-priest was greatly honored in his death. His funeral was like that of a king. In fact, he was buried

with the kings in the city of David. But as soon as Jehoiada was removed from the scene the unclean princes of Judah influenced the king to forget the dull worship of Jehovah and to frequent instead the idol groves where exciting orgies of every unclean description took place. The weak king showed his lack of character by yielding to their persuasion at once. The Lord sent his prophets to rebuke the king and the elders of the Jews, but they tuned out the warnings. On one occasion, Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, was filled with the Spirit of God. He stood above the people and said, "Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the Lord that ye cannot prosper? Because ye have forsaken the Lord, he hath also forsaken you" (II Chron.24:20). The king and the princes of Judah were angry at this reproof. They conspired together against Zechariah, and at the commandment of Josiah, the king, they stoned the faithful prophet to death. This miserable excuse of a man remembered not the kindness of Jehoiada, but murdered his son. It is noteworthy that Zechariah was one who had participated directly in anointing Joash to be king. This is a striking example of ungratefulness. Let us take warning. The human heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, including yours and mine. Let us be sure to be grateful to parents who have sacrificed much for us. To teachers and pastors who have instructed and prayed for us. Nothing is more despicable in this world than an ungrateful son or daughter who gives no thought to the many benefits received from parents, but thinks only of his or her own personal pleasure and desire. When they are gone it is too late to give them the honor they deserve.

Judgment came swiftly upon Joash. A small army from Syria overwhelmingly defeated a much greater host of Judah. The people of Judah and Jerusalem were spoiled of their treasures which were sent to Damascus. Joash was left in terrible disease. His own servants conspired against him and slew him. He was buried in the city of David but not with the kings. So a potentially great and useful life went astray. His main failures were his lack of gratefulness to the man who saved his life and made him king; and his quick yielding to the temptation to moral impurity and idolatry. May God help us to set a high standard for our lives, and principles of godliness to live by no matter what influences we have around us. Let us remember how one godly person can win great victories for the Lord and His people.

LESSON 8

UZZIAH'S STRONG REIGN

Read: II Kings 14:21-22; 15:1-7; II Chron.25 & 26

Memory Work: Review Psalm 1

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *Great blessings and victories should not produce self-confidence and presumption on our part.*
2. *It is better to suffer material loss, than to disobey the Lord and lose His blessing.*
3. *God blesses those who seek Him with the whole heart.*
4. *Pride will bring disaster.*
5. *It is a dangerous error, to resist and defy the servants of the Lord who instruct or reprove us.*
6. *Let us be wary that we do not fail in our middle age or older years.*

I Amaziah: Good and Bad: After the forty year reign of Joash, he was killed by two of his own servants. This was retribution for the killing of the sons of Jehoiada, the priest. When Joash was dead, Amaziah, his son, reigned in his stead (II Chron.14:27). He was 25 years old when he became king and he reigned for 29 years. As soon as his kingdom was established, he executed the servants that had killed his father. He did right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart. Two incidents in the history of Amaziah are noteworthy as lessons in human nature and the ways of God.

On one occasion Amaziah organized his army and equipped them to go forth to war. He also hired one hundred thousand men of war from Ephraim (the northern kingdom of Israel) for a hundred talents of silver. But a messenger of the Lord came and warned Amaziah not to allow the soldiers of Israel to go

with him to battle. The Lord warned of failure, if Israel was allowed to participate. "But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel," Amaziah inquired? The man of God responded that God was able to give Judah much more than that. There is a clear and important lesson here for us. It is certainly better to suffer the loss of money or whatever, rather than to disobey the Lord. If we make a mistake and become aware of it, we must be willing to make things right even if it costs us material loss or hurts our pride. To his credit, Amaziah sent the mighty men of valor from Israel home. They went in a rage, but God helped Amaziah and the army of Judah so that they won the battle with the Edomites. Pleasing God is more important than holding on to our money. If we please the Lord and it costs us, we can count on Him to give us more and better than we lost.

But Amaziah made a terrible dumb mistake after his victory over the Edomites. He took their idol gods and set them up to be his gods. He bowed and worshipped them. Of course, the anger of the Lord was aroused against Amaziah. The Lord sent a prophet to warn Amaziah. The man of God asked the king why he was worshipping the gods of the people which could not deliver their own people out of his hand. Amaziah angrily silenced the prophet.

The second noteworthy incident involving Amaziah took place after his victory over the Edomites. He sent a challenge to Joash, king of Israel (10 northern tribes) to engage their armies in battle. Joash ridiculed the challenge (II Chron.25:18) and advised Amaziah not to meddle to his own hurt. He discerned rightly that Amaziah's recent success had gone to his head and made him presumptuous. Stubborn Amaziah did not listen to the good advice but insisted on attacking. He was totally routed and chased to Jerusalem where Joash humiliated Amaziah by demolishing a 600 foot section of the wall. He also took all the gold and silver and the vessels from the house of the Lord. So the pride and presumption of Amaziah cost him dearly. The lesson here for us is that we must be very careful after a great victory or blessing, that we do not become self-confident and lifted up. Remember what the wise man said: "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov.16:18).

