

PART TWO

From the Division of the Kingdom to the Deaths of Both Kingdoms' Kings

From this point forward we will not be studying Solomon's glorious kingdom but the divided kingdom-- actually the two rival kingdoms now occupying the northern and southern areas of Solomon's kingdom.

7. Jeroboam's Notorious Departures

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 12:26-33.
2. Study the account until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. He sets up golden calves at Dan and Bethel.
 - b. He consecrates priests who are not Levites.
 - c. He ordains a feast in the eighth month.

COMMENTS

Though Jeroboam is not of the royal line of kings (the house of David), God gives this "nobody" an opportunity to become "somebody" and to establish his house as the ruling line in the North.

What kind of king will he be, this first king of the newly-formed Northern Kingdom? Obviously his subjects are expecting him to be more civil about the tax-load and governmental policies than Rehoboam would be, for it has been on this platform the new kingdom has been established. We also expect Jeroboam to be a godly king, for God has spoken to him through the prophet Ahijah, promising him the major part of Solomon's kingdom (I Kings 11:29-31) and other special promises if he will be a good king (I Kings 11:37,38). But these expectations of his goodness are not to be realized as we shall see.

The most notorious of all his departures is his setting up golden calves at Dan and Bethel. People who lack principle often do anything to establish a point or to gain a personal objective. Such is the case with Jeroboam. Uppermost in his selfish mind is to keep his citizens from reuniting with their brethren in Judah. He particularly fears their going to the annual feasts at Jerusalem--the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Deut. 16:16; Psa 122:2-4). He fears the sentimentality of their former ties will cause them to reunite politically under Rehoboam. His solution? Prayer? No. Trust in God? No. But something of

his own doing. He decides to establish two places of worship closer than Jerusalem and to sell his people on the thought it is too much trouble to go to Jerusalem. So at Dan (in the northern end of his territory) and at Bethel (in the southern end) he sets up golden calves as objects and places of worship. And his people who want a lighter political load are easily sold on a more convenient religion. And every succeeding king on his throne will continue these places of calf-worship. So "this thing became a sin" (see I Kings 13:33,34; 16:25,26; etc.). Thus the evil he introduces continues long after his death to curse the very kingdom he has started.

But there are yet other Jeroboam-departures. One departure from God's way or one false doctrine frequently leads to another, and that to another, etc., demonstrating the worst wrong is the first wrong, for without the first there would be no second, no third, etc.

What does he do next? He makes a "house of high places" (probably a temple at Bethel) and "priests of the lowest of the people, which were not sons of Levi". For "lowest of the people" the American Standard reads, "From among all the people," which corresponds with the statement they were not of the tribe of Levi. In fact, according to II Chron. 11:14 he actually rejects the Levites from being priests, resulting in their leaving their priestly cities in the North and going over to Rehoboam in the South.

And his perverting his people's religious life continues when he ordains a feast in the eighth month, a month which the Scripture specifically says "he devised of his own heart". When people reject divine ways, they can turn only to human ways instead. In Matt. 21:25 Jesus recognized John's baptism was either from heaven or of men, and every religious doctrine as well as every religious practice is either "of God" (taught in the Bible) or "of men" (made up by man). Jeroboam himself personally officiates at the altars of sacrifice and incense.

What a presumptuous innovator he has turned out to be! Golden calves to replace Jerusalem, calling these lifeless images the gods that had brought them out of Egypt, a new temple, priests who are not Scripturally qualified, and now a feast "which he devised of his own heart". We can but marvel at his fearless, anti-Jehovah procedures after he has been set up as king by Him. Will he get away with it? We shall see.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 3 memory-facts for this event.
2. Why would we expect Jeroboam to be more civil than Rehoboam?
3. Why does he want to keep his people out of Jerusalem?
4. How does he sell his people on using his places of worship instead of going to Jerusalem?

8. A Young Prophet Appears on the Scene

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 13:1-10.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. A young prophet from Judah rebukes Jeroboam.
 - b. The withered hand of Jeroboam is healed.
 - c. The prophet refuses to accept the king's hospitality-offer.

COMMENTS

When God is displeased, He delivers His message of disapproval by man. In the days of inspiration He dispatched inspired men. Today He depends on uninspired men to deliver His oral rebukes as His Word directs.

Our hero of this event is often called "the young prophet from Judah" because we do not know his name and because he was sent from Judah to Jeroboam in the Northern Kingdom. His case will combine the boldness, the sincerity, and the trusting nature of youth that sometimes lay youth open to deception. You will like this young man, and you will cry at what happens to him.

We can only admire his courage as he crosses the border between his nation and that of Israel where he is being sent with God's message to the sinning king. As he arrives at Bethel, he sees the king himself officiating at his altar of incense. He loses no time but breaks into the very solemnity of the ceremony as he addresses the altar in these stunning words: "O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord; Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee." Notice how minutely God predicts the future of Jeroboam's altar, and three hundred fifty-one years later the prediction will be fulfilled (II Kings 23:15,16). Since it will be centuries before Josiah will come and do this, the young prophet gives an on-the-spot sign to the king to prove his prediction will come true in its own time: "This is the sign which the Lord hath spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out."

The arrogant king is infuriated at such ruthless condemnation of his royal religious set-up, and he entertains no thought of changing his ways. Instead he orders, "Lay hold on him," and he points to the prophet. It is at this point that God who sent the prophet steps in. Two things immediately happen: the king's hand dries up so he cannot even pull it back, and the altar splits and pours out its ashes before the king's bewildered eyes. In one clear lesson Jeroboam learns what Nebuchadnezzar will learn later--that "those that walk in pride" God "is able to abase" (Dan 4:37).

In his humbled condition what is his first concern? As is so often the case, people are more disturbed over their own personal reverses than they are the condition of their religion. Characteristically Jeroboam is more concerned over his hand than he is the altar. He asks the prophet to pray that Jehovah will restore his hand. The prophet, like many a good-hearted preacher who is forgiving of those who have done things against his

ministry, holds no personal hatred for the king who had said, "Lay hold on him," but prays for the restoration of his hand, and God answers. It is customary for people to do good to those who have done good to them, so the king (happy about getting back the use of his hand and thankful for the prophet who has been instrumental in its restoration) now invites the prophet to his place where he plans to give him a reward. But obedience to God who has told the prophet not to tarry in the land even long enough to eat a meal or need a drink of water is more important to him than anything the king might do for him. Consequently the prophet begins his homeward journey back to Judah.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 3 memory-facts for this event.
2. What long-range prediction is made concerning the altar?
3. What order does the king give?
4. What two happenings humble the proud king?
5. How does the king regain the use of his hand?
6. Why does the prophet refuse to go to the king's house?

9. The Young Prophet Meets a Tragic Death

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 13:11-32.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. An older prophet invites him to his home in Bethel.
 - b. The young prophet accepts when told that an angel is behind the invitation.
 - c. While the young prophet is eating, God reveals his fate.
 - d. The young prophet is killed by a lion.
 - e. The older prophet buries him in his own tomb.

COMMENTS

Enter, a bewildering, hard-to-figure-out man--an old prophet living at Bethel. Is this man customarily a true prophet, or is he a false prophet? If true, why has he not rebuked the king's calf-worship? If false, why does he have anything to do with the young prophet?

And why does he lie to the young prophet to begin with, and then why does God deliver a revelation to the young prophet through him?

Bible students have found his case puzzling. Consequently not all have come to the same conclusion concerning him. Our own studied view is he is a true prophet who respects the young man who has so courageously delivered God's message to the sinning king that he wishes to know him personally and to have him in his own home. When one is bold in his stand for the Word of God, there will be people who admire and respect him and who wish to be identified with him in a personal way. One of the most successful ways to do this is to invite him into their homes. The aged prophet is so desirous to have the young prophet in his home he momentarily gives in to the temptation that "the end justifies the means" and tells him an angel appeared to him and told him to bring the young man home.

The foregoing assumes the aged prophet to be a prophet of God also, causing one to inquire, "If he is a true prophet, why hasn't he said something to the king about his sinful Bethel set-up?" First of all, we don't know he hasn't. But if he hasn't, he may be like a local preacher who may not be as bold against congregational conditions as an outside preacher who speaks out more readily about what he sees. This is why outside preachers are needed in any congregation from time to time--revival-meeting preaching, if you please!

Let us follow the pair now to the prophet's house. As they sit at meat, everybody seems to be happy: the young prophet because God has seemingly given him consent to accept this hospitality and the old prophet because he is able to extend the hospitality. All the while, though, God has not forgotten what He told the young prophet, and this one who so pleased God with his faithful delivery of His message to the king is now displeasing Him by his own disobedience. The sad part is he thinks he is doing right--he is deceived by what the aged

prophet claims to be a revelation. His case warns us when we know what God has said in His Word, we should accept nothing contrary to it even if its proclaimer claims it to be given him by revelation of God. Prov. 14:12 says, "There is a way that seemeth right, but the end thereof are the ways of death," and this verse perfectly fits the young man's case both in his thinking he is doing the right thing and the sad results of it.

In God's bringing judgment on the young man, we see His principle set forth in Eze. 18:24 in application: "When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness...all his righteousness... shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed...shall he die." God's verdict in the disobedience of the young prophet: he will die. God's method of communicating His judgment to him is through the aged prophet, thus forcing the deceiver to expose his own lie to the very one he has deceived. For some reason in this case God is not settling for a mere rebuke of the disobedient, for God says to the young man through the aged prophet, "Thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers." Let us realize in that time not to be buried among one's own people was nothing short of a tragedy.

We are not told whether the meal continues or abruptly ends (probably the latter). Sad and fearful, the young prophet trudges out to his beast. Full of grief because of what he has brought on the young man, the aged prophet goes with him to saddle the ass for him. Sadness prevails as the prophet from Judah slowly rides off, and the old prophet tearfully watches him go.

He does not ride very far out of Bethel until he is attacked by a lion, God's agent of punishment. (Yes, there were lions in Palestine then, particularly in the thickets along the Jordan but also elsewhere: David killed a lion, I Sam. 17:34; Samson also, Judg. 14:5,6; one of David's mighty men slew one in a pit on a snowy day, I Chron. 11:22; and others.)

News is brought into Bethel of a lion's standing beside a young man's corpse and his riderless ass. The place this lion plays in this event reminds one of the place the whale played as God's agent in Jonah's case. The whale was there to swallow him. But God did not allow the whale to digest him. At God's order the whale swam near the shore and spewed Jonah out. In our present event the lion kills the prophet but does not eat him. Nor does the lion keep the aged prophet from removing the corpse. Our conclusion? Since the lion is acting contrary to a lion's nature and since this event is being presided over by Providence, God is in complete control of the lion just as He was when preserving Daniel from the lions in the den but caused his enemies to be devoured by the same lions.

As soon as the old prophet hears of the lion and the corpse, he knows it is the young man. It is the young prophet who has died, but don't forget the "living death" the old prophet will experience from this day forth because of what he has brought on the unsuspecting victim. Nothing can bother an honest person more than living after he has been responsible for the death of another. We can, therefore, understand why he goes out, gets the body, prepares it for burial, and places it in his own tomb. He feels just as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus felt who were smitten for not standing up for Jesus among their fellow-rulers but took charge of Jesus' lifeless body, bought spices and linen, and buried it in Joseph's own newly-hewn rock tomb (Luke 23:50-53; John 19:38-42).

The prophet of Bethel tells his sons, "When I am dead, then bury me in the sepulchre wherein the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones: for the saying which he cried by the word of the Lord against the altar in Bethel, and against all the houses of the high places which are in the cities of Samaria, shall surely come to pass."

As he entombs the young man, he says, "Alas, my brother!" A preacher was preaching on why he had left the lodge. As he concluded his sermon, he remarked

on the lodge's use of these very words in its burial service and found a comparison between the old prophet's deceiving the young man and being partly responsible for his doom and the lodge's deceiving a candidate as to the unavailability of its secrets and "light" elsewhere and helping bring doom to him (see your author's work, "Lodges Considered from the Christian Viewpoint") and then saying at his burial, "Alas, my brother!"

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 5 memory-facts for this event.
2. Is the young prophet from Israel or Judah?
3. Does he address the king or the altar?
4. What does he predict?
5. What sign does he give Jeroboam that his prediction will come true?
6. Why does he refuse the king's hospitality?
7. Why does he go home with the aged prophet?
8. Tell of the young man's death.
9. Tell of his burial.

10. The Arrogant Jeroboam Continues His Wrong Ways

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 13:33,34.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. He appoints more non-Levitical priests.
 - b. God determines to wipe out his house.

COMMENTS

King Jeroboam was humbled when God smote his hand and split open his altar. Though king he realized he was powerless before the Power represented by the young prophet. But will his changed attitude be lasting or only temporary? With far too many people repentance is short-lived, based more on momentary feelings than on lasting conviction and is, as Hos. 6:4 records, goodness that soon passes as a morning cloud or the early dew.

Jeroboam likely learns of the young prophet's death, so he feels somewhat relieved of the pressure he felt when he was alive and in his presence. As time passes, there is a need for more priests. Jeroboam proceeds as before, selecting non-Levitical priests. It is obvious he is

going to continue his man-made religious set-up. And God, who set him up as king in the first place, decides to move against the house of Jeroboam and ultimately destroy it. The next event will tell us of His beginning to cut off Jeroboam's house.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 2 memory-facts for this event.
2. What factor(s) may have caused his repentance to be short-lived?

11. God Delivers Bad News to Jeroboam

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 14:1-18.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Jeroboam's wife goes to the prophet Ahijah to see if their child will get well.
 - b. The aged prophet is not fooled by her disguise.
 - c. God will destroy both the house of Jeroboam and his kingdom.
 - d. Her sick son, who will die when she reaches home, will be the only son who will receive a burial.

COMMENTS

Jeroboam may be through with the young prophet, but he is not through with God--or rather, God is not through with him! It is shallow thinking to suppose when a person has gotten some preacher off his back, he has also gotten rid of God.

Jeroboam's divinely-sent sorrows begin with the serious illness of his son Abijah. As he lingers between life and death, the suspense over whether he will live or die is more than the king and his wife can stand. To the south of them at Shiloh is the good prophet Ahijah. You will recall he was the one who predicted the rise of Jeroboam to power even when Solomon was still living. The king knows he is not doing Jehovah's will, but he hopes to get the prophet of Jehovah to say his son will live. Because he is not doing right, he sends his wife to the prophet instead of going himself, and as an extra precaution

she disguises herself so the prophet will not recognize her to be Jeroboam's wife. And to top it off the gift she bears is not a royal gift but a poor person's gift. All is set to obtain an answer from the aged prophet.

It was Lincoln who once said you can fool part of the people part of the time and some of the people all of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time. And we might add from Jeroboam's wife's case and from Scripture that nobody can fool God any of the time! Jeroboam and his wife are to find this out (as did Cain, Ananias and Sapphira, and a host of others).

As the anxious mother hurries to Shiloh, God reveals their plot to the prophet. As she nears his house, he speaks, "Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another? For I am sent to thee with heavy tidings." And her trip that grew out of concern for their son becomes the means of her being told his death will be the least of several calamities to come upon them. The son is to die, but because he is under the age of accountability, he will be buried. But the rest of Jeroboam's house will be brutally killed and have no burials. Those killed in the city will be eaten by dogs while those killed out in the fields will be eaten by vultures. And in time the whole kingdom itself will pass out of existence because of the idolatry Jeroboam has initiated. As we shall see Baasha will fulfill the first part (the destruction of Jeroboam's household) and Assyria the last part (the destruction of his kingdom). God's dealings with Jeroboam prove to be even more severe than His dealings with Saul and Solomon: Saul sinned, and his house lost the throne but was not blotted out; Solomon sinned, and God divided his kingdom, his family ruling only two of the original twelve tribes. In this we must see the enormity of Jeroboam's sin before God. Furthermore he has no David in his background to whom God would be good by continuing his house and family on the throne.

As the wife of Jeroboam hears tragedy after tragedy to befall her family, there is

nothing to do but return home with the sad news. And she knows she will never see her son alive again, for he will die the moment her feet enter the city. His death (like a divine sign) will prove the rest of the bad news predicted will also be fulfilled in its time. O Jeroboam, truly "the way of the transgressor is hard" (Prov. 13:15)!

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 4 memory-facts for this event.
2. Why do they choose to consult Ahijah about their son rather than somebody else?
3. Why do they not want him to know who is making the inquiry?
4. How does the prophet show she is not fooling him?
5. What does the prophet say about her son?
6. What does he say about the rest of Jeroboam's house?
7. What does he foretell about Jeroboam's kingdom?

12. Rehoboam's First Three Years are Prosperous

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 14:21 and II Chron. 11:5-23.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Rehoboam fortifies various cities and supplies them with military equipment and food supplies.
 - b. His kingdom is greatly strengthened by godly priests and people coming to him out of the Northern Kingdom.
 - c. He has eighteen wives, sixty concubines, twenty-eight sons, and sixty daughters.
 - d. He makes his sons rulers in the defenced cities and chooses Abijah as his successor.
 - e. During the first three years of his reign Rehoboam walks with God.

COMMENTS

Please do not confuse the names "Jeroboam" and "Rehoboam". We have been studying about Jeroboam, the break-away ruler of the Northern Kingdom's ten tribes. Now we are studying about Rehoboam, Solomon's son ruling the Southern Kingdom's two tribes.

As we consider Rehoboam's beginning, let us recall that in his receiving only two tribes to rule, God was not angry with him but his father Solomon who had sinned grievously and had been told that nearly all of his great kingdom would be taken from his family. Rehoboam just happens to be the son who succeeds Solomon and has to be content with a two-tribe kingdom. Yes, he acted foolishly in accepting the young men's advice, but even if he had acted wisely, the full kingdom would not have been his, for God had said it would be divided, and his foolish handling of matters at his coronation but became the occasion of God's dividing the kingdom.