Amaziah reigned for 29 years and when he died Judah was without a king for 11 years.

II Marvellously Helped: Finally, all the people of Judah took young Uzziah (also called Azariah) and made him king at the tender age of 16. He built the city of Elath, an important seaport and strengthened Judah on all fronts. The prophet Zechariah apparently was very influential in inspiring the young king to seek the Lord. Uzziah earnestly sought the Lord all the days of Zechariah. As long as he sought the Lord, God made the king to prosper in every way. He defeated the powerful Philistines and broke down the walls of their important cities. He also defeated the Arabians and the Meunims. The Ammorites brought gifts of tribute to Uzziah. His reputation reached all the way to Egypt. The devout young king sought the Lord and strengthened the defenses of Judah tremendously. He also dug wells and improved the desert areas. He increased the cattle and encouraged farming and vinedressing. He was a very interesting character. He loved agriculture, as well as armaments. Not since the days of Solomon, was there a king with so broad an expertise in life. The king organized an elite army. He had 2600 officers which led the various units of 307,500 fighting men. They went to battle in waves under the oversight of three top aides to the king. Everything was efficiently organized. The warriors were also well equipped with shields and spears and helmets and habergeons (coats of mail). Slings and bows were provided. Most notable of all were the modern "engines" that were invented by cunning men to shoot arrows and to catapult great stones. These modern weapons were installed on the towers and walls to defend the strongholds of Judah. The name Uzziah became famous far abroad.

III Till He Was Strong: As in so many of the good kings of Judah, there comes a "but" in the record. Alas, here also, we read "But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (II Chron.26:16). These lessons from the kings should be enough to teach us well that there is never a time when we can rest on our laurels and cease to be vigilant. We must earnestly seek to stay down at the feet of our Lord and seek Him continually as long as we live. "As long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper," we are told (vs.5), and in the same verse the suggestive comment is made that Uzziah sought God in the days of Zechariah. This man of God probably had great influence over the king. But it seems that he died at this time. We do well to be influenced and inspired by godly men and women, but ultimately we must adopt godly

principles for ourselves to live by. We should become an influence for godliness to others. The suggestion is certainly there in the record that while Zechariah lived Uzziah sought the Lord, but when he was removed Uzziah became proud and arrogant to his own destruction.

So great had Uzziah become that everyone honored him. He was used to having his way and doing what ever he pleased. When he came to the house of the Lord on one fateful occasion, he decided that he would burn the incense at the altar of incense before the holy of holies. Azariah, the high priest, boldly withstood the king. Eighty valiant priests of the Lord backed up the courageous high priest. Azariah withstood the king and rebuked him, informing the king that only the consecrated sons of Aaron were permitted to burn incense to the Lord. The king was ordered to leave the sanctuary and told that he had trespassed and that his attempt to burn incense at the altar before the holy of holies would not be for his honor. Uzziah could have turned at the reproof and repented to his own salvation. But the beastly pride which had built up in the famous successful king blinded him to the truth. Instead of submitting to the word of the high priest, Uzziah rose up against him. He became very angry and while he was angry with the censer of incense in his hand beside the altar of incense, the Lord smote him suddenly with a leprous spot in his forehead. Then the 80 priests of the Lord thrust him out. He was forced to live in isolation for the rest of his life while Jotham, his son judged the people of Judah. So the blessed and prosperous reign of Uzziah, one of the major kings of Judah was marred by his pride and arrogance in his later days.

We never do well to be angry with the ministers of God. Certainly, they are human and subject to make mistakes, but even if that is so we do well to restrain criticism and anger, and honor them for their work's sake. We do well when we take advice and when we obey the instructions and suggestions given by the servants of the Lord. Should there be an occasion when their advice is not right we can leave that with the Lord who is able to instruct and to guide His own servants. This sudden judgment stands out as a clear warning to all, not to rise up against the reproof and instruction of the ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Uzziah reigned 52 years. Only Manasseh reigned longer. Judah benefited from his great organizational ability and especially from his earnest seeking of the Lord in his early years.

Let us seek the Lord. He will prosper us as we seek him with all our hearts.