Our text says he and his kingdom did what was right in God's sight for three years. We have already noted when he was prepared to march against Jeroboam in an attempt to bring all the kingdom back under his rule, he listened to God's prophet Shemaiah who told him not to go to battle against his brethren (Israel) because the division was divinely caused (see I Kings 12:21-24). But he is also greatly helped by the voluntary coming of the priests and many godly people out of Jeroboam's kingdom who demonstrate it is really more important to serve God than stay in one's ancestral location. In this they remind us of the members of the Jerusalem church who fled from Jerusalem because of their faith in Christ rather than deny Him and maintain their homes (Acts 8:1). But let us not think Rehoboam to be "just a kid" when he takes over the reins of government. He is forty-one and like his father before him has many wives (forty-one) and concubines (sixty) by whom he fathers many children (twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters).

With God's blessing on him during the first three years he fortifies large, strategically located cities in his kingdom. Fifteen are mentioned: Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa, Bethzur, Shoco, Adullam, Gath, Mareshah, Ziph, Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah, Zorah, Aijalon, and Hebron besides unnamed other ones in Benjamin. (Fortifying a city meant to build a wall

around it, station soldiers in it, equip it with military equipment, and lay up food-supplies in it in the event of a siege.) He utilizes his many sons in helping govern his kingdom by assigning them to his various fortified cities. The fact he selects Abijah as his successor indicates he was not the oldest of his many sons.

As you can see, these first years of righteousness are years of strength, for "the blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it" (Prov. 10:22).

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 5 memory-facts for this event.
2. How old is Rehoboam as he begins to rule?
3. Why do the priests and many good people leave the Northern Kingdom?
4. What does his fortifying certain cities consist of?
5. Whom does Rehoboam appoint as rulers over his fortified cities?
6. How long does this state of righteousness-and-blessing continue?

13. Rehoboam Foolishly Forsakes Jehovah

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Chron. 12:1 and I Kings 14:22-24.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Rehoboam forsakes Jehovah (probably through pride).
 - b. He worships heathen gods.

COMMENTS

After three years of great prosperity, prosperity brought about by God's blessing, it is surprising to see King Rehoboam turn from Jehovah to heathen idolatry. It is surprising until we remember people often forsake God in prosperity but seek Him in adversity. Moses warned Israel, "When...God shall have brought thee into the land...to give thee great and goodly cities...and houses full of good things...and wells...vineyards and olive trees...; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; then beware lest thou forget the Lord" (Deut. 6:10-12). Just before our II Chron. text says Rehoboam forsook the law of the Lord, it expressly says it was after he

had established the kingdom and had strengthened himself.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 2 memory-facts for this event.
2. What do people often do in their prosperity?

14. Judah's Wealth is Removed to Egypt

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 14:25-31a and II Chron. 12:2-16a.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Shishak of Egypt plunders Jerusalem's wealth.
 - b. Rehoboam replaces his departed gold shields with brass ones.

COMMENTS

God's answer to Rehoboam's apostasy is Pharaoh Shishak of Egypt. Shishak is no friend of Solomon's house, having provided political asylum for Jeroboam when he fled from Solomon (I Kings 11:40). He knows of the great wealth amassed at Jerusalem under David and Solomon and is eager to obtain it--and because of Rehoboam's sins God is going to allow it. In fact Rehoboam's sins are so bad God is minded to put an end to the Jerusalem government.

To be sure he can overpower Jerusalem Shishak comes with one thousand two hundred chariots, three thousand men on horses, and an innumerable army made up of Egyptian soldiers plus hired-soldiers from other African countries. Judah cannot resist this formidable array. First Shishak takes the outlying fortified cities before coming against Jerusalem.

While Rehoboam's rulers are assembled with him from throughout his dominion, God sends the prophet Shemaiah to them. Rehoboam had hearkened to Shemaiah when God sent him to him before (I Kings 12:22-24). He is now sent to tell them God is bringing Shishak against Rehoboam because he

has forgotten Him. Again Rehoboam humbles himself before God and declares God is just in His judgment. As a result Shemaiah promises Shishak will not be permitted to destroy Jerusalem but to plunder the temple and the palace of their prized treasures. Consequently Judah surrenders peacefully to Shishak who helps himself to the vast treasure.

Upon his return to Egypt Shishak inscribes his victory in a great wall-inscription in the Temple of Karnak in which he claims to have taken one hundred fifty-six cities from the Jews of Palestine for his god Amon. The inscription contains one hundred fifty-six Jewish captives, each captive representing a captured city. Shishak's mummy has been found in a silver sarcophagus within an outer case of solid gold--probably some of the silver and gold he took in this very raid and which once graced the temple and palace. Edersheim points out the Israelite cities included in Shishak's raid were cities of the Levites and Canaanites. He says they were cities "in all parts of the territory of the ten tribes, and at considerable distances from one another, there being, however, no mention of the taking of the intervening cities. All these facts point to the conclusion...that the Levitical and ancient Canaanite cities within the territory of Jeroboam did not acknowledge his rule" ("Bible History" by Edersheim). Since Jeroboam and Shishak are cordial friends, we don't expect Shishak to take any of Jeroboam's cities while Jeroboam is glad for him to raid these cities not recognizing him.

After the Jerusalem raid particularly missed are "the famous shields used by Solomon's body-guard on state occasions" ("Edersheim") that were kept in the House of the Forest of Lebanon. There had been two hundred of the larger ones and three hundred of the smaller ones. II Chron. 9:15,16 tells the enormous amount of gold involved in these. Rehoboam replaces them with substitute shields of brass.

When it says, "In Judah things went well. So king Rehoboam strengthened

himself in Jerusalem, and reigned," we conclude things are better for a time. Then when we read a verse later that "he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord," we conclude his righteousness does not last very long.

Particulars of Rehoboam's middle and latter years are lacking. A state of hostilities exists as long as both he and Jeroboam live. After a seventeen-year reign he dies at the age of fifty-eight.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 2 memory-facts for this event.
2. What prophet is sent to Rehoboam?
3. What message does he deliver?
4. When Rehoboam humbles himself, what message does God send him?
5. Tell about the shields.
6. Does Rehoboam repent?
7. How long does he reign?

15. Abijah's Reign Includes a Great Victory over Jeroboam

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 14:31b--15:8 and II Chron. 12:16b--14:1.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Abijah goes against Jeroboam.
 - b. He delivers a great speech to Jeroboam and Israel.
 - c. Jeroboam surrounds Abijah and Judah.
 - d. Outnumbered and surrounded, Abijah and Judah call on God.
 - e. God gives Abijah and Judah a great victory.
 - f. Abijah has fourteen wives, twenty-two sons, and sixteen daughters.

COMMENTS

It seems strange to be having a new king over either portion of the once-united kingdom as Rehoboam has died and is now replaced by the pick of his sons—Abijah (II Chron. 11:22) or "Abijam" as he is also called. What kind of king will he be? And will Jeroboam, the veteran of eighteen years of ruling, try to intimidate this beginner in Judah?

The state of hostilities that has existed between Jeroboam and Rehoboam now breaks out into open warfare between Jeroboam and the house of Rehoboam represented by Abijah. Even though God forbid Rehoboam to go to battle against his brethren in Israel (I Kings 12:21-24), it appears that Abijah — not Jeroboam — is the one who instigates this present confrontation.

The two armies assemble at an insignificant place called Mt. Zemaraim, a mountain likely near the city of Zemaraim mentioned in Josh. 18:21,22 (near Bethel). From the top of the hill Abijah delivers an emotional speech to Jeroboam and his men. As he claims Jehovah as Judah's God and their fidelity to Him as the basis for God's being with them, and as he rebukes Jeroboam for forsaking Jehovah and setting up golden calves while rejecting God's priesthood for priests of his own making, Abijah sounds much like a preacher, and as he charges Jeroboam with conspiring against his father Rehoboam when he was "young" and "tender-hearted", he sounds like a prosecuting attorney. Though Abijah seems to have his information about his father wrong (Rehoboam was not so young--he was forty-one when he became king--nor did he appear to be tender-hearted when he roughly answered Jeroboam and the people), yet God is pleased with the rest of the speech. When his speech ends, "O children of Israel, fight ye not against the Lord of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper," is Abijah actually expecting (or at least hoping) to see Israel lay down its arms?

Well the warlike Jeroboam is not to be convinced by speeches but takes advantage of Judah's army's location to surround it. This is done when Judah is not aware--maybe even during Abijah's speech. When Judah becomes aware of its situation, they see Jeroboam has them in a desperate situation. (If it is while Abijah is delivering his speech that Jeroboam surrounds him, he thinks he is quite smart to let him preach but not listen. But the battle that follows demonstrates Jeroboam should have been listening.

God is able to humble the proud and the wicked.)

Trust in God often enables a minority to overcome a majority (Psa. 18:29). Abijah and Judah are faced with the gravity of the situation, realizing they have only four hundred thousand soldiers to Jeroboam's eight hundred thousand, and that Jeroboam occupies the strategic position. What is Judah going to do? They cry out to Jehovah, the priests blow the trumpets like the priests did at the battle of Jericho (Josh. 6:20), and the people shout. God turns Jeroboam's cleverness into defeat in answer to Judah's prayers, siding with Judah in administering a telling defeat to Jeroboam and the idolatrous North. In this battle Jeroboam loses five hundred thousand men plus several of his border cities--including Bethel!

Even though Jeroboam reigns several more years, he is not able to rebuild enough to become strong again. His case surely reminds us of the truth of that proverb, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).

In contrast the victorious Abijah becomes stronger. During his years he marries fourteen wives and has twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. He is the last king of Judah whose number of wives and children is mentioned. Likely the practice of having an extreme number of wives and children came to be less and less significant until finally it lost all significance. A glance at the following tabulation shows it has been on the decline:

Solomon - seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (we are not told the number of his children).

Rehoboam - eighteen wives, sixty concubines, eighty-eight children.

Abijah - fourteen wives and thirty-eight children

Since Abijah has a short reign of only three years, we are left wondering just what brought about his early death.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 6 memory-facts for this event.

2. What is Abijah's other name?
3. How long has Jeroboam ruled in the North when Abijah begins?
4. How many men does Abijah have? Jeroboam?
5. Give the gist of Abijah's speech?
6. What does Jeroboam do instead of regarding the speech?
7. What does Judah do before beginning the battle?
8. Who wins the battle?
9. How many men does Jeroboam lose?
10. How many wives does Abijah have? How many sons? How many daughters?
11. How long does Abijah reign?

16. A Powerful New King Arises in Judah

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 15:8b-12 and II Chron. 14:1b-8.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Asa begins a long rule of forty-one years.
 - b. He is the first Divided Kingdom king listed as "good".
 - c. In his peaceful prosperity he fortifies Judah's cities and builds a large army.

COMMENTS

Jeroboam is still living and ruling in Israel as Judah's third king takes over. But he will not outlive Asa, the new king, for Asa will be on the throne for forty-one years!

Even though Rehoboam and Abijah had some good events in their reigns, they were still listed as evil (Rehoboam--II Chron. 12:14; Abijah--I Kings 15:3). Asa is going to improve on them (the way it should be). He becomes the first king of either South or North of whom it is recorded, "Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did David his father." We will note throughout this study of Divided Kingdom History that any good king of the South will be said to be good like David while every evil king of the North will be said to walk in the way of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, reminding us of Prov. 10:7: "The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot." Each of us should want to be remembered for our good (like David) rather than for our bad (like Jeroboam). "A good name is

rather to be chosen than great riches" (Prov 22:1); "A good name is better than precious ointment" (Eccl 7:1).

Generally speaking a "good" king in Kings and Chronicles is one who worships Jehovah rather than idols while an "evil" king is an idolatrous king. In Asa's revolt against idolatry he qualifies as "good", and God blesses him with peace and prosperity in which he fortifies many of Judah's cities and develops an army of five hundred eighty thousand.

Asa is going to be around for awhile, and he will be a powerful king as well as a long-ruling one.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 3 memory-facts for this event.
2. Who is still ruling in the North?
3. Any good king of the South is compared to what former great king?
4. Any bad king of the North is compared to what former bad king?
5. What is usually meant in Kings and Chronicles by a "good" king? An "evil" one?
6. What does Asa do during his peaceful years of prosperity?

17. Jeroboam's Son Reigns Only Two Years

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 14:19,20; 15:25-31; II Chron. 13:20.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Jeroboam is divinely smitten with death.
 - b. Nadab continues the calf-worship.
 - c. After Nadab rules two years, Baasha assassinates him and kills all the house of Jeroboam.

COMMENTS

It seems Jeroboam will continue reigning "forever", but his end finally comes after twenty-two years on the throne. We do not know the cause of his death, but when II Chron. 13:20 says he is smitten of God and dies, it suggests his death comes in some unusual way or at some unexpected time as a judgment from God.

This brings his son Nadab to the throne. This is a crucial time in Israel, and

Israel's future course is greatly dependent on whether the new king will continue the calf-worship at Dan and Bethel with which God is so displeased or whether he will repudiate it and allow his people to attend the Jerusalem feasts again as the law of Moses requires. Though neither he nor Israel realizes it, this man can make the difference between Israel's continuing as a nation or ultimately being blotted out once and for all time. Similarly most of us do not really realize the difference we can make either in the Lord's work, in our nation, in our community, in our family-line, or in the lives of others. In Nadab's case we are sorry to see his perpetuating the calf-worship.

Will he get to have a long rule like his father? No, it is cut short after only two years by the first assassination in the history of either Israel or Judah. It comes about while Israel is warring with the Philistines over the city of Gibbethon. Baasha, probably one of Nadab's influential military men, conspires against him while at Gibbethon and kills him. And since he aspires to the throne, he slays all the household of Jeroboam (remember Ahijah's predicting this in I Kings 14:10,11?). Baasha's bold act is just the beginning of assassinations that from time to time will rock the Northern Kingdom throughout its history as aspirants-to-power rise against the kings. Note that each assassin who takes over brings a new family or line of kings to power. All the rulers of a given family compose a "dynasty". Baasha begins the second dynasty in the Northern Kingdom.

Why such a traumatic time in Israel? From Baasha's standpoint it is to wipe out any rivals for the throne, but from God's standpoint it is to bring His promised judgment against the house of Jeroboam for setting up that calf-worship (I Kings 14:7-10).

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 3 memory-facts for this event.
2. What difference can Nadab make in the whole future of Israel's history?
3. What is Baasha's motive in assassinating Nadab?
4. What is God's purpose in allowing him to do it?
5. What is meant by a "dynasty" of kings?

18. The Wicked Baasha's House Will be Wiped out Also

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 15:33-16:4.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Baasha continues calf-worship.
 - b. The prophet Jehu is sent to tell him his house will also be wiped out.

COMMENTS

God has enabled Baasha to overthrow the house of Jeroboam because of his instituting calf-worship. How foolish then it seems for Baasha to perpetuate it! It is sad when people do not learn from the mistakes of others. Baasha seems to fall for the illusion from the devil that "it will not happen to me" even though it has happened to others. Will God be more pleased when Baasha does this than when Jeroboam did it? No, for He is a God of principle. Right is right no matter who is doing it, and wrong is wrong no matter who is doing it. God respects principles, not persons (Rom. 2:11). Just because God has used Baasha to bring judgment on the house of Jeroboam does not mean Baasha is a privileged character to do whatever he wants to, and God will pay no attention to it.

God dispatches the prophet Jehu (don't confuse him with a later king by this same name) who tells Baasha that what befell Jeroboam's house will also befall his and for the same reason. The next time Baasha's house will be the recipient of God's wrath instead of being the administrator of it. Evidently Baasha pays no attention to the prophet, for we read of no repentance on his part and no changing of the decree on God's part. If he and Israel repent, the decree against them will be changed (Jer. 18:7,8).

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 2 memory-facts for this event.
2. What foolish mistake does Baasha make?
3. What message is sent to him from the Lord?
4. What evidence do we have that Baasha does not repent?

19. Asa Gains a Great Victory over Ethiopia

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Chron. 14:9—15:19.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. A great Ethiopian army invades Judah.
 - b. Asa prays for God's help.
 - c. God gives a great victory.
 - d. Asa plunders Philistia on his way back.
 - e. The prophet Azariah encourages Asa to serve Jehovah.
 - f. Asa is even stronger against idolatry.

COMMENTS

God loves to show Himself strong in behalf of those who put their trust in Him. King Asa might wonder why God is allowing an invasion of Judah by a million Ethiopians with three hundred chariots, for he has faithfully served God. God is not bringing them against Asa to break his years of peace because of any sin he has done. It appears the Ethiopians have come of their own will, but God has allowed it because it will result in a greater Asa and a greater Judah. Let us observe that even godly people do not always understand why God allows certain things to happen, but we can always be sure He is leading and "doeth all things well".

Asa knows he is no match for such a sizable military aggregation. But don't forget that "man's extremity" can be "God's opportunity". What is "big" to us is nothing to Almighty God. In the midst of danger Asa does what God wants all His people to do: pray and lean on Him and recognize that numbers mean nothing to Him. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psa. 46:1). He can give a believing minority victory over a vast majority. Israel of Moses' day did not think this way as they listened to the despairing thoughts of the ten spies (Num. 13:31-33). Gideon experienced this blessing from God (Judg. 7:7). So did Samson (Judg. 15:14-16). So did Jonathan (I Sam. 14:6-16). So

did David (II Sam. 22:30). This causes God to be glorified and keeps men from taking credit for such victories (Judg. 7:2). God enabled the lone prophet Elijah to bring a mighty victory over Ahab's four hundred fifty prophets of Baal (I Kings 18:38-40), and He still uses the lesser to overcome the greater (I Cor. 1:27-29).