NOTES:

## HEZEKIAH'S REFORMATION

Read: II Chronicles 29, 30 & 31

Memory Work: Review Psalm 1

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *The Lord is always pleased by sincere repentance and an honest attempt to draw near to Him.*
2. *Our efforts to worship the Lord in the way He has ordained will bring the blessing of God and joy and gladness to our lives.*
3. *The blessing of the Lord should inspire us to thoroughly purge out of our hearts all that is of the world or of the flesh.*
4. *It is a privilege and sacred obligation to bring tithes and offerings to the Lord for the maintenance of the house of the Lord and for the support of His ministers.*

I Jotham and Ahaz: We must pass quickly over these two kings of Judah. Their lives and reigns were quite opposite. Jotham pleased the Lord and did not follow the bad example of his father Uzziah, but only the good. He improved the house of the Lord and strengthened Judah. He won a notable victory over the Ammonites and became a mighty king "because, he prepared his ways before the Lord his God" (II Chron.27:6). He reigned only 16 years and died at the age of 41. Ahaz the son of Jotham, also reigned fro 16 years and did that which was evil following the pattern of the kings of Israel (10 northern tribes). He set up images of Baal and sacrificed his children and practiced the abominable customs of idolatry. The king of Syria attacked Ahaz and defeated him, taking many captives back to Damascus. Pekah, the king of Israel also defeated Ahaz and slaughtered 120,000 valiant men in one day. They also took many captives, but when a man of God, Obed, threatened Israel for holding the captives, they were returned



to Jericho. The Edomites also defeated Ahaz and took captives. The Philistines took away some of the cities of Judah. Ahaz called for the help of Assyria. He took a portion from the house of the Lord and from his own house and from his princes and gave it for a gift to Tilgathpilneser, king of Assyria, in the hope that he would come to his aid. He came alright, but only to distress Ahaz more. All this was because Ahaz and Judah had forsaken the Lord God of their fathers (II Chron. 28:6). God "brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel: for he made Judah naked and transgressed sore against the Lord" (vs.19). Even in great distress Ahaz turned to the gods of Damascus and they were the ruin of him (see vs.23). This desperately wicked monarch closed the house of the Lord and destroyed the holy vessels. He established groves for his idol gods in all the high places and provoked the Lord to anger. When he died he was not buried with the kings of Judah, for he was unworthy.

II National Repentance: Isaiah dealt with Ahaz to no avail, but the son of the wicked king, Hezekiah did indeed hearken to the word of the Lord. Hezekiah became the king of Judah at the age of 25. Right from the beginning, he purposed to please the Lord. His first acts were to open the doors of the house of the Lord and to call together the priests and the Levites. He admonished them to sanctify themselves and to begin a cleanup of the house of the Lord. The daily sacrifices had been abandoned. No incense was burned before the Lord. In fact, the temple building was desecrated, abandoned, and boarded up. Hezekiah recognized that the terrible oppressed condition of Judah was directly related to their neglect and forsaking of the Lord and His house. Hezekiah proposed to make a covenant with the Lord so that His fierce wrath and judgment would turn away from Israel (II Chron.29:10).

The king admonished the Levites not to be careless or negligent, but to get to work and cleanse the house of the Lord. They began the work of sanctifying the house of the Lord on their New Year's day. In 16 days the work was completed and they reported their progress to Hezekiah. Immediately the king called for the rulers of the city. They rose early and went to the house of the Lord. Seven bullocks and seven rams, seven lambs, and seven goats were brought as a sin offering for the kingdom and for the sanctuary and for Judah. Hezekiah commanded the priests to offer them on the altar. The blood of the bul-

locks and of the rams and the lambs was sprinkled on the altar to make an atonement for all Israel. This is what the earnest young king commanded. He sought to repent before God Almighty for the sins of his father and for the sins of all the children of Israel.

Our method of repentance is not nearly so difficult as in those ancient days and if only the sinners would bring themselves to call on the Lord for forgiveness they could be quickly and wonderfully restored. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

Hezekiah had ordered singers and musicians to sing and play for the occasion. The Levites sang praises to the Lord with the words (Psalms) of David and Asaph. The king and all with him bowed and worshipped the Lord. The people offered up innumerable voluntary sacrifices and thank offerings to the Lord. So the temple worship was restored. Repentance was made and Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem rejoiced greatly.

III An Unusual Passover Feast: The date for the Passover Feast was the fourteenth day of the first month. When Hezekiah had the temple cleansed and worship restored, that date had already passed. Rather than wait for an entire year, Hezekiah issued a proclamation and invitation to all Judah and Israel to come to the Passover Feast in the second month. They had not kept the Passover according to the law of Moses for many years (see II Chron.30:5). The sacrifices of repentance which Hezekiah had inspired had been attended by the people of Jerusalem only. Now this feast was to be for all Israel, even for the northern tribes. So letters from Hezekiah were dispatched to all the tribes of Israel. He called on all the people to return unto the Lord God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. He warned them not to be stiffnecked like their fathers but to yield to the Lord and come to His sanctuary. The Lord in great mercy gave the northern tribes one last opportunity to forsake idolatry and return to Himself. Alas, in five years Samaria and the whole northern kingdom was swallowed up by the Assyrians under Shalmaneser. The great majority from Israel laughed at the invitation and mocked the call to worship. However, there were some from the tribes of Asher and Zebulun and Manasseh who responded and came to Jerusalem. Judah responded with one accord so that a very great congregation assembled at the temple in Jerusalem. Some did not have the time and opportunity

to sanctify themselves according to the law. Hezekiah prayed for them and they were permitted to participate in the great feast anyway. When Hezekiah prayed the Lord healed the people. They zealously cleansed out the altars that were in Jerusalem. Every shrine was destroyed and thrown in the brook Kidron. For seven days the great congregation observed the feast of unleavened bread with great gladness. There had not been a Passover Feast like that since the days of Solomon, almost 300 years before. So there was great joy in the city and the prayer and worship came up before the Lord in His heavenly dwelling place. This great joy is the blessed result of worshipping the Lord sincerely with all the heart. Let us learn to worship the Lord with our whole heart and soul and mind.

IV Practical Results: After the blessed time of fellowship and feasting, those who had been present went out to tear down the high places and groves and to brake the images in pieces wherever they could find them. Judah and Benjamin and Ephraim and Manasseh were cleaned up. Then the people returned to their own houses. Hezekiah, meanwhile organized the worship at the temple. He allocated funds from his own substance for the work of the Lord and then commanded the people to follow his example and bring tithes and offerings to the house of the Lord and for the support of the priests and Levites. The people of Judah responded generously. They set administrators over the tithes and offerings who allocated them faithfully. Freewill offerings were abundant and the priests and Levites were greatly encouraged to sanctify themselves and minister to the Lord and the people with all their hearts. Many a faithful servant of God has been discouraged by the lack of support from those to whom he has ministered. It is a great privilege and important part of every believer's service to bring tithes and give offerings for the work of the Lord and the support of His ministers.

Hezekiah sincerely did that which was right and good in the sight of the Lord. He set a good example himself and inspired zeal in all around him. Everything that Hezekiah did for the house of the Lord and in obedience to the commandments of God, he did with all of his heart. Let us do the same.

## HEZEKIAH'S TEST AND TRUST

Read: II Kings 18:13-37, 19, 20; II Chron. 32; Isaiah 36, 37, 38 & 39 - note II Kings 19 and Isaiah 37 are almost identical.

Memory Work: Review Psalm 1

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *A godly life is the best preparation for the tests and trials that come our way.*
2. *It is wise to turn our problems over to the Lord at once, as soon as they arise.*
3. *It is helpful to be able to enlist the intercession and faith of godly vessels in time of need.*
4. *Prayer and faith can change any situation.*
5. *Deliverance and victory must not be allowed to produce pride and self-confidence in us.*

I A Serious Threat: For fourteen years Hezekiah led Judah in whole-hearted worship and reformation. Everything he did was with all his heart and God prospered all of his efforts. But after those blessed years a serious threat to the very existence of Judah arose. Ten years before, the Assyrians, led by their king Shalmaneser, had overrun the northern kingdom of Israel. Samaria had been besieged and conquered and the Israelites taken away, captives. Now the Assyrians came back, led by Sennacherib, to attack and possess all the fenced cities of Judah. Hezekiah bargained with Sennacherib and offered to pay whatever tribute the Assyrian king would assess. But when Hezekiah had emptied the treasury of the house of the Lord and his own house and had even stripped the gold from the doors and pillars in the house of the Lord and given it all to Sennacherib, the heathen king was not satisfied but treacherously continued his siege.

While Sennacherib himself led his troops against the city

of Lachish, 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem, he sent a host of warriors under the leadership of Tartan, Rabsaris, and Rabshakeh to Jerusalem. He demanded and expected their captivation. They found the city well fortified and prepared to defend itself. Not only had Hezekiah re-established the earnest worship of Jehovah, but he had also strengthened the defences of Jerusalem during his 14 years on the throne (II Chron.32:6-8). He organized his army and spoke encouragingly to them. The enemy generals called for the king to confer with them, but Hezekiah sent out three of his trusted servants (see II Kings 18:18). The Assyrian leaders warned their counterparts to advise Hezekiah that if he was hoping for help from Egypt, he could forget it. And if they were trusting in the Lord, their God, they falsely claimed that the Lord had sent them to destroy Israel. They spoke in the Jews' language and the people on the wall could hear everything. They ridiculed the meagre forces of Hezekiah (vss.23 & 24), suggesting that if given 2000 horses, that they would be unable to supply the horses with riders. Hezekiah's negotiators asked Rabshakeh to speak in the Syrian language so the people on the wall would not understand. But Rabshakeh wanted the people to hear and be afraid and to revolt from Hezekiah. The Assyrian general cried with a loud voice to the people on the wall. He boasted that no god could deliver Jerusalem from his hand and noted that Samaria and many other strongholds had fallen one by one. Their gods could not deliver them. If only Jerusalem would surrender, the Assyrians would allow them to live in peace until they could arrange to relocate (take captive) the entire city. The people on the wall did not answer Rabshakeh. They showed their faith in the leadership of Hezekiah by following his advice not to answer the heathen ambassadors. The three representatives of Hezekiah reported to him, with their clothing rent, all the demands and ridicule and blasphemy of the heathen representatives.