And their faith is not misplaced. "Faith" and "Victory" go together (I John 5:4), and God gives them a mighty victory. This trial of their faith, like chastening, has not been joyous, but it has proven to be a blessing since their faith stood the test.

While Asa and the army are down in the Philistine Plain, they plunder some of the hostile Philistine cities before returning to Jerusalem. It is indeed a happy reception they are given as they reenter Jerusalem. Among those coming out to meet them is the prophet Azariah who urges Asa to continue seeking Jehovah. Azariah's assuring message on top of the victories just realized further encourages Asa and Judah in their fidelity to Jehovah. They destroy idols out of the land including some cities they have taken from Israel, and they rebuild the altar of Jehovah in the temple. The king also calls a great mass-meeting of his citizens, and they are joined by many out of the Northern Kingdom who see God is with Asa. They first offer a sacrifice of some of the spoils taken in their battles and then enter into a sacred covenant to serve Jehovah. They depose the queen-mother Maachah because of her idolatry, destroy her idol, and bring into the temple the treasures set aside for this purpose by both Asa and his father Abijah. (Asa's dealing with his idolatrous mother indicates God and righteousness are to come before our closest earthly ties--Matt. 10:37. Gideon had done similarly with his father's idol--Judg. 6:25-27.)

Judah is stronger now than it has ever been since the division of Solomon's kingdom. This is the high-point of Asa's rule.

How is Baasha of the North going to respond to some of his citizens' moving

into Judah because of the revival going on there? We shall see.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 6 memory-facts for this event.
2. How many soldiers and chariots does Ethiopia have?
3. Cite other Biblical cases where minorities overcame majorities because of God's help.
4. Who is Maachah, and what happens to her?

20. Baasha Seeks to Stop His People's Leaving Israel

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Chron. 16:1-10.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Baasha begins fortifying Ramah to keep more of his people from defecting to Judah.
 - b. Asa hires Syria to attack Baasha.
 - c. While Baasha goes to fight with Syria, Judah hauls the stones from Baasha's Ramah-project to Geba and Mizpeh and fortifies them.

COMMENTS

The number of godly people of Baasha's kingdom packing up their belongings and migrating to Judah because God is with King Asa of the South is a great number, and Baasha is determined to put a stop to it. To do so he selects the prophet Samuel's border town of Ramah and begins fortifying it (building a great wall around it and outfitting it with gates and bars and equipping it with soldiers, military equipment, and food-supplies). From this military outpost only five miles north of Jerusalem Baasha can control traffic along the north-south road between the two kingdoms.

While this fortifying goes on, Asa is trying to figure out just how to stop the project. He can go out and attack Baasha, but Baasha is strong. This is evident by his having killed Elah and all Jeroboam's male descendants to get the throne. Furthermore his "might" is specifically mentioned in I Kings 16:5.

Asa seems to be a different person now than when he relied on God against the army of the Ethiopians. Instead of attacking Baasha with the Lord's blessing he turns to the Syrians for help. If he has a strong faith now and gains another great victory, Asa will go down in history as a king of great faith, but his lack of it begins his ultimate undoing.

The silver and gold that he and his father have put into the temple and palace to replace what Shishak removed to Egypt during Rehoboam's reign are now sent to Ben-hadad of Syria as hire for his military help. The king of Syria is not only glad to receive this great hire but also to break his non-aggression pact with Israel (and succeeding events will include many wars between Syria and Israel).

As Ben-hadad attacks cities in Baasha's far-north territory, Baasha has to muster all his forces to resist the aggression there. As Asa sees Baasha stop his Ramah-project to protect his northern territory, he compliments his shrewdness and immediately issues a royal order for every man of his kingdom to come to Ramah, and they lose no time dismantling its walls and hauling its large stones to two border towns in Judah (Geba and Mizpeh) which they fortify. It turns out to be quite a victory for Asa as he sees Baasha forced to "dwell in Tirzah" (I Kings 15:21).

But his rejoicing is cut short by the coming of the prophet Hanani who is dispatched to tell him of God's displeasure with the way he has handled his problem. When Hanani's message includes these words, "Herein thou hast done foolishly" (in hiring the Syrians); "therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars," Asa is too proud to be reproved. Life teaches us it is not easy for successful people and prominent leaders to accept rebuke. Instead of humbling himself before God Asa imprisons the prophet and oppresses some of the people (probably those who agree with the prophet and disagree with him). This event proves to be the turning point in Asa's career. Up to this time everything we read about him is good, everything

afterward bad. (Note--Because the few things mentioned about Asa are not to his compliment, we must not conclude he is only evil, for he continues to rule for many years after this event.)

Before leaving this event it is interesting to note that hundreds of years later reference is made in Jer. 41:9 to a pit (maybe a cistern) that Asa makes at Mizpeh in this struggle with Baasha.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 3 memory-facts for this event.
2. What is involved in fortifying a city?
3. What evidence do we have that Baasha is a strong king?
4. What mistake does Asa make early in this event?
5. What part of Baasha's kingdom does Ben-hadad attack?
6. What prophet rebukes Asa?
7. What is Asa's response to the prophet's rebuke?

21. Zimri Touches off a Turbulent Time in Israel

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 16:5-23.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Zimri assassinates Elah.
 - b. He burns the palace down over him in his defeat by Omri.
 - c. Omri finally wins the throne after a long struggle with Tibni.

COMMENTS

The warlike Baasha has given Israel twenty-four years of strong rule even though God has seen little in his reign to record for us. He took the sword in killing Jeroboam and his household, and in this event his house will perish by the sword as so often happens (Matt. 26:52). His death now brings his son Elah to the throne of Israel. But he is not the ruler his father has been. Instead of being with the army fighting the Philistines at Gibbethon, he is at home in Tirzah.

Zimri, captain of one-half of Elah's chariots, takes advantage of the army's absence from the capital to overthrow him. His chance is improved as the king drinks himself drunken in the house of the

royal steward Arza. (Most of the assassinations in Israel will be by high-ranking officers. Being king was not really safe. Kings found it difficult to have capable officers without their being ambitious for the throne. Sometimes people whom we aid and help advance come to be our adversaries and destroyers.) Drink has been the downfall of more than one ruler (Elah). It also brought an end to world-conqueror Alexander the Great. World War II in the Pacific was touched off by Japan's taking advantage of weekend drunkenness on the part of the U.S. military to bomb and destroy our naval power at Pearl Harbor.

Zimri gains admittance to the house of Arza and kills the king who has ruled only two years. He then goes to the palace, takes charge of it, and executes every descendant of Baasha who might lay claim to the throne. Thus the prophecy of Jehu against Baasha (I Kings 16:1-4) is fulfilled.

Zimri has misjudged either the willingness of the people to have him as king or his ability to hold the throne once he has usurped it. He has more ambition to be king than he does wisdom to become king permanently. When news of his doings reaches the army down at Gibbethon, the military is not for him but for its great captain Omri. Omri is eager to become king, but he must dispose of Zimri. Immediately he breaks off the war at Gibbethon, which is in the Maritime Plain north of Ekron and west of Gezer, and goes back up to Tirzah (a trip of fifty-sixty miles) to put down Zimri. Upon arrival they lay siege to the city. The battle is going against Zimri, and he sees his cause is hopeless. Fearing he will be killed by Omri, he decides to put an end to himself and also do as much damage for Omri as he can, so he sets fire to the palace and dies in its destruction. If he can't have the kingdom, Omri won't have the palace. Thus ends Zimri's short reign of only seven days, the shortest reign of any king of either Israel or Judah. (Seven days is about the time required for news of the assassination to reach the army down in the Maritime Plain, for the

army to break camp and return to Tirzah, and for the decisive battle that puts an end to Zimri--Zimri's seven-day reign.)

But wait. Omri finds the throne is not his yet--there is another contestant for it. The military may want him crowned king, but fully one-half of the people are wanting Tibni. Will the two forces engage in battle to see who will emerge as king, or will the kingdom exist for a time in a state of divided confusion? Evidently the latter, for our account says, "The people that followed Omri prevailed against the people that followed Tibni...So Tibni died, and Omri reigned." Evidently then Omri, backed by the army, could force the issue, but with half of the people for Tibni he has handled the case more judiciously, and his patience pays off with the death of Tibni (probably a natural death). Let us not forget how important patience is: "The husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain" (Jas. 5:7), and that statement is introduced with, "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord." On the other hand, if Omri had acted hastily, the end might have been different. Haste is not always right: "He that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly" (Prov. 14:29); "I said in my haste, All men are liars" (Psa 116:11).

Poor Tirzah is ready to settle down after going through Elah's assassination, the battle between Zimri and Omri and the attending burning of its palace, and the power-struggle between Omri and Tibni. At the end of this turbulent period the dead are Elah, Zimri, and Tibni. How long has all this consumed? looking at v. 15 it started in the twenty-seventh year of Asa and lasted until his thirty-first year (see v. 23). Jewish writings have it like this: "The division of the kingdom between Tibni and Omri began in the twenty-seventh year of Asa; this division lasted five years, during which Omri had but a share of the kingdom. Tibni dying, Omri came into possession of the whole kingdom which he held for seven years; this was the thirty-first year of Asa"

("Clarke's Commentary"). Just as Isa. 57:20 says, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked," so the wicked Northern Kingdom has known very little peace. Our election-method of deciding who is going to rule is so much more peaceful than deciding it by the sword as those times often did.

Things will settle down under Omri, and though it will be a wicked time in Israel (Omri through Jehoram), it will be a politically strong period for the Northern Kingdom.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 3 memory-facts for this event.
2. Who becomes king upon the death of Baasha?
3. Where is the army when this event opens?
4. What is the king doing when this event opens?
5. What terrible things does Zimri do in the absence of the army from the capital city?
6. How does this battle between him and Omri go?
7. With whom is Omri forced to share leadership until death removes him?

22. Omri Leaves His Mark

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 16:24-28a.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Omri establishes Samaria as a new capital.
 - b. Omri is more wicked than any king of Israel before him.
 - c. Archaeology reveals Omri's political greatness.

COMMENTS

During the several year Omri-Tibni struggle the Northern Kingdom somehow made out without a permanent palace after Zimri had burned it. Not until the kingship could be settled was there going to be any attempt to rebuild the palace. Now that Tibni is dead and Omri is sole ruler in full control, he decides on an altogether different location for the capital itself. He bargains with a man by the name of Shemer for an eminence (hill) he owns that is completely surrounded by valley. That it is an ideal location for the construction of a fortified city is verified by any observant person

who has stood on its height and noticed the valley area completely surrounding it. The price is agreed on, and it becomes a royal site where the new palace is built and from which all future kings of the Northern Kingdom will rule. This new city "Samaria" comes from the word "Shemer", the previous owner's name. Maybe naming the city after Shemer was a condition of his selling it to Omri. Take time to locate the city of Samaria on the map in the back of your Bible. It is interesting to note that an archaeological expedition sponsored by Harvard University unearthed the ruins of the palace here at Samaria. Nothing older than Omri was found, confirming the Biblical record that he began this city.

To make Shemer's hill the new center of government is a wise move on Omri's part. Oh, that he were as wise in spiritual matters! But he isn't. Omri is like many people: wise when it comes to material matters but foolish in spiritual matters. The Bible shows he is worse than Jeroboam, worse than Nadab, worse than Baasha, worse than Elah, and worse than Zimri, for "he did worse than all that were before him". In fact, he is the beginning of a new kind of evil in Israel. His dynasty of rulers (composed of himself, Ahab, Ahaziah, and Jehoram) will be by far the worst dynasty that either North or South will have on the throne. Through this family's intermarrying with and having alliances with the contemporary kings of Judah, the Omri-Ahab evil will also infest the life of Jerusalem and Judah, and two hundred years after the reign of Omri the prophet Micah will bemoan the sin of Judah, saying "For the statues of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels; that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof an hissing" (Mic. 6:16). We see that Omri well illustrates the statement in Eccl. 9:18, "One sinner destroyeth much good." He is wicked; he begets a wicked son Ahab who is even worse than Omri; Ahab marries Jezebel who measurably adds to the wickedness of Israel; their daughter Athaliah marries the king of Judah, and

the South also becomes contaminated with their evil.

The unfortunate thing about Omri's wickedness is he is such a powerful king. This is not as evident from the Biblical coverage, where but little is recorded about his reign, as it is from archaeology where several important references to him have been found. Evidently he has no religious virtues for God to record, but he does have political importance for his contemporaries to record. The Moabite Stone found at Dibon in Moab in 1868 shows he had been triumphant over Moab and had put it to tribute for several years (through the reigns of Omri and Ahab: II Kings' opening verse says, "Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab"). Also, the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III of Assyria speaks of his receiving tribute from King Jehu, and even though Jehu was four rulers later than Omri, the Obelisk identifies Jehu by referring to him as a "successor of Omri".

Yes, Omri leaves his mark: he brings a new family to power that will rule for forty-eight years (four kings); he introduces a wickedness that lasts for many years and that affects both Israel and Judah; he selects a new capital city, and thereafter Samaria becomes the political center of all future Northern Kingdom operations; and he is powerful enough for his name to find itself on the monuments of several nations of his time.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 3 memory-facts for this event.
2. What makes Shemer's hill such a desirable place for a new capital city?
3. Why does Omri call the new city "Samaria"?
4. Who will be the four kings of his dynasty?
5. How will the wickedness of the Omri-dynasty get into Judah?
6. What Stone and what Obelisk testify to Omri's political greatness?

23. Asa is Still Reigning when Ahab Succeeds Omri

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 16:28-32; II Chron. 16:11-14; and I Kings 15:23,24.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:

- a. Asa, diseased in his feet in his last years, does not seek the Lord's help in the matter.
- b. Ahab marries the wicked Jezebel and becomes the worst of all Israel's kings.
- c. The curse of Joshua falls on Hiel of Bethel for rebuilding Jericho.

COMMENTS

Now that Omri has died and has become the first king to be entombed at the new capital Samaria, his son Ahab succeeds him as ruler in the North. But would you believe the king ruling in the South (Asa) has been ruling ever since the last years of the North's first king Jeroboam? But let us not be too surprised, for the Bible shows that long life is often bequeathed to the righteous (Eph. 6:3; Prov. 3:1,2; Prov. 3:16). Exceptions to this evidently involve other considerations. Contrast Psa. 55:23.

Asa began in Jeroboam's twentieth year (I Kings 15:9), and his forty-one year reign (I Kings 15:10) has enabled him to be contemporary with the first seven kings of Israel (Jeroboam, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, and now Ahab). Altogether Israel's total history will know nineteen kings, and Asa has been contemporary with more than one-third of them! For all Asa lived to see, we might remark that "he could have written a book".

When Kings and Chronicles normally record deaths of kings, they state that the rest of their acts are "written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of" either Judah or Israel, depending on the particular king and kingdom he had ruled. But it is noteworthy that Asa's acts are recorded in both the books of the kings of Judah and Israel (II Chron. 16:11).

But Asa will not survive much longer --only two or three years into Ahab's long reign of twenty-two years. But his last years are sad ones. Two years before his death he is plagued with a disease of his feet. He should seek God's help but instead seeks physicians. Just why, we are not told. It is a sad farewell to this king

who has been good in so many ways. If we had only II Chron. 16:12, it would be easy to conclude that to utilize the help of a physician when one has a disease is to be guilty of not seeking the Lord. But Jesus said, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (Mat 9:12). Hezekiah was healed by medical means by divine approval (Isa 38:21). The wrong is in seeking physicians' help without seeking the Lord's help in prayer.

Asa is honored with a great funeral for the many years he has successfully ruled Judah. Others who were also thus honored in their times were David (I Chron. 29:28), Jehoshaphat (II Chron. 17:5), and Hezekiah. (II Chron. 32:27). "The memory of the just is blessed" (Prov. 10:7).

But what kind of king does the North now have in its new ruler Ahab? This son of Omri is a "chip off the old block" --only worse! He not only perpetuates the wickedness of his father but actually enlarges on it. Like Omri before him, he has masterful abilities, but they are regretfully dedicated to evil instead of good. How tragic!

As if he is not already bad enough, he sins greatly in violating God's law in Deut. 7:3,4 (an Israelite is not to marry a Gentile) when he marries Jezebel of Phoenicia--and in marrying the particular Phoenician woman he does. Mixed marriages between Christians and non-Christians are also divinely forbidden (I Cor. 7:39; II Cor. 6:14) and also unwise.

Ahab's marriage to this woman will prove to be the worst thing spiritually that will ever befall the Northern Kingdom. Things will not be the same for many years through her bringing her Baal-worship with her. And to make matters even worse this Baalism and the Ahab-Jezebel type of wickedness will get into the life of the Southern Kingdom through the marriage of their daughter Athaliah to Jehoram, king of Judah.

Baalism is one of the most offensive forms of idolatry to God. "Baal" means "master" or "owner", and he is looked to as the god of weather and agriculture. Inscriptions unearthed at Ras Shamra in

the late 1920's refer to Baal as "Lord of the Earth" and "Rider of the Clouds". Representations of Baal have been found with a club in one hand and a bolt of lightning in the other. Palestine's dry-weather months of April through September are taken as times when Baal is losing the battle to Mot, the god of Death and Aridity. In their mythology Baal is awakened to life by his sister Anath in October, and his return to his throne is followed by his mating with his wife Ashtoreth, and this insures rainfall and fertility for their agriculture. To stimulate Baal and Ashtoreth to mate, great sex-orgies take place in Baal temples, and the consequent return to the rain-season is also celebrated with more temple-sex. In both Megiddo and Gezer archaeologists have found cemeteries of infant-remains in stone jars adjacent to places of Baal-worship. It is easy to see why God is so opposed to Baalism!

Baalism virtually becomes the national religion of Israel under Ahab and Jezebel (to go along with Jeroboam's golden calves), and they persecute the Jehovah-religion that is its chief barrier (notice two references to Jezebel's killing God's prophets: I Kings 18:4 and I Kings 19:14).

Then in addition to her Baalism she is a continual bad influence on her husband, stirring him up to many wicked things he will not otherwise do (I Kings 21:25). And a bad mate like Jezebel can still be a person's downfall. This is demonstrated by instances in every community of our land!

You may recall Joshua's solemn statement when he and Israel destroyed the great Canaanite city Jericho with God's help: "Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho: he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it" (Josh 6:26). Joshua's destruction of the great fortress city was one of the many well known events in Israel's history, and likely the curse he pronounced was also well known and feared, for even though its ruins have occupied a prominent site

near the fords of the Jordan, has a great spring of fresh water, and its valley is a virtual paradise in the otherwise arid area, for over five hundred years nobody has dared rebuild it--not until Ahab's day. In Ahab's day, when the fear of Jehovah is at its lowest our text says, "In his days did Hiel the Bethelite build Jericho," and the curse fell on his household (his firstborn died when he began the project and his youngest when he completed it). The passing of several centuries did not nullify Joshua's curse pronounced by divine inspiration.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 3 memory-facts for this event.
2. With how many kings of Israel has Asa been contemporary?
3. Who is ruling in Israel as he begins? Who when he dies?
4. What divine law does Ahab violate in marrying Jezebel?
5. Why is God so against Baalism?
6. Tell of Joshua's curse falling on Hiel.

24. Another Great King Arises in the South

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 22:41-43; II Chron. 17:1-19; and II Chron. 20:32,33.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Jehoshaphat succeeds his father Asa as king of Judah.
 - b. He reacts against Baalism, fortifies several cities, and dispatches Levites and priests to teach God's law throughout his kingdom.
 - c. Because of God's blessing he has peace, riches, and honor.

COMMENTS

So many times after the passing of a powerful, long-term ruler, the next king or two will be looked on as weak in comparison and will have shorter, unsuccessful reigns. Not so after the death of the great Asa. His son Jehoshaphat is a worthy successor and is a great king in his own right. It is his trust in God that will enable him to have such a successful reign. God can still make

those who trust in him successful (Psa. 1:1-3).

Jehoshaphat is strong against Baalism, removing the idolatrous high places and groves. It is mentioned but not in any derogatory way that Jehovah-worship (such as burning incense) is done in various high places. "Clarke's Commentary" makes this observation concerning what might seem like a contradiction between the Kings' and the Chronicles' accounts of Jehoshaphat's taking away and not taking away the high places: "There were two kinds of high places in the land: (1) those used for idolatrous purposes; (2) those that were consecrated to God and were used before the temple was built. The former he did take away; the latter he did not."

In his early reign Jehoshaphat fortifies himself against the Northern Kingdom by stationing soldiers in Judah and also in some cities his father had taken from the Northern Kingdom. We are not told which cities these are, but they are also mentioned in II Chron. 15:8.

From the very beginning of his reign it is evident he is walking with God for which he is blessed (Heb. 11:6). Because his subjects bring him presents, he has riches and honor in abundance.

In his third year he embarks on something no previous ruler has done--dispatches chosen Levites and priests to go from city to city in Judah teaching the law of God. God's law cannot be kept unless it is first known. Jas. 1:22 says we are to be "doers" of the Word, but "doing" must be preceded by "learning". Thus Jas. 1:21 first says to receive the Word. As a result of this divinely-approved program God causes fear to come on all neighboring kingdoms so they make no war with Jehoshaphat but bring him presents instead. Such prosperity enables him to do much construction and to build a great army. He is truly one of Judah's greatest kings.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 3 memory-facts for this event.
2. Why does Jehoshaphat not fail even though following a powerful ruler?
3. What two kinds of "high places" are there?

4. What unusual program does Jehoshaphat inaugurate in Judah?
5. How does God bless him?

25. Elijah Prays for and Proclaims a Drought upon the Land

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read Jas. 5:19 and I Kings 17:1-24.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Elijah prays for God to send a drought as a punishment.
 - b. He foretells this drought to King Ahab.
 - c. God provides for Elijah during the 3 1/2 years of drought.
 - d. Elijah raises the widow's son.

COMMENTS

We have been studying about the two great kings of the South (Asa and Jehoshaphat) for sometime. What has been developing in the North in the meantime?

You will recall that wicked King Ahab is ruling here, and that his Phoenician-wife Jezebel has killed off all the prophets of Jehovah she can find. With such wickedness enthroned in Israel Jehovah-worship is at a practical standstill. It shows that when leadership is wrong, it has a great effect on the whole situation. Wickedness may be in the "driver's seat" and may kill many of God's prophets, but God is not dead nor blind to what is taking place. And He still has a remnant--people who are not fooled nor in agreement with what is taking place. I Kings 19:18 tells us there are seven thousand in Israel who are not bowing their knees before Baal. One of them is an "unknown" in Israel at this time, a man who lives at Tishbeh east of the Jordan River--Elijah. He will be well known before this is all over!

In Moses' day God had said to Israel, "Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; and then the Lord's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit" (Deut. 11:16,17). In view of this

divine threat this man Elijah (whose name aptly means "Jehovah is my God") believes conditions are such that God should shut off all rain. So he prays that God will. As a result God begins the chastening of Israel.

God is highly pleased with the spiritual depth and concern of this godly man, and he calls him into prophetic service. And what a prophet he becomes during his lifetime and later as a representative of all the prophets when he is chosen to appear with Moses and Jesus at the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-32)! John the Baptist, forerunner of Christ, would also come in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). His prophetic assignments will not be of an insignificant nature--he will be sent to the ruling kings of Israel!

His first assignment is to go to King Ahab and say, "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." He can thus speak because he knows he is a prophet of God. Even though he speaks as a representative of Jehovah and mentions "years" without moisture (no dew or rain), the king is not disturbed. To him the ill-clad Elijah is some deranged man who should never have been admitted by the guards into his presence. Elijah's words are taken as idle words with no reference to the nation's actual future. But when time passes, and there is no rain, the king recalls what Elijah has said, and now he will take him into custody if he can find him. While the prophet is safely secluded from the king's knowledge, he seeks for him even in neighboring countries, even making them take oaths that Elijah is not in their respective realms.

God is not through using the bold prophet, and just as He spares Elijah for future use, so will God spare us for the assignments He has for us yet to fulfill. Elijah's first hideout is in the desolate Brook-Cherith area, where food is brought to him by ravens, and where he drinks from the brook--until it dries up. Next God sends him clear out of the

country--to Zarephath in Phoenicia. He will be in Phoenicia until the end of the drought, ironically sustained in the very country from which Jezebel has come!

As he arrives at Zarephath, he sees a woman gathering sticks. He asks her for a drink. As she goes to get it for him, he calls after her with an additional request: "Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand." It is then she shares her desperate plight with the visiting stranger. Phoenicia, the land from which Baalism has come into Israel, is also having the same drought, and it is a real test of her faith when the stranger from Israel says concerning her last bit of flour and oil, "Make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. For thus saith the Lord God of Israel, the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruise of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth." She too can look on Elijah as some "crackpot", but she takes his word seriously, and when God's promises are daily fulfilled to her, how happy she is she has believed God's prophet! (Oh, that Ahab had!) It is interesting to note Jesus mentioned this residence of Elijah in her home (Luke 4:25,26).

But her joy in having him in her home and the perpetuating of her food supply is suddenly and unexpectedly turned to grief when her son becomes deathly sick and dies. Conscience has a good memory--you will recall Joseph's brothers' conscience bothered them many years later concerning what they had done to him (Gen. 42:21). Now the widow's conscience bothers her concerning some unnamed sin in her past for which she now thinks she is being punished because of the prophetic insight of Elijah. The prophet takes the lad's lifeless form to his room in the loft and prays for his restoration to life. Again the prophet's prayer is heard, and the son is given back to his relieved mother.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 4 memory-facts for this event.
2. From where is Elijah?

3. How great a prophet is Elijah to become?
4. Why is the king probably not disturbed over Elijah's foretelling a drought?
5. Where is Elijah's first hideout, and how does God provide for him here?
6. Recall the conversation between Elijah and the Zarephath woman.
7. What does the woman think when her son dies?
8. How does Elijah restore her son to life?

26. Elijah Comes out of Hiding and Challenges the Whole Baal Set-up

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 18:1-46 and Jas. 5:18.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Elijah is sent back into Israel.
 - b. He tells Obadiah to report his presence to the king.
 - c. Elijah tells the king to gather Israel and his prophets upon Mt. Carmel.
 - d. The contest between Jehovah and Baal by Elijah and the Baal prophets.
 - e. The people exclaim, "Jehovah, he is God," twice.
 - f. Elijah orders the false prophets slain.
 - g. Elijah sends the king home because of coming rain.
 - h. The prophet outruns the king on his way to Jezreel.

COMMENTS

It has been sometime since God has communicated any special instructions to Elijah. Sometime during the third year of this silence, God orders him to go show himself to King Ahab, promising to send rain on the earth. The three and one-half years of no rain and no dew have been sufficient to prove to the people of Israel that the king and queen's god Baal is not the real God who controls the weather. He has given them no rain even though they have kept worshipping him.

As Elijah bids a thankful farewell to the widow and her son to return to his own land, the king himself is taking half of the land and his high official Obadiah the other half, seeking out any possible remaining water holes or grass for their horses and mules. (This is not the Obadiah who wrote the Bible book.)

Obadiah is shocked as he meets Elijah, who bids him tell the king he is back in the land. Obadiah is fearful to report this lest Ahab kill him for letting Elijah get away. In begging not to be sent to the king, Obadiah asks the prophet if he has not heard of his having hidden and fed one hundred prophets of Jehovah when Jezebel was trying to kill them all. Realizing the predicament Obadiah could be in, Elijah assures him if he will report to Ahab, he will appear to Ahab personally. So Obadiah goes to tell the king.

What will be the wicked king's first words when he sees the man who over three years ago said, "There shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word"? Here are the king's accusing words upon Elijah's entrance: "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" They are so different from Obadiah's first words: "Art thou that my lord Elijah?" The man from Tishbeh is not intimidated by the king nor by his words but replies, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim."

Now that the prophet whom the king has been seeking is in his presence, why doesn't he take him into custody? You can tell that the drought plus the bold reply of Elijah have subdued any wrathful intentions Ahab may have had. In fact when Elijah orders him to call Israel together upon Mt. Carmel along with four hundred and fifty Baal prophets and Jezebel's four hundred prophets of the grove, he obeys even though Jezebel refuses to send her prophets.

What a sight as thousands upon thousands of Israel gather on Carmel's heights near the Mediterranean Sea to see just what is going to take place! Elijah speaks to the people: "How long halt ye between two opinions?" What two opinions? Which is God--Baal or Jehovah? Elijah's proposition is fair: "If Jehovah be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." But the people are hesitant to reply but remain silent.

The Baal prophets feel confident they can outdo the lone prophet of Jehovah and proceed with preparing their sacrifice to Baal. Just visualize the whole group of them--and only one Elijah! But in spite of their number, in spite of their fanatical extremes to get Baal's attention to ignite their sacrifice, Baal does not control things. He cannot send fire. He is no god. Nothing happens. This failure registers in the minds of onlooking Israel.

Elijah now invites the people to come in as close as they can as he repairs a one-time altar to Jehovah, using twelve stones after the number of the tribes of Israel. First on the altar goes the wood and then the bullock, and then to everybody's surprise he has twelve barrels of water poured over the sacrifice until water stands in the trench around the altar. Then he prays, "Jehovah God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, 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 Jehovah, hear me, that this people may know that thou art Jehovah God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again." Without any stretching out of time and without any fanatical carrying-on by Elijah, God immediately answers this lone man's prayer and sends fire that ignites and consumes the sacrifice, the wood, the stones of the altar, the dust, and even the water in the trench!

Yes, God knew when He called Elijah out of obscurity back into the lifestream of Israel, the people could now be convinced to declare themselves for Jehovah and against the king and queen's god Baal. As they see the fire come down and ignite the sacrifice and the rest that follows, in spite of the king's presence they fall on their faces and declare, "Jehovah, he is the God; Jehovah, he is the God." Was there ever a meeting when more people were changed for good than this meeting on Mt. Carmel?

Elijah issues an order, and the powerless king offers no opposition: "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." And these four hundred fifty men who have been a part of the

nation's religious apostasy are taken down to the brook at the base of the mountain (Brook Kishon) and are slain.

Elijah knows the drought is over and bids the king eat and drink, "for there is a sound of abundance of rain."

Mt. Carmel is not a mountain peak but a short mountain range running northwest-southeast, jutting out into the Mediterranean Sea and putting an end to the wide Maritime Plain to its south. To its north is the great Bay of Acre with its sweeping shoreline. Inland on Carmel's north side and far below is the rich Esdraelon Plain, the gateway to the interior from the Mediterranean port. Tour guides take you several miles inland on the Carmel range to show the traditional place of Elijah's contest with the false prophets. The particular place is a slight depression so that from it you cannot look west and see the Mediterranean. A close study of I Kings 18:41-44 indicates the place they show you is probably accurate. Let's see. After killing the prophets down at the base of the mountain, Elijah tells Ahab, "Get thee UP, eat and drink." "So Ahab went UP to eat and drink--that would be back up where they had been. But from there it says, Elijah went UP to the top of Carmel," and he told his servant to go UP now, look toward the sea." All this adds up to the fact that the place of the contest is lower than the summit and from which the crowd could not look west and see the Sea.

What is Elijah doing as he casts himself down to the ground and puts his face between his knees? Praying, according to Jas. 5:17,18. His servant sees no cloud over the Sea until his seventh trip, and it is only "a little cloud" said to be "like a man's hand". But it is enough for Elijah to tell the king to get into his chariot and speed for home before the rain keeps him from getting there. After the king leaves on his hasty trip to Jezreel, the Lord strengthens Elijah so he runs and passes the king in his chariot on their way to the royal city Jezreel.

1. Recite the 8 memory-facts for this event.
2. What are Ahab and Obadiah doing when Elijah returns to Israel?
3. Why is Obadiah hesitant to tell the king that Elijah is back?
4. What are Ahab's first words when he sees Elijah?
5. What proposition does Elijah make to the people?
6. Tell of Baal's prophets' attempt to get Baal to answer by fire.
7. Tell of Elijah's procedure in getting God to answer by fire.
8. On which trip to look toward the sea does Elijah's servant see a cloud?
9. Who arrives at Jezreel first--Ahab or Elijah?

27. Elijah Flees from Jezebel's Threat

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 19:1-18.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Jezebel threatens to kill Elijah for killing the Baal prophets.
 - b. Elijah and his servant flee to the south.
 - c. Elijah leaves his servant at Beersheba while he goes farther south.
 - d. He is awakened and fed by an angel.
 - e. Finally settling in a cave at Mt. Sinai he is asked by the Lord, "What doest thou here?"

COMMENTS

Upon Ahab's return to Jezreel he reports the Mt. Carmel happenings, especially Elijah's slaying of the Baal prophets. At this point let us notice the difference between Ahab and Jezebel. Because the prophet can call a drought on his land, Ahab did not kill him when he showed himself to him three and a half years later. In fact the king took orders from the prophet to assemble the people and the prophets on Mt. Carmel. (But Jezebel did not send her prophets of the grove.) Because his own prophets could not call down fire on their sacrifice while Elijah could, though he was king he offered no resistance when Elijah ordered his prophets killed. We note too that Ahab ate at the prophet's direction and also left for Jezreel at his order. He realizes it was the prophet's call for rain that brought rain again. (But the headstrong Jezebel brushes all these aside, does not fear Jehovah, and vows

she will put an end to Elijah's life.)

It appears the fears of the prophet are the lone reason for his fleeing. The text contains nothing of God's telling him to flee to Mt. Horeb to escape her wrath. (You will recall God's directing his going to the Brook Cherith and later to Zarephath--I Kings 17:2-4 and 7-9.) The question in Elijah's mind: "Where shall I flee from her?" He decides on the south. He and his servant make haste to get out. They cross the border into Judah and continue clear to Judah's southern border (Beersheba). Here he leaves his servant and plunges another day's journey into the wilderness (desert) beyond Beersheba. Physically and emotionally drained he is at his lowest when he sits in a juniper tree's shade and requests to die. It is obvious he is running on emotions when he requests to die at the very time he is fleeing from the wicked queen to keep from dying. In this exhausted frame of mind he drops off to sleep until he is awakened by an angel who has food and water ready for him. After eating and feeling safe in the uninhabited desert and with his body crying out for more sleep, he is again overcome with drowsiness and is soon asleep once more. When the angel again awakens him and bids him eat in view of the many days' journey before him, he does so and then continues his journey to far-away Mt. Horeb. Mt. Horeb is Mt. Sinai so sacred to the mind of every Israelite. No doubt he thinks of Moses' escaping here from Pharaoh's wrath. As he arrives, he likely feels an ancestral kinship to this locale because it was here that God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, here that Moses brought Israel after their escape from Egypt, here that God spoke to the people and then called Moses up into the mountain to receive the Law, here that the tabernacle was made and first set up, and here that the priesthood was begun.

As he takes up his abode in a cave in the mountainous region, he finally feels completely safe from the enraged Jezebel. In much the same way that Jesus asked Peter, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matt. 14:31) when his faith failed him on

the water, so does God question Elijah, "What doest thou here?" Elijah's answer concerning the danger involved in staying in Israel shows he is unduly fearing men (in this case Jezebel) instead of trusting God (note Matt. 10:28).