II A Wise Response: When Hezekiah heard the demands he immediately humbled himself. He rent his clothes and dressed in sackcloth. Then he went to the house of the Lord. He also sent Eliakim and Shebna, dressed in sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet to report the terrible threat and the blasphemy of the heathens' reproach of the Lord God. They requested that Isaiah lift up his prayer on behalf of the remnant of Jews still surviving. Isaiah gave the messengers an encouraging word from the

Lord. First he told the messengers to assure Hezekiah to "be not afraid." This is always the way to approach any onslaught of the enemy. God is for us. He works all for good. His promises are true. We need not fear. If fear persists we must look away from the danger and look up to Him. As we claim His promise and sing praises in advance of the victory, fear must go. Faith takes over and the triumph is sure. Isaiah foretold precisely that Sennacharib would hear a rumor and return to his own country where he would be slain with the sword. Isaiah also revealed that God would send "a blast" upon Sennacharib.

When Rabshakeh realized that Jerusalem would not surrender, he took his troops and returned to Sennacharib. He found that the king had left Lachish and attacked Libnah nearby. While engaged there, Sennacharib heard a report that Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia was coming to fight against him. He stopped everything to prepare to meet the Ethiopians, but this was no doubt only a rumor which Sennacharib heard, just as Isaiah had foretold. The Assyrian king sent a letter to Hezekiah threatening him further and reminding him that no god had delivered his enemies from his hand.

Hezekiah immediately took the letter to the temple and spread it before the Lord. He lifted up his voice in earnest and sincere supplication reminding the Lord that Sennacharib had reproached the living God. He recognized that the enemy had indeed destroyed the nations round about and thrown their gods into the fire, but noted that those gods were wood and stone and the works of man's hands with no real power. The king besought the Lord to save Jerusalem, "that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only" (II Kings 19:19).

While Hezekiah prayed the word of the Lord came to Isaiah once again. The Lord was aware of how Sennacharib by his messengers had reproached Him (vs.23). He recognized the rage of Sennacharib against Himself. The word came to Isaiah that God would put his hook in Sennacharib's nose and turn him around to go back where he came from (vs.28). The prophet reassured the king that Sennacharib would not come into Jerusalem nor even shoot an arrow there nor cast a bank against its walls. "I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake," The Lord promised (vs.34).

That very night the destroying angel of the Lord went out and smote the camp of the Assyrians so that 185,000 men perish-

ed overnight. Sennacharib had no choice but to take the surviving troops and return to Nineveh, his capital. There while worshipping his god, Nisroch, his own sons smote him with the sword and ended his reign of terror. So the city of Jerusalem withstood and overcame the siege of the greatest power in the world of that time through real faith in the living God. The godly life and faithful obedience of king Hezekiah developed a real confidence in his heart that God would hear and answer his desperate prayer. For us, also, a life of faithful obedience will develop a triumphant faith in God. Don't wait for a crisis or calamity to seek the Lord. Seek Him now. He will prepare us for every test and trial.

III A Second Trial: About the same time, Hezekiah was taken seriously ill. Isaiah the prophet, came and advised the king by the word of the Lord, to set his house in order, for he would die and not live (II Kings 20:1). Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and called on the Lord with all his might that he might be healed. He was only 39 years old at this time and had lived a good life with a perfect heart toward the Lord. Before Isaiah had left the king's court, the word came to him to turn around and to tell Hezekiah that God had seen his tears and heard his prayer and that he would be healed. In three days he would be able to go up to the house of the Lord and God promised him 15 more years to his life and reign. Isaiah also offered to show by a miraculous sign that the promise was of God. He asked the king whether the shadow of the sun dial should jump forward or go backward ten degrees. Hezekiah chose to see it go backward. Isaiah ordered a clump of figs to be put as a poultice on the great boil afflicting Hezekiah and God healed the king. Hezekiah wrote his testimony concerning his healing, but the double victory caused him to become lifted up.

IV The Unfortunate Failure: "But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up" (II Chron.32:25). Two miraculous deliverances, one after the other, caused Hezekiah to become proud. If only God's vessels would keep down in real humility, the Lord could do more and greater works. Hezekiah "showed off" his treasures and gifts to the ambassadors which came from Babylon. They came to enquire of the wonder done in the land and "God left him (Hezekiah), to try him that he might know all that was in

his heart" (II Chron.32:31). When Isaiah reproved Hezekiah he did not get angry and he humbled himself somewhat, but he did not truly repent. The king was satisfied to know that the Babylonian judgment would not come in his days.