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 5 memory-facts for this event.
2. What causes us to think God does not tell Elijah to flee from Jezebel?
3. Tell of the angel and the sleeping Elijah.
4. What is Elijah's answer to God's question as to why he is clear down here?

28. Elisha--From Plowman to Prophet's Helper

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 19:19-21.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Elijah casts his mantle on Elisha while he is plowing, calling him to become a prophet.
 - b. Elisha asks permission to bid goodbye to those at home.
 - c. When Elijah does not approve his going home, Elisha makes a going-away feast out of his oxen.

COMMENTS

Elisha, one of the seven thousand who has not bowed his knee to Baal and the one personally selected by the Lord to succeed Elijah as his special prophet in Israel, at this time is plowing in a field near his town Abel-meholah in the Jordan Valley. As Elijah is returning from the deep south to the wilderness of Damascus at God's bidding (I Kings 19:15,16), he approaches him who is evidently a responsible son of a wealthy farmer. "Barnes" suggests he is "the son of a wealthy yeoman superintending the field-laborers himself and taking a share in their toils". As such he is plowing with the twelfth yoke of oxen, the other plows preceding his. To indicate Elisha is being called to go with him and be a prophet, Elijah casts his own mantle on him. Later we will find at the moment of Elijah's translation his

mantle will fall from him to Elisha (II Kings 2:13). We note this future prophet is thus called to divine service while busy in his own pursuits. God calls busy--not idle people: Jesus thus called the working fishermen (Mark 1:16-20) and the working Matthew (Matt. 9:9). Even the mistaken Saul of Tarsus was aggressively pushing his persecution of Christians when Christ appeared to him (Acts 26:9-18).

Elisha just has to have a few moments to decide his future action, and while he tarries in consideration, Elijah leaves to continue his journey. Even though there are many things to ponder about the matter, Elisha is able to decide rather hurriedly in favor of accepting the call, so runs after Elijah to accept. Students are divided as to whether Elijah is giving him permission to go back and tell his parents goodbye when he says, "Go back again," or whether he is telling him to go back to his plowing since Elisha stipulates when he will go with Elijah. As unreasonable as it may sound on Elijah's part, his words, "What have I done to thee?" seem to fit the latter thought better than the former. Don't you perceive some connection between Elisha's case here and that of the man in Luke 9:61,62 who said, "Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house," to whom Jesus replied, "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God"? To put your hand to the plow and then look back evidently implied quitting the job. When the agricultural plowman Elisha said, "Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee," it suggests his willingness to go with the prophet Elijah. He is putting his hand to a new kind of "plow" just as the four fishermen were soon to be a different kind of "fishermen". For some reason Jesus didn't approve the man's going home to his family before responding to the opportunity of going with Jesus, and evidently Elijah is not approving Elisha's going back to his family either.

With Elijah's remonstrance letting him know it is "now or never", Elisha immediately returns to his plow and oxen, builds a fire with the wood of the plow, makes a departure-feast of roast oxen, and the other workers share in the occasion prior to his departure to become a prophet. Matthew also gave a farewell-feast to which his former fellow-laborers were invited (Luke 5:27-29). When Elisha does this, he is making a complete break with farming, "burning his bridges behind him" when he burns his plow! In leaving everything to follow Elijah, he exemplifies what others have done since who have left houses and lands and loved ones to preach the gospel (Mark 10:29,30) just as did the fishermen and Matthew already mentioned.

He goes to minister to Elijah just as Joshua did to Moses. This man is now a servant of Elijah before he later becomes his successor with Gehazi as his servant (II Kings 4:12). We must all learn to follow before we are entrusted with leadership!

QUESTIONS

1. What is Elisha doing when Elijah comes along?
2. Is he from a wealthy or a poor family?
3. What does he tell Elijah he wants to do before going with him?
4. Under what condition will Elijah consent to his going with him?
5. What does Elisha do to show he is through with farming and will be a prophet?
6. What is his relationship to Elijah?

29. God Gives Ahab Two Great Victories over Syria

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 20:1-43.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Ben-hadad's demands stir Ahab and Israel to resist.
 - b. God assures Ahab of victory.
 - c. Syria is defeated, thinking Jehovah is God of the hills.
 - d. Syria rebuilds and returns to attack Israel in the valley.
 - e. Syria is defeated again.
 - f. God is displeased with Ahab for sparing Ben-hadad.

COMMENTS

Syria, Israel's neighbor to its north and east, is in the heyday of its power, so it is indeed an alarming situation when Syria's powerful king Ben-hadad decides to come against Ahab and Samaria. He has with him thirty-two kings and well over one hundred thousand soldiers (a comparison of vs. 25 and 29 shows). The warring mentioned in v. 1 has been so conclusive for Syria that Ben-hadad proudly demands Ahab's silver, gold, wives, and children. It is evident from Ahab's answer (v. 4) he realizes his helplessness before the mighty army. Ben-hadad is pleased with Ahab's capitulation, so he decides to add to his military demands. Not only is Ahab to deliver him his silver, gold, wives, and children, but Ben-hadad will send men to search Ahab's palace and his servants' houses to see that he has not held anything back and to take whatever else he desires.

There is something about this later demand that changes Ahab from a submissive vassal into a fighting mad-dog. He calls a meeting of the nation's elders, and they all agree: "Let's fight!" They send a message to Ben-hadad they will not give in to his demands. Enraged, Ben-hadad blows up and is ready to wipe out Samaria. Ahab returns a saucy response (probably a proverb of the time): "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off." At this time the Syrian king and the leaders with him are in a drunken state. They order the army to resume its fighting lineups and to lay siege to Samaria.

Ahab has the same small army he had when he first said he would surrender. Jehovah knows Ahab is greatly outnumbered and yet has committed himself to resist. God is going to use this situation to make a personal bid to become Ahab's God by giving him a victory over the sizable Syrian army. So He sends a prophet to Ahab telling him He is going to give him such a victory that he will know that He is Jehovah.

Ahab asks by whom Jehovah will deliver such a great multitude into his hand. The answer: by your own young men! And when Ahab asks who is to order or lead the battle, God says Ahab himself is!

No doubt Ahab is surprised Jehovah is having anything to do with him, but he is pleased (this is Elijah's God!), and he cooperates with what God's prophet has said. It is a small number that Ahab has (two hundred fifty young princes and seven thousand soldiers) compared with the number in the opposing army. Ben-hadad and the fifty-two leaders are even more drunk by the time the Israelite army comes for the battle. Ben-hadad orders his men to take the Israelites alive whether they are coming out to surrender or to fight. But not realizing God is with Israel, Ben-hadad is totally surprised when Israel's small force completely routs his vast army. He is not so drunk he can't get on a horse and make a hurried escape into nearby fortified Aphek. God's giving Israel's small army a great victory over such odds reminds us of His reducing Gideon's army to a mere three hundred before giving it the victory over the countless Midianites so the victors would know it was God who gave them the victory (Judg. 7:2). Remember too the words of Jonathan to his armor-bearer when the two were about to attack the whole Philistine garrison: "There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few" (I Sam. 14:6).

It has been a long time since Jehovah has had any harmonious contact with any king of the Northern Kingdom until this battle. Now that He has given Ahab this victory, He follows up with sending the prophet back to him to tell him to expect Ben-hadad to remobilize and return against him at the turn of the year. And right the prophet's message is, for up in Damascus Ben-hadad's advisors are telling him Israel's gods are gods of the hills, and that if he will take an equal size army, replace the kings with captains, and fight against Israel in some valley, the outcome will be a victory for Syria. It is obvious his advisors subscribe to the heathen idea of localized gods whereas

we know (and Ben-hadad will find out) there is but one God, and He is everywhere. Of course Ben-hadad likes the message of his advisors, and he lays plans for the next attack. But simply because a person likes what he hears does not necessarily make it true.

It is obvious to the Bible student Ben-hadad will also lose the next battle since it will be fought on such a fallacious thought concerning Israel's God. When Goliath defied the armies of the living God and cursed God's servant David in the name of his gods (I Sam. 17:26,43), the loss went to Goliath and the win to David (I Sam. 17:45-53). When Sennacherib's messenger compared Jehovah to the idolatrous gods of other nations which Assyria had already defeated (II Kings 18:31-35), God immediately took hold and wiped out his army (II Kings 19:15-23,35-37). We have a right to look for the same in the coming battle.

Now back to the rematch of Syria and Israel. The scene is near Aphek. There are several Apheks in Ahab's territory. Some take this to be the Aphek just east of the Sea of Galilee, but it seems more likely to be the Aphek in the Valley of Jezreel, which would be nearer the location of the first battle and in a famous battle valley.

If they are walking by "sight" rather than by "faith", Israel will not enter the battle, for Israel is like "two little flocks of kids" while the Syrians fill the country. God is watching and again sends a prophet to Ahab with this message: "Thus saith the Lord, Because the Syrians have said, The Lord is God of the hills, but he is not God of the valleys, therefore will I deliver all this great multitude into thine hand, and ye shall know that I am the Lord." This brings joy to the heart of Ahab, and he has never had a victory like the one coming up: (1) one hundred thousand Syrians are killed in one day; (2) the rest of the Syrians (twenty-seven thousand) flee into Aphek only to have a big wall collapse on them and kill them; and (3) Ben-hadad hides in an inner-chamber in Aphek.

What is Ben-hadad's next move to be? His servants tell him the kings of Israel have a reputation for being merciful to those they have conquered, so he sends his servants clothed with sackcloth and with ropes on their heads (signs of sorrow and submission) to Ahab with a plea for his life. Ahab is surprised Ben-hadad is still alive, supposing he has been killed either in the battle or by the falling wall. When he refers to Ben-hadad as "my brother", they hurry back to him with the assurance everything is going to be all right. This time Ben-hadad comes in person, and Ahab invites him up into his royal chariot. Vanquished but spared, Ben-hadad offers to restore the cities his father took from Israel and to give Ahab permission to make streets (probably streets with Jewish merchants selling Jewish merchandise) in Damascus (Syria's capital city). Ahab feels good over the two victories and because Syria has come to terms with him. But has he handled the Ben-hadad matter correctly? Is God pleased? We shall see.

God intended Ahab to have finished off Ben-hadad. Ahab is like the neighbor ("his fellow" ASV) of the sons of the prophets who is commanded by the Lord to smite him, who refuses and is killed by a lion for his disobedience. Ahab should be like the next man who strikes and wounds the son of the prophets at God's command and who lives as a result. The wounded young man departs in a disguised way with God's message for the king.

Parabolically the messenger of God is represented as a soldier who confesses to the passing king he has allowed a prisoner committed to his care to escape. At this point the young prophet removes his disguise, and Ahab recognizes he is face to face with a messenger of Jehovah who says, "Thus saith the Lord, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand a man whom I appointed to utter destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people." When Ahab shows mercy to Ben-hadad to God's displeasure, it is just as wrong to disobey this command as it is to hate when God

says to forgive. Some people's natures make it easier for them to execute God's judgment than to practice His mercy while the natures of other individuals make it easier for them to show mercy than to execute divine judgment. As obedient servants of the Lord we should strive to fit into God's plans whether it be to bring offenders face to face with their disobedience or whether to forgive transgressions done against us.

What will the king's response be to such a parabolic approach (so similar to the prophet Nathan's approach to King David over the Bathsheba-Uriah matter--II Sam.12:1-12)? Like David (II Sam. 12:13) Ahab is submissive and heavy-hearted.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 6 memory-facts for this lesson.
2. What is Ben-hadad's first demand of Ahab?
3. What is his second demand?
4. What message does God send to Ahab?
5. What do Ben-hadad's advisors tell him about Israel's God?
6. What message does God send to Ahab before the second battle?
7. What two things befall the men of Ben-hadad's army?
8. What terms of surrender does Ahab accept from Ben-hadad?
9. What has God planned for Ahab to do with Ben-hadad?

30. Ahab Takes a Righteous Man's Vineyard

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 21:1-29.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Ahab offers to buy Naboth's vineyard next to his palace.
 - b. He is saddened by Naboth's refusal to sell.
 - c. Jezebel arranges for Naboth to be falsely charged, condemned, and killed, permitting Naboth's vineyard to become Ahab's.
 - d. Elijah meets Ahab in the vineyard and pronounces doom on both him and Jezebel.

COMMENTS

We are again back at the beautiful city of Jezreel built on an eminence overlooking the fertile Jezreel Valley. The city is twenty-five miles north of the capital Samaria. Ahab has a palace here too (likely a vacation-capital, making it a royal resort-city). The last time we were here was immediately following Elijah's contest on Mt. Carmel. It was from here that he fled from the murderous intentions of an inflamed Jezebel.

A good man Naboth lives here, and his vineyard is immediately adjacent to Ahab's palace. The king wants to obtain it so he can make it into an herb garden. He offers either to buy it or give Naboth a vineyard in exchange. We should note it is not customary for an Israelite to sell his land unless debts and unfortunate circumstances force him to do so. This keeps one's patrimony within his family. The background of this is in Lev. 25:23-28. Normally a plot of land that is sold will still revert to the original Israelite family at the year of jubilee (every fiftieth year). However since Jezreel is a royal city and has walls, the teaching in Lev. 25:29,30 implies if Naboth sells his vineyard to Ahab, it will be lost to his family forever. So principle causes Naboth to reply to the king's proposal, "The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee."

It is not customary for a king not to have what he wants, but Ahab has to respect Naboth's right of possession. The extent of his disappointment is apparent as we see him go into the palace, flop himself across his bed with his face to the wall, and refuse to eat. When the unprincipled Jezebel comes in, she says to her sobbing husband, "Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel?" suggesting that a king can do whatever he wishes and have whatever he wants. To her, "might is right" instead of "right is might". In essence she is saying, "I will get the vineyard for you!" And she goes out and devises the scheme that will get rid of Naboth and embolden Ahab to take over the vineyard. In the king's name and sealed with his seal Jezebel orders the

elders and nobles to proclaim a fast (as though some calamity were facing the city the responsibility for which would evidently be laid on the innocent and harmless Naboth). Reminiscent of the rigged trial of Jesus Jezebel has her false witnesses present (described by the inspired writer of I Kings as "sons of Belial"--no-goods). And what is the charge brought against the bewildered vineyard owner who is the victim of this greed and intrigue? "Thou didst blaspheme God and the king!" Not one word of Naboth's at his trial is recorded, but we can well imagine his asking, "What? When? Where? What did I say?" But any personal appeal he makes is swept aside by the court that has been called together to get rid of him. And it is made to look honorable by having the minimum of two witnesses testify against him (Deut. 17:6). Poor Naboth is condemned to death by stoning outside the city. Jezebel has kept her word--she has gotten rid of Naboth whose property now passes to the king whom Naboth allegedly wronged (compare II Sam. 16:4).

Ahab loses no time taking possession of the prized vineyard. What a sinner he is before God! He has killed a righteous man, has allowed his wife to overthrow justice, and has been heartless toward the family of Naboth, robbing them of their family head and "bread winner" and now taking away even their vineyard. Unprincipled people such as Ahab and Jezebel will get what they want no matter how they get it. If they cannot obtain it honestly and honorably, they will get it dishonestly and dishonorably. And they won't worry over the grief and sorrow they bring to their victims, for in their selfishness they have no heart for those they hurt.

When we see the way Naboth's case goes, we can see that a day of divine judgment is necessary to repay the wicked and reward the righteous.

Will Ahab get away with this? Num. 32:23 says people's sins will find them out. While King Ahab is walking around through his newly acquired vineyard, no

doubt making plans for its use now that it is his, he is stunned to look up and see the stern prophet Elijah coming toward him. God's servants often show up at the most embarrassing moments (when one is lighting a cigarette, when people are having an argument, etc.). Ahab cries out, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" indicating immediate admission of his guilt. His elation over obtaining the vineyard is now suddenly turned to fear as he knows Jehovah's prophet has come because of what he has done. Why does Ahab consider Elijah his "enemy"? Because Elijah is always against the evil he does--for the same reason Ahab hates the prophet Micaiah (I Kings 22:8). Compare John 7:7 and Gal. 4:16. There is nothing wrong with the prophet, the full responsibility belonging to the sinning king. Rebuking preaching has not made Elijah popular with the king. "Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way" (Prov. 15:10). While the thoughtful and the honest will accept correction, others won't, and when they don't, they usually employ vengeful tactics against the one who is correcting them. This is why few preachers bring rebuking messages.

Twice in our lesson text is Ahab's selling himself to do evil mentioned (vs. 20,25). God has been longsuffering long enough with him and with the hateful woman who has stirred him up to his wickedness. Elijah tells him of the doom that will come on him and his house (which Ahab understands to be the end of his family on the throne when Elijah refers to the annihilation of the previous houses of Jeroboam and Baasha). And how gruesome punishment the king hears concerning his wife Jezebel and his offspring: "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Him that dieth of Ahab in the city the dogs shall eat; and him that dieth in the field shall the fowls of the air eat."

Again the king is docile before the withering words of the prophet. He rends his clothes, puts on sackcloth, fasts, lies in sackcloth, and goes softly. He has every reason to believe that what the

prophet has said will be fulfilled exactly.

Psa 51:17 says God will not despise a broken and contrite heart. Because Ahab humbles himself before God and His Word, God tells Elijah the doom of Ahab's house will take place after his death and not during his lifetime.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 4 memory-facts for this event.
2. In what city does this event take place?
3. What does Naboth have that Ahab wants?
4. What use does Ahab have for it?
5. What brings sorrow to Ahab in the matter?
6. What does Jezebel find Ahab doing?
7. What does she promise him?
8. Tell how she goes about fulfilling her promise?
9. Where is Ahab when Elijah comes to him?
10. What does Ahab say the moment he sees Elijah?
11. What does Elijah foretell concerning Ahab's house?
12. What will happen to Jezebel?
13. How does Ahab respond to the prediction?
14. When will the doom fall?

31. Jehoshaphat Makes Peace with Ahab

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 22:44 and II Chron. 18:1.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Jehoshaphat makes peace with Ahab that lasts for a long time and that is bad for Judah.
 - b. It is probably done to combine their strength against the rising power of Syria.

COMMENTS

For so many studies now we have been following the events in the Northern Kingdom involving King Ahab and events involving the prophet Elijah that we need to check in and see what is taking place with King Jehoshaphat and his Southern Kingdom. Let us remember he is the son of Asa who ruled over Judah for so long. He is a good king and is enjoying a prosperous reign also.

We are not told just when Jehoshaphat makes peace with Ahab nor why. It is probably to combine their strength against the rising power of Syria (Damascus the capital) in the event of an attack. For whatever the reason we are

surprised Jehoshaphat yokes up with such a wicked king, for Jehoshaphat is one of the good kings while Ahab is the worst. This alliance is the one glaring weakness Jehoshaphat has amid many great strengths he possesses. Sometimes even good people have a besetting sin.

One of the results of this alliance is Jehoshaphat takes Ahab's daughter Athaliah as a wife for his son Jehoram who will succeed him. Other results coming up will be Jehoshaphat going to war with Ahab in the battle for Ramoth-gilead. Then after Ahab's death Jehoshaphat will build a fleet of ships with Ahab's son Ahaziah at the port of Ezion-geber. Still later he will go to war against Moab in company with Ahab's grandson Jehoram. And then Jehoshaphat's grandson Ahaziah and Ahab's grandson Jehoram will be the best of friends, will go to war together against Ramoth-gilead, and will die together at the hand of Jehu. So the peace Jehoshaphat and Ahab make is real and will be lasting. But God is not pleased with it as we shall see in coming events. We will also see that much evil will get into the life of Judah through this affinity between the two ruling houses. Just as God said back in Deut. 7:3,4 that when the righteous marry the wicked, it has its sad effects.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 2 memory-facts for this event.
2. When does Jehoshaphat make peace with Ahab?
3. Probably why does he make this peace?
4. Why are we surprised that this peace is made?

32. The Condemned Ahab Cannot Escape God's Judgment

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 22:1-40 and II Chron. 18:1-34.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Ahab invites Jehoshaphat to join him in recovering Ramoth-gilead from Syria.
 - b. Ahab's prophets promise him victory.
 - c. Micalah prophesies his defeat and death.

- d. The circumstances of Ahab's fatal wound indicate God's role in it.
- e. Dogs lick up Ahab's blood just as dogs did Naboth's.

COMMENTS

Following his second and decisive defeat by Ahab and Israel, Ben-hadad of Syria had agreed to restore to Israel the cities his father had taken from them (I Kings 20:34). We are not told just which cities they were, but those cities of Israel east of the Jordan were from time to time held by Israel, then by Syria, and then by Israel again, etc. Likely those were the cities involved in Ben-hadad's promise. One of the chief of these cities is Ramoth-gilead. It is near the center of the land occupied by Israel's two and one-half tribes east of the Jordan (look it up on a map). It is one of the forty-eight cities allotted to the Levites (Num. 35:7; Josh. 21:38), and its prominence among Israel's many cities is seen in its being the central refuge city east of the Jordan (Josh. 20:2,7,8). Even though it has now been three years since Ben-hadad promised to restore these cities, the important Ramoth-gilead is still in his hands. After the pressure of the time passed, he is like Pharaoh who would promise to let Israel go if Moses would but remove the plague, but after the plague was lifted he hardened his heart and did not keep his word (Exo. 8:28-32). So human nature will make promises to God in days of calamity that are not always carried out in days of prosperity.

It is while Jehoshaphat of Jerusalem is paying Ahab of Samaria a friendly visit (with much dining--II Chron. 18:2) that Ahab solicits his help in going to war against Syria in order to recover Ramoth-gilead. The II Chron. account indicates Ahab has to persuade Jehoshaphat to assist him in the battle. Jehoshaphat commits his men and horses to the project but asks that they inquire of Jehovah before proceeding. His request is supposedly honored when around four hundred court-prophets come before the

two kings as they sit on thrones just inside Samaria's entrance gate. Are you surprised Ahab has this many prophets when so recently Elijah slew so many of his prophets near Mt. Carmel (I Kings 18:40)? The slain prophets were prophets of Baal while these are possibly general prophets. "Barnes" observes that among the ancients their prophets were not so much mouthpieces for their gods as persons thought to have power with their gods to induce them to do what they pronounce. Naturally, then, they will say what the king wants, so they unite in saying, "Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king." This is music to the ears of the king, but Jehoshaphat discounts what they say because, as "Smith" notes, they do not say as true prophets of Jehovah, "Thus saith Jehovah." He, therefore, asks, "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord ("Jehovah" ASV) besides, that we might enquire of him?"

The only Jehovah-prophets Ahab knows about are Elijah (and he would have to know Elijah's whereabouts in order to consult him "today"--Jehoshaphat's request in v. 5) and Micaiah (whom he hates). His words concerning Micaiah ("I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me") remind us of Jesus' words in John 7:7 ("The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil") and of Paul's words in Gal. 4:16 ("Am I become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?").

While Micaiah is being sent for, and the two kings are in their royal robes on thrones just inside the entrance gate of Samaria, one of Ahab's prophets (Zedekiah) is leading the other prophets in quite a "pep rally" before the two kings. He acts as if he is a strong animal with horns, assuring Ahab he will "push the Syrians, until thou have consumed them." And all the prophets come in, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the king's hand."

As the messenger calls Micaiah, he urges him to join the other prophets in prophesying success. But the faithful

messenger of God is concerned with one responsibility as a prophet, replying, "As the Lord liveth, what the Lord saith unto me, that will I speak." Such faithfulness has always characterized God's true messengers. John 3:34 says, "He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God." One is not a true messenger of God if he preaches something besides God's Word so as to please his listeners (Gal. 1:9,10).

As Micaiah arrives on the scene, it could be an overwhelming situation for one not so firmly committed to being a true prophet, for there are the two kings on their thrones, and there is a crowd of prophets (around four hundred) led by Zedekiah's assuring antics, all prophesying victory. But truth and righteousness are not always demonstrated by numbers. Micaiah is outnumbered about four hundred to one, yet he is right and they wrong. Noah and his family were likewise outnumbered in their day, and so were Caleb and Joshua. Jesus noted, "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13,14).

Now comes the king's question, "Shall we go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we forbear?" Everything is quiet awaiting his answer. There is irony in Micaiah's answer ("Go, and prosper: for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king"), and Ahab detects it (v. 16). And now comes forth the real prediction from God when Micaiah says, "I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the Lord said, these have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace." Ahab gets the idea (he is the shepherd who is no longer with the sheep, and the sheep are his leaderless army), for he turns to Jehoshaphat and says, "Did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil?"

Micaiah resumes speaking and explains why Ahab's prophets actually prophesied victory: God wants Ahab to

fall, so He has put a lying spirit into the mouths of all Ahab's prophets who promise victory for him. This will draw Ahab into the battle where he will be slain. The smart, show-off Zedekiah walks over to Micaiah, smites him on the cheek, and scoffingly asks, "Which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee?" Momentarily and in the setting it looks like Zedekiah is the triumphant one, and Micaiah is not to be intimidated by a prophet, a king, or a throng, so he predicts trouble for the demonstrative Zedekiah: "Behold, thou shalt see in that day, when thou shalt go into an inner chamber to hide thyself." It is always bad to resist God's messengers. Ask King Jeroboam (I Kings 13:4), Amaziah (Amos 7:16,17), Hananiah (Jer. 28:12-17), Jehoiakim (Jer. 36:20-23,27-31), and others.

The king wants no more of Micaiah's prophecies, so he orders him returned to jail and prescribes a bread-and-water diet for him until he can deal with him on his return from the battle. When the king says, "Until I come in peace," Micaiah replies, "If thou return at all in peace, the Lord hath not spoken by me," and he bids the people to take note of his statement.

We are left wondering just why Jehoshaphat asks for a prophet of Jehovah and still will go to battle with Ahab when doom has been prophesied. Maybe the pressure that does not overwhelm Micaiah does overwhelm Jehoshaphat, for not all who intend to serve God have equal courage.

The battle-plan of Syria is to kill King Ahab and not fight with anybody else. Word of this has leaked out to Ahab but not to Jehoshaphat. Therefore, Ahab doesn't want to direct the battle himself but will enter the battle attired as one of the soldiers while hypocritically offering the glory of leading the battle to Jehoshaphat. As the battle opens, from what the bowmen say as they shoot at Jehoshaphat it is evident they think he is Ahab, and Jehoshaphat cries out he is not Ahab. For a while that stops the shooting until they can locate Ahab. But Ahab is not to be identified. He is doing

everything he can to save himself from the doom pronounced against him. But when God marks a person for destruction because of unrepented sin, no amount of human ingenuity can overthrow His pronouncement. You can be sure this is Ahab's last. How will this be brought about?

It appears from the Biblical account that some Syrian soldier just shoots an arrow at random, not aiming at anything or anybody, but that very arrow finds its way between the joints of Ahab's armor, severely wounding him. Hoping against hope Ahab courageously props himself up in the chariot all day throughout the battle. But at evening the king who has led Israel for twenty-two years finally succumbs, breathes his last, and dies in the chariot. His death brings a proclamation that ends the fighting, and the Syrians retain Ramoth-gilead.

Ahab's chariot is a mess with his blood all over its floor. His dead body is sorrowfully hauled back to the capital city for entombment. Since Samaria is a new city, beginning with his father Omri, Ahab is only the second king buried there. There will be many more in the future, of course. As the servants scrub out his bloody chariot, scavenger dogs are present to lick up his blood, reminding us of the dogs at Jezreel that licked up Naboth's blood.

A problem may arise in your mind over the place where dogs licked up Ahab's blood. Elijah told him, according to I Kings 21:19, "Thus saith the Lord, in the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." That would be Jezreel and not Samaria where it happens (I Kings 22:38). There is one Scripture that may take care of the problem. When Ahab repented after hearing Elijah's rebuke and pronouncement of doom on him and his house (I Kings 21:19-24,27), God said He would defer the punishment until after Ahab's death (I Kings 21:28,29). Evidently it was God's intention to destroy Ahab, Jezebel, and all his offspring at once, and Ahab would be in Jezreel where Naboth had lived. So at the

time of Elijah's prophecy Ahab was scheduled for a peaceful death with the predicted calamities coming on his family later. But because of Ahab's run-in with God's prophet Micaiah, God decided Ahab's new sin should bring its own punishment--a violent death. Thus, he dies in fulfillment of Micaiah's prophecy, and dogs still lick up his blood according to Elijah's prophecy even though it is at Samaria instead of Jezreel.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 5 memory-facts for this event.
2. What promise does Ben-hadad not keep?
3. What city does Ahab really want back?
4. Whom does he persuade to help him?
5. At whose insistence do they call in prophets?
6. How many prophets of Ahab are called in?
7. What is the gist of their message?
8. Who is not altogether pleased in the matter?
9. Why does Ahab not want to summon Micaiah?
10. What do Zedekiah and the prophets do while they wait for Micaiah to come?
11. What does the messenger tell Micaiah?
12. What does Micaiah say to him?
13. What does Micaiah foresee in the coming battle?
14. Tell of Zedekiah's smartness with Micaiah.
15. What does Micaiah say back to him?
16. What order does Ahab give concerning Micaiah?
17. What are Micaiah's parting words to Ahab?
18. What is Syria's battle-plan?
19. What seeming honor does Ahab give to Jehoshaphat?
20. When does Syria quit shooting at Jehoshaphat?
21. What brings about the wounding of Ahab?
22. When does he die?
23. When do dogs lick up Ahab's blood?

33. Jehoshaphat is Rebuked for Helping Ahab

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Chron. 19:1-3.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. The prophet Hanani reproves Jehoshaphat for going to battle with Ahab.
 - b. He also commends Jehoshaphat for his good points.

COMMENTS

We cannot help wondering about Jehoshaphat's thoughts as he makes his way back to Jerusalem following the defeat at Ramoth-gilead. At the beginning of the

battle he was actually near death himself when the Syrians were shooting at him. His friend (?) Ahab, who had put him up as the "target" instead of himself, is now dead, and Micaiah's prophecy has come true (Israel's army is without a shepherd). Jehoshaphat is bound to have some misgivings about the whole matter. Is the matter ended now that the battle is over?

A prophet Jehu, son of Hanani, who in his younger years rebuked King Baasha of the North for his wickedness (I Kings 16:1-4), is now summoned in his older years to intercept Jehoshaphat of the South and first rebuke him ("Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord"—referring to his having helped Ahab) and then encourage him ("Nevertheless there are good things in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God").

It is interesting to know that this same prophet Jehu will write a biography of King Jehoshaphat (II Chron. 20:34).

Upon his return to Jerusalem Jehoshaphat labors to bring all his people (from Beersheba in the south and Mt. Ephraim in the north) back to God.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 2 memory-facts for this event.
2. Jehoshaphat is returning to Jerusalem from where?
3. Who meets him?
4. Where have we come across this prophet earlier?
5. What words of encouragement does he also have for him?
6. What does the king endeavor to do for the people from Beersheba to Mount Ephraim?

34. Ahaziah is Israel's New King

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 22:51-53 and II Kings 1:1.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. He perpetuates both Jeroboam's calf-worship and Ahab's Baal-worship.
 - b. Moab rebels against Israel in his reign.

COMMENTS

Now that Ahab is dead, the North will have a new ruler. Who will he be, and what will he be like?

No aspirant-to-the-throne takes advantage of the sudden and unexpected death of Ahab to seize the throne, but his son Ahaziah is made the next king. Jehoshaphat of the South is now in the seventeenth year of his twenty-five year reign.

What parents are is often reproduced in their children, for often children "learn what they live". With a father and mother like Ahaziah has had (Ahab and Jezebel), we are not surprised that he is an evil ruler also, worshiping Baal and perpetuating Jeroboam's long-standing calf-worship. So God's efforts to gain the allegiance and worship of the North by giving Ahab two significant victories over Syria are not realized as neither he nor his son Ahaziah turn back to Jehovah-worship. And not every effort we put forth to turn individuals from sin to righteousness will succeed either, but we should continue trying just as God did.

Moab's rebelling against being tributary to Israel comes with the death of the powerful Ahab. Ahaziah will not attempt to regain control over Moab, but his successor will.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 2 memory-facts for this event.
2. What event brings Ahaziah to the throne of Israel?
3. In what year of his reign is Jehoshaphat when Ahaziah begins to reign?
4. How is Ahaziah's evil described?
5. What nation successfully rebels against Israel during Ahaziah's reign?

35. Jehoshaphat Reforms His Judicial System

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Chron 19:5-11.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Jehoshaphat places judges in all his fortified cities.
 - b. He establishes a special set of judges in Jerusalem.

COMMENTS

In order to insure that every man's case receives a just hearing, Jehoshaphat places judges in each of Judah's fortified cities. This was a point on which Absalom criticized his father David's government and used it for his own ambitious ends (II Sam. 15:2,3).

Knowing every judge should respect the law of the land, the right of each innocent individual before the law, and the penalty to be placed on each violator of the law, Jehoshaphat charges his appointees with these words: "Take heed what ye do; for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment." And he goes on to warn them about having respect of persons in their judgments, and he also warns them about accepting bribes, which is in harmony with the law of God in Lev. 19:15 ("Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour"). Taking bribes was one of the sins of Samuel's sons: "They were judges in Beersheba. And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment" (I Sam 8:2,3). And the same thing happened in Amos's day: "I know your manifold transgressions, and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right" (Amos 5:12).

At the same time that Jehoshaphat establishes judges in all his major cities, he also establishes somewhat of a "supreme court" in Jerusalem for handling more serious cases and those involving technical interpretations of the law. Commenting on v. 11 "Clarke" says, "Here was a two-fold jurisdiction, ecclesiastical and civil: in the ecclesiastical court Amariah the high-priest was supreme judge; in the civil court Zebadiah was supreme." It is evident the Levites will fill an important place in this new national court.

We might observe it is just such wise and righteous moves as this by King Jehoshaphat that please God, bring His blessings on him, and make him the

great ruler he is. Prov. 29:4 says, "The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts (takes bribes) overthroweth it." "The throne is established by righteousness" (Prov. 16:12).

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 2 memory-facts for this event.
2. What does Jehoshaphat establish in all his fortified cities?
3. What charge does he give them?
4. What does he establish in Jerusalem?
5. What kind of cases will Amariah handle?
6. What kind will Zebadiah?

36. God Gives Jehoshaphat Victory over a Powerful Coalition

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Chron. 20:1-30.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. A great coalition of armies invades Judah.
 - b. Jehoshaphat calls a great fast and prayer meeting at Jerusalem.
 - c. God sends an ambushment among the opposing armies causing them to destroy each other.
 - d. Judah praises God for such a victory.

COMMENTS

A powerful coalition composed of Moab, Ammon, and Edom is conspiring against Jehoshaphat. These are all ancient enemies of Israel. The nations of Moab and Ammon are descendants of Lot's incestuous union with his daughters after their escape from the burning Sodom. Though distantly related to the Israelites through Abraham's father Terah, they have constantly been at odds with Israel. Edom is a nation of Esau's descendants, and the ill-will set up over Jacob's obtaining Esau's birthright and blessing has continued through the centuries in the hearts of their descendants.