All things considered, Hezekiah was the best of all the kings of Judah from the time of David. He trusted God like none before nor after him. His marred testimony should serve as a warning to every believer. His temptation to pride should put us on guard, especially after great blessings and victories. His great faith and trust in God should inspire us to believe for the impossible, also.

NOTES:



LESSON 11

MANASSEH'S WICKEDNESS AND REPENTANCE

Read: II Kings 21, & 23:26-27; II Chron.33; Jer.15:1-9

Memory Work: Review Psalm 1

What we should learn from this Lesson

1. *Children do not automatically follow in the steps of godly parents.*
2. *The good life-work of a godly servant of God may be quickly destroyed by weak and careless successors.*
3. *God hates astrology and spiritualism and witchcraft. His people are to be controlled by the Holy Spirit and not by the stars.*
4. *Even the worst of men, when they humble themselves before God find mercy and grace.*

I A Wicked Son: During the 15 extra years which God gave to Hezekiah after his miraculous healing, the king was lifted up in pride. He did not render appropriate service to God for the benefits which he received. Hezekiah "showed off" his treasures to the ambassadors of the king of Babylon. During those years a son was born to Hezekiah. His name was Manasseh. He was only twelve years old when his father died. This son of the godly Hezekiah turned out to be one of the worst of the kings of Judah. He became a fanatical idolater, the slave of astrology and the occult and the perpetrator of violent persecution against the godly remnant in Jerusalem. It is a sad reality, that the children of godly saints of God do not automatically become saintly also. Noah's son, Ham, brough a curse upon his son Canaan. Moses' son Gershom is lost in obscurity. Two sons of Aaron perished while offering strange fire at the altar of incense. Samuel's sons were unworthy to follow in the steps of their godly father. Several of David's sons did very wickedly. This ought not so to be. Yet, the lesson is here for parents, not to take for granted the salvation and godliness of their

offspring. It takes great faith and watchfulness to see our children through into the kingdom of God. The lesson is here also for the children of godly parents, that they cannot make it on the coat tails of their parents. Every young person must have their own experience and choose in the valley of decision for themselves. Hezekiah was the son of a wicked king of Judah; Ahaz, by name. Yet, he chose to turn to the Lord with all of his heart. He brought about a great reformation in Judah and was responsible for a great revival of the work of God in Israel. So there are examples of godly children which came from wicked parents and there are examples of wicked offspring from saintly parents. The individual must choose his own path. Godly parents can have faith and obtain wisdom from God however, and claim the promises such as Proverbs 22:6, and Isaiah 54:3, and Acts 16:31.

Manasseh came to the throne at the age of 12 and chose to follow the wicked suggestions of evil advisors. Young folks make choices early in life which set the tone for life. The choice of friends is extremely important. The choice of how to use our spare time and energy will direct us either to good or evil. Ask God's help in every choice. Do not trust your natural inclinations, for the human heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. What peace and joy and glory come to those who choose to love and obey the Lord with all their hearts!

So wicked was Manasseh that the sacred record states that he made Judah and Jerusalem to err and to do worse than the heathen whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel (II Chron.33:9 & II Kings 21:9 & 11).

II Catalogue of Evil: An extensive list of the provocations of Manasseh is given twice in the scripture (see II Kings 21:3-7 & 16; II Chron.33:3-7). The high places which Hezekiah had finally gotten rid of after many years, Manasseh built right up again, undoing his father's work. He also revived Baal worship and made groves to hide the vile fornication practiced in Baal worship. He worshipped the "host of heaven". This means sun worship and the worship of the moon and stars and planets. This was common in Chaldea and Babylon. Manasseh had the audacity to set up heathen altars right in the house of the Lord. In the two courts of the temple he set altars for the sun, moon, stars and planets. He sacrificed his children in the fire to Molech. Manasseh became an "observer of times," which is related to the use of astrology still persisted in

God would have us moved by His Holy Spirit and not by the signs of astrology under which we were born. The evil king practiced enchantment and witchcraft. He became involved in everything evil and vile and provoked the Lord to anger. He set another carved image which he had made in the house of the Lord and defiled the house in which the Lord had promised to set His name.

The Lord sent prophets who spoke to Manasseh and who warned him and Judah, but they would not heed the warnings nor listen to the word of the Lord. Manasseh added yet to his great list of sins, by "shedding innocent blood, very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another" (II Kings 21:16). Ancient traditions record that Manasseh had Isaiah, the prophet, silenced by placing him in a hollow log and having him "sawn assunder" from head to foot. The reference in Hebrews 11:37 may well have been to Isaiah's martyrdom at the hands of the wicked Manasseh. The people of Judah with their wicked leader plunged into every evil and mocked and murdered the messengers of the Lord until there was no more remedy (see II Chron.36:1416).