Moab and Ammon occupy the country east and south of the land allotted to the two and one-half tribes of Israel living east of the Jordan while Edom occupies the land directly south of the Dead Sea.

This great joint-army is already at Engedi on the west side of the Dead Sea in Jehoshaphat's own domain when he learns about their coming.

Fortunate indeed is a people whose ruler is in touch with God. King Jehoshaphat sets himself to seek the Lord, proclaims a national fast, and gathers people from Judah's various cities at Jerusalem to seek God, and he himself stands in the midst of them in a new court of the temple and prays a great prayer. The Lord loses no time in assuring Jehoshaphat and the people that He will take care of their enemy. One of the men of the group (Jahaziel) is given the inspired message that Judah will not even have to fight. He says, "The battle is not yours, but God's...Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you...Tomorrow go out against them: for the Lord will be with you." These words are very similar to those spoken by Moses when the Egyptians pursued them before they had crossed the Red Sea out of Egypt (Exo. 14:13,14).

We can but imagine the thrill that comes to the hearts of the king and his worshiping subjects as they hear this wonderful promise. Oh, how the Levites do praise God with strong voices! There is not a doubt in their minds, and God will not fail them nor His Word.

In the morning as they leave Jerusalem and go toward Engedi where the great army is, Jehoshaphat urges the people, "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper." He also has singers preceding the army, and hear them sing, "Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth for ever." Various times the Old Testament shows God intervening in the affairs of men to work out everything after the counsel of His own will such as He does here. "Barnes" considers the divinely appointed ambushment to be angels, and it is very likely true. He says, "These liers in wait have been regarded as angels employed by God to confuse the host and cause its destruction, so that the Moabites and Ammonites first united to

destroy the Edomites, and then turned upon each other."

When Jehoshaphat, his army, and the singers arrive on the scene, the ground is covered with the dead bodies of Judah's would-be invaders. Since these ancient warriors have proudly worn much of their wealth on their persons, Judah strips the slain of everything of value (compare I Sam. 31:8). There is so much it actually takes Judah three days to gather all the spoil to carry home with them. But before returning to Jerusalem they hold a great praise service, and the place from henceforth will be known to people as "Berachah", which means "Blessing". As they joyfully make the trip back to Jerusalem, the king heads the procession. What music of psalteries, harps, and trumpets as the procession ends at the temple where they had held their great prayer meeting before departing for the battle they never had to fight! Just as these do not forget the special blessing God has given them, even so we should never fail to thank God for the special blessings He pours out upon us.

Word of all this so spreads that "the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those countries...so the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet... God gave him rest round about." This happens much as Solomon has written: "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. 16:7).

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 4 memory-facts for this event.
2. What three nations come against Judah?
3. Where is their great army when Jehoshaphat learns of their intentions?
4. What does this cause Jehoshaphat to do?
5. What message does God send through Jahaziel?
6. What group praises the Lord with loud voices?
7. Whom does Jehoshaphat have preceding the army as they leave for Engedi?
8. Tell of the way God gives Judah victory.
9. How long does it take Judah to strip the valuables from the dead soldiers' bodies?
10. What happens at Berachah?
11. Where does the victory procession end?

37. The Royal Fleet is Destroyed before Leaving Harbor

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Chron. 20:35-37 and I Kings 22:47-49.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Jehoshaphat and Ahaziah build a fleet of ships at Ezion-geber.
 - b. Because God is displeased with Ahaziah's participation in it, the fleet is destroyed before it can leave the harbor.
 - c. When Jehoshaphat rebuilds the fleet, he does so without Ahaziah's help.

COMMENTS

Before the kingdom of Solomon divided, he utilized two great ports: Joppa for his Mediterranean trade (II Chron. 2:16) and Ezion-geber on the Red Sea for his other trade (I Kings 9:26). They were his gateways to the outside world. Special mention is made in our text that Edom has no king at this time—only a deputy (a subservient ruler). It appears that with Jehoshaphat's victory over the Moab-Ammon-Edom coalition, he is the one who has taken over Edom. Edom is a narrow strip of land running from the Dead Sea on the north to an arm of the Red Sea on the south. Ezion-geber is the great port city on this arm of the Red Sea. Since Jehoshaphat is contemplating doing the same thing Solomon did in building great ships to go to Ophir for gold, it is evident God has blessed him with abundance, or he couldn't be doing this. Now that he appears to control Edom, he can make use of this great port. Ophir is a place famous for its gold (I Kings 9:28; I Chron. 29:4; II Chron. 9:10; Job 28:16; Psa. 45:9; etc.) and is far to the south on Arabia's western shore. "Tarshish" is both mentioned as a place of trade (thought to be "Tarsessus" of Spain at the western-most point of the ancient world) and also as designating the kind of ships being built (probably large, rugged vessels that could make such prolonged sea journeys). (Do you remember when Jonah was running from God's call, he boarded a ship at Joppa for Tarshish-Jon. 1:3?)

To build the kind of ships and the amount of ships Jehoshaphat wants is quite an undertaking, so he and King Ahaziah of the North combine in the venture. But because Ahaziah is so wicked, God is again displeased that Jehoshaphat has allied himself with him, so He sends the prophet Eliezer to prophesy doom on their fleet of brand new ships. After all the time and expense and work that have been expended building these great sea-going vessels, our text says, "They went not; for the ships were broken at Ezion-geber." What breaks them in Ezion-geber harbor? The most obvious and probable is a great storm that dashes the ships to pieces.

Our Biblical account is very brief, but the details in I Kings 22:49 (the verse after telling of the fleet's destruction) has led most scholars to think Jehoshaphat, now understanding why the first fleet was destroyed and still desiring to have vessels on the sea, resumes the ship-building but refuses to have Ahaziah have any part of it. This appears likely, indicating Jehoshaphat has accepted the wrongfulness of his earlier project and is desirous of doing it right this time.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 3 memory-facts for this event.
2. Where is Ezion-geber?
3. Since it is not in Judah, why can Jehoshaphat make use of its harbor?
4. What item from Ophir is he wanting?
5. What mistake does he make in building the ships?
6. How does he pay for his mistake?
7. How do we know he has learned his lesson?

38. King Ahaziah has a Run-in with Elijah

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 1:2-18.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. King Ahaziah is seriously injured from falling out of his upper chamber.
 - b. Elijah sends word to him that he will not recover.
 - c. Two bands and their captains are destroyed when Ahaziah sends them to take Elijah.

- d. A third band and its captain beg for mercy and are spared.
- e. Elijah personally tells the king he will not recover, and he doesn't.

COMMENTS

Ahaziah's reign seems to be one calamity after another: (1) During his reign Moab refuses to be tributary; (2) The fleet he and Jehoshaphat build at Ezion-geber is destroyed; (3) And now he has had a terrible fall down through some lattice-work from his upper chamber, and his condition is grave. He is in only the second year of his reign.

He summons messengers to his bedside and dispatches them to Ekron, a city of the Philistines, to consult its god Baalzebub. He hopes to obtain a message from him that he will get well. We wonder why he doesn't consult his own idol-prophets. Some think Baalzebub of Ekron is known for predicting favorable fortunes.

If you think God has given you nothing but thankless assignments to perform, think of Elijah whose job it seems is always to deliver bad news to kings of the North. We haven't seen Elijah for sometime, but here he comes again. An angel of God sends him to intercept these messengers of the king. He does not introduce himself to them but asks them if it isn't because there is no God in the Northern Kingdom that they are being sent to Ekron. After he tells them to tell their king, "Thus saith the Lord, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die," they turn around and return to Samaria with the message.

Surprised they have gotten back so soon, the king is incensed with the message they bring. He inquires concerning the man who sends the message. Just as soon as they begin describing the man's looks and clothing, he says, "It is Elijah the Tishbite," and he dispatches a captain with fifty soldiers to find him and take him into custody. The detachment stands at the base of the hill

on which Elijah is resting. The captain orders, "Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down." Since he refers to the prophet as a "man of God", Elijah says, "If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty." And immediately God sends fire that destroys them. Elijah's calling down fire on his enemies will be well known among the Jews for generations to come, for when a Samaritan village refused to allow Jesus and His disciples to stay overnight, the sons of Zebedee said, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them even as Elias did?" (Luke 9:54).

One would think Elijah's previous victory over Ahab and the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel and now this destruction of Ahaziah's captain and soldiers at his hand would cause the king to drop the matter, realizing he cannot fight against the prophet's verdict involving his death. But no, the king sends out a second captain with a second set of fifty soldiers. The captain says the same thing, Elijah replies in the same way, and the same fate befalls this captain and his men.

It is obvious the lives of a king's soldiers are very cheap and mean very little to him when Ahaziah sends out yet a third captain and another fifty men. How would you like to be that third captain or one of his soldiers? It looks like "curtains" for them too, except this captain tries a more humble approach to the prophet-in-touch-with-God. First he pleads for his own life and for the lives of his soldiers: "O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight." His attitude and appeal are honored when the angel speaks to Elijah, "Go down with him; be not afraid of him." And he gets down and walks with the group to the bedside of the ailing king. It is noteworthy Elijah is just as courageous in his message in the actual presence of the king as he has been when merely sending a message to him by his Ekron-bound messengers, for at the king's bedside he

says to the king, "Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron, is it not because there is no God in Israel to enquire of his word? therefore thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die." And he dies. Thus comes to an end this son of Ahab and Jezebel, the third king of the Omri dynasty and the eighth king of the Northern Kingdom.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 5 memory-facts for this event.
2. Name three calamities that hit Ahaziah during his brief reign.
3. To what god does Ahaziah send messengers to inquire about his prospects of recovering?
4. How does Elijah know about these messengers?
5. What question and what verdict does Elijah send to the king via his messengers?
6. What surprises Ahaziah about his messengers' return?
7. What displeases the king about their message to him?
8. How do the messengers describe Elijah?
9. Where is Elijah when Ahaziah's soldiers find him?
10. What does the captain say to him?
11. What does Elijah say to him?
12. And what happens to the captain and his men?
13. How many such captains and their men does Ahaziah send to take Elijah?
14. Tell of the last captain's different approach.
15. What does Elijah say to the king in person?
16. What happens to king Ahaziah?

39. Another Son of Ahab Becomes King in the North

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 3:1-3.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Jehoram succeeds his brother as king in the North.
 - b. He puts away his father's image of Baal but continues Jeroboam's calf-worship.

COMMENTS

It is customary for a king's son to follow him to the throne, but since Ahaziah has no son (II Kings 1:17), his brother Jehoram becomes his successor. He too is a son of Ahab and Jezebel. The fact that he is not as evil as his father and his mother recalls the gross evil of their many years heading the

nation. Though it will be Jehu who will later exterminate Baal-worship from Israel, God still takes notice that this king takes some stand against it in that he puts "away the image of Baal that his father had made". Even though he is not good otherwise, God takes notice of and gives him credit for doing this good.

But he is still listed as "evil" because he continues the calf-worship so long ago instituted by the first king of the Northern Kingdom. When we see the way Jeroboam's calf-worship lives on, we cannot help saying, "Oh, that he had started something good!"

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 2 memory-facts for this event.
2. Who is the new king of Israel?
3. What relation is he to his predecessor?
4. Why doesn't a son of Ahaziah follow him to the throne of Israel?
5. Is the new king labeled good or evil?
6. What is his evil?
7. In what way is the new king better than his father?

40. Elisha Sees Elijah Translated

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 2:1-18.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Elisha refuses to be apart from the traveling Elijah.
 - b. The Jordan divides before them as they cross to the east side.
 - c. Elisha requests a double portion of Elijah's spirit.
 - d. Elijah is taken up to heaven.
 - e. The Jordan also divides at Elisha's command.
 - f. The sons of the prophets go on a futile search for Elijah's body.

COMMENTS

The time has drawn near for Elijah's earthly labors to end. He and Elisha are together at Gilgal where he bids Elisha remain while he himself goes to Bethel. From what we read later, we conclude Elisha knows Elijah will be taken from him soon, so he does not want to be left behind. He treasures every precious hour with him who has been a

spiritual "father" to him. In going to Bethel Elijah may be wanting to see the sons of the prophets of this place before departing. God has revealed to the Bethel young men that God will take Elijah away this very day. When they speak of it to Elisha, he says he also knows it but asks them not to talk about it. It is an emotional matter with Elisha.

Elisha also refuses to be left behind at Bethel but accompanies the older prophet down to Jericho, affirming again the double oath, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." By his thus putting both "As the Lord liveth" and "As thy soul liveth" in the same oath, it makes a strong argument for the doctrine of human immortality like God's immortality.

The sons of the prophets here at Jericho approach Elisha with the same information as have those at Bethel, and he likewise asks them not to be talking about it. Just why Elijah keeps speaking to Elisha about remaining behind at all these places is not clear. If he really wants him to remain, Elisha is surely disobeying his orders. Or is he testing him to see if he will accept being separated from him at this time? Or does Elijah want to be psychologically bolstered by Elisha's continued affirmation that he will not be apart from him until he is gone?

As the two prophets head for the Jordan, the young Jericho prophets situate themselves so they can keep the older prophets in view (probably from an eminence). Elijah the Tishbite is a native of Tishbeh (on the east side of the Jordan). He is going to the east side for his departure. Here the unusual experience of not dying but being transported to heaven awaits him. Instead of crossing the Jordan at the ford where travelers customarily do, they come to the historic river where there is no ford and no bridge. Taking his mantle Elijah rolls it into a long, club-like object and swings it down upon the surface of the water, and the river opens a passageway so the two can walk across the river bed even without getting muddy feet!

As soon as they are east of the river, Elijah bids his successor ask what he should do for him before he is taken from him. Elisha loses no time in replying: "Let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." What is meant by a "double portion"? Many commentators take the position exemplified in "Barnes Notes" as follows: "The 'double portion' is that which denotes the proportion of a father's property which was the right of an eldest son (Deut. 21:17). Elisha therefore asked for twice as much of Elijah's spirit as should be inherited by any other of the 'sons of the prophets'." Others hold the view he is asking for a double portion of the Spirit Elijah himself has. In your writer's judgment the remark made by Elijah ("Thou hast asked a hard thing") favors the latter position. Obtaining the requested blessing will be conditioned on Elisha's getting to see Elijah taken away.

The two push ahead, talking as they go. Suddenly a chariot of fire pulled by horses of fire appears, and the older prophet is immediately taken up into heaven by a whirlwind. What is that falling back to the ground? It is Elijah's mantle. And Elisha sees him taken! His request will be granted! As Elisha sees him go, he exclaims about Elijah, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." This remarkable appellation so fittingly stated about Elijah will later be stated by a king about Elisha also when he is on his deathbed (II Kings 13:14).

We can imagine the sorrow Elisha feels as he sees his dear leader suddenly snatched from him never to be with him again. Standing with his clothes rent, emblematic of the sorrow he feels, reality comes home to him (his master has been taken away from him). Seeing the mantle lying on the ground and realizing his request will be honored, he picks up that mantle that was earlier cast on him when he was plowing and that had parted the Jordan when in Elijah's hand. Eager to see the spirit of Elijah manifested through him, he goes directly to the Jordan and smites the Jordan with the mantle, saying, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" His

God is with him, for the waters of the Jordan again open, and he crosses to the west side.

This has been quite a day for the sons of the prophets: They have seen Elijah smite the Jordan, have seen him ascend, and have now seen Elisha smite the Jordan. They concur among themselves, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha," and they go forth to meet and bow themselves before their new superior. They form quite a group in themselves (fifty strong young men). Though not as close to the dramatic ascension as Elisha, they have nevertheless witnessed it from their spot west of the Jordan. The big question in their minds now is, What has happened to Elijah since he was taken up? They fear the Spirit of the Lord who took him away may have cast him on one of the Gilead mountains on the east side of the Jordan. My mind struggles to figure out the nature of their thinking. Are they wanting to go look for Elijah himself or for his body? If for Elijah himself, then they are not conceiving the translation that has taken place. Elijah would still be alive over there, and they want to go see him. But why would God do anything to harm Elijah? On the other hand maybe they understand the separation of body and spirit when one leaves this life. They could have understood, for Solomon had already written Eccl. 12:7 ("Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it"). I think they know he has been caught up to heaven but suppose his body has been deposited somewhere in those bleak mountains east of the Jordan.

Elisha considers it a fruitless journey and discourages their going. But the basis of their concern for the unburied body of one whom they have respected so highly reflects the Jewish concept of the calamity of being unburied. Listen: "If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he" (Eccl. 6:3). They cannot stand not going to look for the body. Realizing it is

not a moral issue Elisha indulges their concern and permits them to go. Fifty men seeking for three days uncovers no trace of the body. Now satisfied he has not been cast on one of the mountains in that wild terrain, they return to Elisha at Jericho. James Smith in his commentary on I and II Kings explains Elisha's statement, "Did I not say unto you, Go not?" from the standpoint that Elisha's knowledge of the situation was being wrongfully called in question by them.

So we indeed do say goodbye to the great prophet Elijah. He is gone. He is no longer a part of this world. Elisha, blessed with a double portion of his spirit, will take over.