III Undeserved Mercy: This evil king had the longest reign of any of the kings of Judah. Fifty-five years he ruled in Jerusalem. However, during that time the Assyrians came against Judah and took Manasseh captive. Hezekiah's living faith had thwarted the Assyrians' attempt under Sennacherib to conquer Judah. But with the supernatural protection removed the Assyrians overran the small nation. The captains of the Assyrian army, "took Manasseh among the thorns and bound him with fetters and carried him to Babylon" (II Chron.33:11). There, in great affliction he cried to the Lord and humbled himself greatly (vs.12). Like Ahab before him, this evil man in time of distress humbled himself. The wonder of it all is that the gracious, merciful Lord immediately recognized Manasseh's repentance and heard his prayer and answered above and beyond what we could ask or think. The king was shortly released from his captivity and restored to his throne. There is good evidence that he was a vassal of the king of Assyria from that time on, to the end of his reign, paying tribute to Assyria every year. But this evil king, who had sinned above all that were before him was granted mercy and pardon. Nor did he forget his experience in Babylon when restored to his throne. He removed his altars and idols from the house of the Lord

and repaired the altar of the Lord and sacrificed both peace offerings and thank offerings (II Chron.33:16). He also commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel. The people continued to frequent the high places, but at least they sacrificed at those high places offerings to the Lord and not to Baal, Molech and the other idol gods of the heathen. This story stands out as an example of the great mercy of the Lord. The thief on the cross was the recipient of that great mercy, also. The enemy may condemn some, causing them to think that their sin is too great to be forgiven or that their rebellion has been too great to be pardoned. Satan is a liar. Our God is abundantly able to pardon. He will forgive all our iniquities. If we but humble ourselves and apply to him for mercy, the blood of Jesus Christ our Savior will cleanse us from all sin. Come boldly to the throne of grace, you will obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. If God was pleased to note the humbling of Manasseh and to hear and answer his prayer, surely God will hear your earnest cry to Him and lift you from the miry pit of sin and failure to a place of glorious fellowship with Himself.

When Manasseh died he was not buried with the kings of Judah, but in his own house. His reign was evil in general and the blood of innocent victims which he shed in Jerusalem brought down the judgment of God. The Babylonian captivity was sealed by the wicked reign of Manasseh and by the blood which he shed in Jerusalem (see Jeremiah 15:1-9). The imminent punishment was postponed when Josiah, the grandson of Manasseh, came to the throne, two years after his death, and repented and humbled himself before the word of the Lord. That will be the subject of another lesson.

LESSON 12

JOSIAH, JEHOIAKIM, AND THE WORD OF GOD

Read: II Kings 22 & 23 & 24:1-6; Jeremiah 36;  
II Chronicles 34, 35 & 36:1-8

Memory Work: He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Psalm 91:1

What we should learn from this Lesson

- 1. It is possible for young people to seek the Lord and to influence others for good.*
- 2. It is wise to hearken to the Word of God and take seriously its commandments.*
- 3. We must fulfill the conditions in order to claim the promises of God.*
- 4. How we respond to the Word of the Lord will determine how the Lord will deal with us in the judgment.*

I A Young Seeker: After Manasseh's long and evil reign of 55 years, his son, Amon reigned in his stead. He did evil in the sight of the Lord, worshipping the host of idols which his father had set up in Jerusalem and even in the house of the Lord. He never humbled himself as his father had finally done. After only two years, Amon's own servants conspired against him and assassinated him.

The people took the conspirators and slew them and then made Josiah the son of Amon, king in his place. Josiah was only eight years old when he came to the throne, yet the sacred story records that immediately he did right in the sight of the Lord and walked in the ways of David without deviating to the right or the left (II Chron.34:2). This may be a summation of his 31 years of rule in Judah, but even if it is, we still have the record of how Josiah sought the Lord in the eighth year of his reign when he was 16 years of age. By the time that he was 20, Josiah was ready to launch a national reformation. The record in the Chronicles tells of his clean-up

of idolatry even before the book of the law was found, while the story in the book of Kings tells of an extensive purge of idolatry after the discovery of the Word of God. No doubt, both are correct. "In the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father: and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem" (II Chron.34:3). High places, groves, molten images, carved images, he broke in pieces and scattered the rubble on the graves of the idolaters. He also desecrated the altars of the idols by burning the bones of idol-priests upon them (vss.4-5). He carried this purge even to Ephraim, Manasseh, Simeon and Naphtali and the remains of the northern kingdom of Israel.

II A Valuable Discovery: After the purge throughout the land, Josiah returned to Jerusalem and ordered the clean-up and restoration of the house of the Lord there. Skilled workers were hired. Extensive repairs had to be made. Hewn stones and timber beams and new floors had to be installed. During the repair work Hilkiah the high priest, found the book of the law of Moses. So neglected was the worship of the Lord, that the book of the law was totally forgotten and lost. Hilkiah told Shaphan, the scribe, of the discovery, and Shaphan told the king and brought the book to him. Josiah had the scribe read the Word to him. When Josiah heard the law of God and realized how terribly Israel had offended the Almighty he rent his garments. He immediately realized that great wrath could be poured out upon Israel and Judah at any time. He sent representatives to enquire of the Lord as to if there was any hope for them. The Word of the Lord was given through Huldah, a woman and a prophetess. She confirmed Josiah's fears that wrath and judgment could no longer be averted, but the mercy of God was extended to Josiah because of how he humbled his heart before the Word of the Lord. The Lord promised that the king would live out his days and die in peace. After that, the judgment would inevitably come.

III Another Purge: Armed with the written Word of God, Josiah launched another cleanup of idolatry and unclean practices. He started by getting rid of every vessel and instrument which had been made for Baal and had found its way into the temple of the Lord. He effectively stopped all idolatrous worship in Jerusalem. He destroyed the houses of the abominable sodomites which were male prostitutes connected with the idol worship.

The altar where babies were sacrificed to Molech was defiled so that this wicked practice was abolished. Shrines that had persisted since the days of Solomon (see II Kings 23:13) were finally removed. The bones of the dead were burned on every sacred altar of the idols.

This purge included the fulfillment of the very remarkable prophecy of the man of God who denounced the golden calf at Bethel in the days of Jeroboam. That prophet had foretold that a child of the house of David would arise who would slay the evil priests of the high place and burn them upon the altar and defile the altar by burning bones of the dead upon it. The prophet even named the son of David who would accomplish this: Josiah (see I Kings 13:2). Now as Josiah came to Bethel, about 350 years after the prophecy he did exactly as had been foretold. In one other instance an individual was prophetically named far in advance of his birth. That man was Cyrus, named by the prophet Isaiah about 200 years before his birth.

So king Josiah effectively cleaned up idolatry from his realm and returned to Jerusalem determined to serve the Lord and to obey those things which he had learned from the book of the law which had been found.

IV A Great Passover Feast: After Josiah had heard the comforting word concerning himself and his reign, he desired that his people should hear the words of the book of the law. He called for the elders of Jerusalem and Judah and gathered all the men of Judah and all the people of Jerusalem, both small and great, and all the Levites, and he read in their hearing the words of the book of the covenant which had been found (II Chron.34:30). Then the king made a solemn covenant to walk in complete obedience to all the commandments and teachings of the book with all his heart (vs.31). He inspired the people to do the same. The result was that Judah faithfully followed the Lord all the days of Josiah and judgment was postponed.

In reading the book of the law, Josiah and the people discovered that they should celebrate the feast of the Passover. For many years this was neglected. Now they determined to celebrate this feast with all their hearts. Hezekiah had inspired a remarkable observance of the Passover feast (II Chron.30:13-15,26). But this celebration surpassed even that remarkable occasion. This was the greatest observance of the feast of unleavened bread and of the Passover since the days of Samuel (II Chron. 35:18).

V Premature End: Despite the promise of God that he would come to his end in peace because he had humbled himself at the Word of the Lord, Josiah died a premature and violent death. He presumed to withstand Pharaoh-Necho, who was going to war with Assyria. The Egyptian monarch warned Josiah not to meddle but the king of Judah would not listen. The scripture records that Josiah "hearkened not to the words of Necho from the mouth of God" (II Chron.35:22). He went to battle disguised, like Ahab had done years before, and he too was wounded by the archers and died to the grief of all Jerusalem. It stands as a warning to every believer of the promises of God that we must obey the word of the Lord and do as He instructs us if we expect to see the promises fulfilled for us.

VI An Unworthy Son: The people of Judah made Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah, king in his place. But the king of Egypt would not allow him to reign and carried Jehoahaz away captive to Egypt. He made Eliakim, another son of Josiah and the brother of Jehoahaz, king in his place and changed his name to Jehoiakim. He did evil in the sight of the Lord. Jeremiah had begun his ministry in the 13th year of Josiah's reign. During the early years of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah had Baruch, the scribe, write out on a scroll, the Word of the Lord as given to him. He sent Baruch to read the message to the people of Jerusalem on a fast day in the house of the Lord. The princes of Judah then asked for another reading. They told Baruch to hide himself with Jeremiah while they told the king of this prophetic writing. They did not bring the scroll at first. But Jehoiakim sent for the scroll and had Jehudi read it to him. As it was read the brazen king cut the scroll with a penknife and threw the leaves into the fire that was burning on the hearth in his winter house.

This son of Josiah did not respond as his father had, to the reading of the Word of the Lord. He did not rend his garments and they were not afraid to burn the pages of the inspired word. No wonder judgment was pronounced against this monarch. In his days Nebuchadnezzar came against Judah and took hostage many of the young princes and rulers of the land.

Someday God will treat us in the same way which we have treated his Holy Word. Let us love it and obey it and teach it for it is our life.