Before passing on into our history this side of Elijah, let us share some final considerations about him. (1) The brevity of the Bible's coverage of Elijah robs us of a full personality—picture of the prophet. It appears to this writer he can be quite a non-emotional person. Indications: even though he has been with Elisha several years and knows he is going to be taken away, he would leave Elisha at Gilgal, at Bethel, and at Jericho, and when he leaves he shares no parting instructions nor "God bless you" but only a business-like offer, "What shall I do for thee, before I be taken away from thee?" Nor is there any "Farewell" or "Goodbye" falling from his lips as he departs. However, when Jas. 5:17 says he was a man of "like passions as we are", when we see him fleeing from Jezebel, and when we see him discouraged in the cave at Mt. Sinai, it may be that the above conclusion should be modified. (2) The unusualness of his translation without dying is seen in the fact that only Enoch before him and nobody since him has ever experienced what he did. (3) Jesus' meeting with him and Moses in the Transfiguration is usually interpreted as Moses representing the Law and Elijah the prophets. If so, his being chosen to represent the prophets testifies to how great he was. Some scholars see something else in these two men at the Transfiguration. Since these appear "in glory" with Christ (Luke 9:31), they think

Moses represents the godly deceased at the time of Christ's coming and Elijah those who will be translated when He comes. (4) Are you aware that the Old Testament's last two verses contain a prophecy that God would send "Elijah" before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord (Mal. 4:5,6)? This is why some Jews asked John the Baptist if he was Elijah (John 1:21) and why some thought Jesus was Elijah (Matt. 16:13,14). It is reported that Jewish families at their passover meals leave an empty chair for Elijah. The angel told Zacharias that his son John the Baptist would go before the Lord "in the spirit and power" of Elijah (Luke 1:17), and though John himself did not realize he was fulfilling the "Elijah" prophecy, Jesus said he was the fulfillment (Matt. 17:12,13; 11:13,14). In Elijah's and John the Baptist's rebuking sins (even their kings' sins) together with the solitary manner of their lives, they are strikingly similar. (5) Just as God's name is associated with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (e.g. Exo. 3:6), even so does God's name get associated with Elijah (our text), and if we are obedient to Him, He will also be our God (Rev.21:7)!

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 6 memory-facts for this event.
2. At what three cities west of the Jordan does Elijah seek to leave Elisha?
3. What knowledge do the sons of the prophets have about Elijah?
4. Does Elisha already know it?
5. Who watch as the two great prophets go to Jordan?
6. How do they get to the east side of the river?
7. What request does Elisha make of Elijah?
8. On what condition will the request be fulfilled?
9. Tell of Elijah's translation.
10. How does Elisha get back across the Jordan?
11. What do the sons of the prophets want to do?
12. What do they find on their search?

41. The City of Jericho Asks Elisha's Help

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 2:19-22.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:

- a. Jericho sends for Elisha because of its spring.
- b. He comes and heals the spring.

COMMENTS

Travelers to Jericho today find it an oasis city in the midst of a vast, unbelievable arid desert. Luxuriant vegetation, delicious fruit, and beautiful blossoms greet the traveler as he enters Jericho. Has it always been this way? Evidently, for "Jericho" means "place of fragrance", and your writer has never been anywhere that the fragrance in the air is so pronounced as in Jericho. No wonder the elders of the city said, "The situation of this city is pleasant."

Everything of beauty and productivity at Jericho is traceable to its great spring of water issuing forth as a flowing stream at the base of the mound that was the Jericho of Joshua's day. Our text says for some reason the great spring that has been such a blessing has now become a problem. The King James reading, "The water is naught, and the ground barren," sounds as if it has dried up while other translations say, "The water is bad, and the land miscarrieth" (American Standard); "The waters are bad, and the earth sterile" (Young's Literal). We can see the situation is grave, and the elders of Jericho who realize Elisha has succeeded Elijah seek his help. Upon his arrival he requests two things: a brand new vessel and salt in it. In no way would salt be a natural cure for their spring (see Deut. 29:23 and Judg. 9:45), so the prophet's using such unlikely means demonstrates that the cure is indeed a miracle—which is what they had in mind in sending for him. In recognition of Elisha's great miracle at this spring, the Jericho citizens today refer to it as "Elisha's Fountain".

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 2 memory-facts for this event.
2. What problem arises at Jericho?
3. Who sends for Elisha?
4. How does he proceed to heal the spring?

42. A Bethel Kid-Gang Mocks Elisha

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 2:23-25.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Forty-two Bethel young people ridicule Elisha.
 - b. They are torn by two she-bears.

COMMENTS

This section shows Elisha "on the move", which is somewhat characteristic of him. The various events recorded of him happen at a number of different places. In this study alone we see him going from Jericho (where he has healed the spring) to Bethel (where the golden calves are located), and from Bethel to Mt. Carmel (where Elijah had his contest with the Baal-prophets), and from Mt. Carmel to Samaria (where the Northern Kingdom kings rule).

As he is nearing idolatrous Bethel, he runs into a kid-gang that is up to no good. Observation generally teaches us to beware of "gangs", be they animals or kids. For instance, your pet dog may normally be a nice dog, but he may show another side if he gets in with a gang of dogs. And the same is true of children. Under these conditions more often than not, it seems, the bad comes out instead of the good. Therefore, as parents it is considered wise to keep your child/children at home in free time or with selected playmates than to have him/her a part of some gang.

These may know he is Elisha the prophet of Jehovah, or to them he may be just some bald-headed man about to enter their town. The following will probably show they do recognize him as the prophet after Elijah. When they mock him and say, "Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head," they are not only making fun of his shiny head but are probably making fun of the report that has reached Bethel—that Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind. Hear them roar

with laughter as they say, "Go up...go up."

It is too bad many youngsters are given to making fun of people's unfortunate situations. Adults may talk about others behind their backs, but children spare no feelings—they say what they want to say in the presence of or to the person involved in their "fun" (making fun of their crossed eyes, crooked feet, or whatever else they can find to mock or mimic). Again parentally be sure your child or children are taught it is much better for them to be normal and to thank God for it than to make fun of those who are less fortunate.

But the Bethel young people's laughter is soon turned to fright as two she-bears come out of the woods upon them. A mother bear can be so very vicious (see Prov. 17:12 and II Sam. 17:8). For only two bears to tare forty-two youngsters is evidently traceable to their accomplishing Elisha's curse on them. Neither our English word "tare" nor the Hebrew word from which it is translated throws any specific light on whether the bears actually killed them or seriously injured them. Since they are the recipients of a curse, we would think the bears have had the mastery over them and killed them. On the other hand, if they are not killed, such a brutal attack is to them a grim manifestation of Jehovah's serious displeasure with them.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 2 memory-facts for this event.
2. List the three places named in this event where we see Elisha.
3. Who meets him as he nears Bethel?
4. What do they say to him?
5. How does Elisha respond to their action?
6. What befalls them?

43. God Gives Victory through Elisha

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 3:4-27.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Jehoshaphat agrees to go with Jehoram to put down Moab's rebellion.

- b. Elisha promises both water for the armies and victory over Moab.
- c. Thinking the armies have killed each other, the Moabites are surprised when they come to strip the dead.
- d. The king of Moab offers his son as a sacrifice.

COMMENTS

There is a relationship between v. 5 ("When Ahab was dead...the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel") and II Kings 1:1 ("Then Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab"). The rebellion likely occurred at the time of II Kings 1:1 when Ahab's successor Ahaziah took over, but it is not until our present event under Jehoram that Israel is able to do anything about it.

Mention is made of the great flocks of sheep of the king of Moab. This country east of the Jordan and the Dead Sea is great land for livestock pasture (Num. 32:1-5). For sometime before the death of Ahab, Moab chafed under the yearly tribute it had to pay to Israel (one hundred thousand lambs and one thousand rams along with the rams' wool for that year). The death of Ahab opened the door for Moab's throwing off that yoke, evidently indicating Ahaziah's inexperience would be no match for Mesha and the Moabites.

How successful has Mesha's revolt been during the two years of Ahaziah's reign? Mesha tells his own story of it on what Archaeology calls the "Moabite Stone" found back in 1868 and now in the Louvre at Paris. Chiseled into it is this information: "I, Mesha, king of Moab, made this monument to Chemosh [Moab's god] to commemorate deliverance from Israel. My father reigned over Moab thirty years, and I reigned after my father. Omri, king of Israel, oppressed Moab many days and his son after him [Ahab]. But I warred against the king of Israel, and drove him out, and took his cities, Medeba, Ataroth, Nebo and Jahaz [cities east of the Jordan], which he built while he waged war against me. I destroyed his cities, and devoted the spoil to Chemosh, and the women and girls to Ashtar. I built Qorhah

with prisoners from Israel. In Beth-Diblathaim, I placed sheep-raisers."

Our present event is Israel's "reply" to that rebellion. This is too much annual tribute to forego. The present power of Moab is evidenced in Jehoram's raising a sizable army out of the Northern Kingdom and getting additional armies from Judah and Edom.

One wonders why Jehoshaphat agrees to go on any other project involving a king of Israel since God rebuked him for going to war with Ahab at Ramoth-gilead (II Chron. 19:2) and destroyed the ships he and Ahaziah built at Ezion-geber (II Chron. 20:35-37). "Smith" thinks since Judah has recently experienced a threatened invasion by Moab and its helpers (II Chron. 20:1 ff), Jehoshaphat is willing to help against Moab not so much with the idea of helping Israel as in the interests of his own kingdom.

The question comes up as to which way should they take to Moab. Look at a map of Bible lands, and you will see they either must cross the Jordan and then go south along the east side of the Dead Sea to enter Moab from the north or go south along the west side of the Dead Sea, enter the land of Edom, and then come against Moab from the south. Jehoshaphat recommended the western route and attacking Moab from the south. This is probably recommended from three considerations: (1) Edom being subject to Judah at this time can be enlisted to join them; (2) Moab is less fortified against an attack from the south; and (3) Their troop-movement will not be detected as early.

It is evident they have not sent any scouts ahead, or they would have returned with a report of a lack of drinking water. In time, therefore, they find themselves in a real plight—a lack of water both for the animals (brought along for meat) and the armies. This has happened after they have been joined by the king of Edom (v. 10). Jehoram of Israel evidently is of the "quitter" variety, for he is sure the campaign will end in sure defeat (v. 10). But Jehoshaphat's spirit is not so quickly broken. These two kings illustrate the two

ways people react when calamities arise. Jehoram represents the class that faints and falls apart while Jehoshaphat represents the class that looks to the Lord in prayer and faith. Jesus' parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:12-8) was taught "that men ought always to pray, and not faint" (18:1). Paul had many adversities, but he said, "We faint not" (II Cor. 4:1). A verse that helps your writer is that chiding thought in Prov. 24:10: "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small." The part that faith in God plays in such times is brought out in Psa. 27:13: "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living."

Jehoshaphat inquires if there be a prophet of Jehovah somewhere among them. Unbeknown to the kings the prophet Elisha has been traveling with them (likely divinely dispatched for this occasion). When this long-time servant of the great Elijah is reported among them, Jehoshaphat is happy, saying, "The word of the Lord is with him!" Although neither Elijah nor Elisha are what you would call Southern Kingdom prophets, this king of Judah knows about them. So desperate are the three kings and so much respect do they hold for the prophet that they do not summon him to them but go to him instead. What an honor for the prophet who began as one who "poured water on the hands of Elijah" (v. 11) but now has kings coming to him. Well, "before honour is humility" (Prov. 16:18), and before Jesus was "highly exalted" and given a "name which is above every name", He "humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8-10). We are taught to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God with the assurance He will exalt us in due time (I Pet. 5:6). There is nothing wrong with starting at the bottom and through work and God's blessing rising to places of leadership whether it be in the occupational world or in the church.

As Elisha beholds the kings, he has a character evaluation of both the wicked Jehoram and the righteous Jehoshaphat.

This is evident when he says to Jehoram, "What have I to do with thee? Get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother...As the Lord of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee." And Jehoram evidently respects his evaluation by his silence.

Elisha's only request is that a minstrel come and play music. The request is granted, and inspiration came to him with this message: "Thus saith the Lord, make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith the Lord, ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts. And this is but a light thing in the sight of the Lord: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand," after which they will smite every fenced city and choice place, cut down Moab's good trees, fill up their wells, and throw the stones back on to the field that they had cleared of them.

To ask if God will be able to turn death and defeat into such a victory is to answer it. The next morning water comes from Edom into the valley, filling their ditches with water for them to drink and also to set the stage for Moab's defeat. Even today great rains in these highlands can send big streams of water suddenly into the dry desert valley many miles below, which apparently God does here.

The position of the Moabite army is such that when the sun rises and casts its light on the water-filled ditches, the water looks red (like the light of a rising sun reflected from windows). History has recorded times when coalition armies developed trouble among themselves, and the different segments ended up fighting each other. This did happen to the Moabite-Ammonite-Edomite coalition in II Chron. 20:22-24. So when Mesha sees this "blood-like" water, he concludes this has happened among his would-be attackers, and he is glad, resulting in the joyous battle-cry in the Moabite camp, "Moab to the spoil!" As they rush over supposedly to strip the dead of their

treasures, was ever an army so surprised as when Moab finds all their enemies alive and ready to do battle for the unsuspecting, unorganized Moabites? Hastily they retreat with the western, victorious armies in hot pursuit. Thus the prophesying of Elisha not only comes true but has been the divine means of giving the victory.

In the final stages of the conflict Meshah chooses seven hundred choice men and seeks to break through just to kill the king of Edom (probably because he has been a former ally and is now a part of his opposition). But he is not succeeding, so in desperation he takes his eldest son (the heir to his throne) and offers him to his god Chemosh as a burnt offering. We today are shocked at this human sacrifice, but such was occasionally done among the heathen of those times.

With the Moabite rebellion put down Israel returns to its land, and the two years of freedom from paying tribute to Israel that Moab had enjoyed under Ahaziah now make the returning to this payment all the more bitter ("And there was great indignation against Israel").

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 4 memory-facts for this issue.
2. After whose death does Moab rebel from paying tribute to Israel?
3. Who is king of Moab at this time?
4. What tribute has Moab been paying?
5. What king proposes bringing Moab back under his yoke?
6. What king of Judah agrees to help him?
7. What other king joins them?
8. Which way do they choose to go to attack Moab?
9. What calamity arises?
10. What prophet is among them?
11. How does he speak to the king of Israel?
12. What job does Elisha tell them to do?
13. What does he promise will happen?
14. What fools the king of Moab in the morning?
15. What does he think has happened?
16. What happens when Moab comes to take the spoil?
17. With which king is the king of Moab specifically angry?
18. What does the king of Moab do in desperation?

44. Elisha Solves a Widow's Serious Problem

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 4:1-7.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.

3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. A widow comes to Elisha with her problem.
 - b. She is told to borrow many empty vessels and fill them by pouring into them from her one vessel of oil.
 - c. By selling the oil she is able to pay her debt and have money to live on.

COMMENTS

Both in the Old Testament (Deut. 14:28,29; Deut. 24:19-21) and the New Testament (Jas. 1:27) God has shown a deep concern for widows and those who are victims of circumstances. In the present event we are not surprised God moves Elisha to perform a special miracle to relieve a desperate widow of a situation that will otherwise ruin her life.

She is evidently no stranger to Elisha, her deceased husband having been one of the sons of the prophets who has had a close connection with Elisha (II Kings 2:15). Also she says to him, "Thou knowest that thy servant [her husband] did fear the Lord."

Her husband had borrowed some money but had died before getting it paid back. Devoting oneself to God's service does not mean great financial gain therefrom as seen in the case under consideration, in the fact that the sons of the prophets did not so much as own an ax (II Kings 6:4,5), in Jesus' case (Matt. 8:18-20), and in Peter's case (Acts 3:2-6).

Her husband's death itself has been a great blow, but now the creditor comes to collect the money. She doesn't have it. In Bible days creditors had the right to sell a person to collect a debt (Matt. 18:25). The grief-stricken widow now faces the possible loss of her two sons to the creditor. This will not only multiply her domestic grief but rob her of her future provision through them.

She goes to the prophet Elisha, reminding him of the faithfulness of her husband to the Lord. When he inquires as to what she might have in her house, she mentions only a pot of oil (olive oil, used for so many purposes in Bible days). She has done what we Christians are taught to

do in I Pet. 5:7 ("Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you"). So many cases have been observed of God's turning people's desperation into blessing that it is a well known saying, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." The tide will turn now that she has brought her problem to the man of God. God delights in being good to those who put their trust in Him and who thank Him for what He does for them.

Elisha instructs her to go to her neighbors and borrow empty vessels. He says, "Borrow not a few"—get many of them! He tells her that when she obtains them that with her sons being with her in the privacy of their own dwelling, she is to pour oil out of her vessel into these and to keep pouring into the borrowed vessels until they are all full. She does this, and when the last vessel is full, what a thrill to this needy family to see so much valuable oil in their little house! And they know it is theirs because of a miracle of God performed in their behalf. Their gloom has given way to gladness as they send word to Elisha.

His instruction now is, "Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest." In one miracle God has taken care of their present problem and has also provided for their future. The family can now stay together, and they know God is indeed good and that His eye is upon the righteous (I Pet. 3:12).

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 3 memory-facts for this event.
2. What has happened to this woman's husband?
3. Who was he?
4. Did Elisha know him?
5. Tell of the great problem she has.
6. What does Elisha tell her to do?
7. What miracle takes place in her house?
8. What 2 uses will there be for all this oil?

45. Elisha's Special Room at Shunem

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 4:8-17.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:

- a. A Shunammite couple builds a guest chamber for Elisha.
- b. The couple is rewarded with a son.

COMMENTS

Shunem is near the Hill of Moreh at the east end of the Esdraelon Plain. It is the home of an unnamed "great woman" and her husband who have no children. We wonder why the woman is so prominent in the account while her husband is merely in the background. She is much younger than he and the active one in the home. Nor are we told of the meeting of this woman and the prophet Elisha. She and her husband enjoy having him as a guest whenever he passes through Shunem even though at first they did not realize he was a prophet. We might wonder why he has not told them or why that fact hasn't somehow come out during their conversations. But it is left for the woman to conclude to her husband, "I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually." And he concurs with her expressed proposal to build a small room just for him. How surprised Elisha is the next time he stops and sees his "home away from home"—a nice room furnished with everything he might need (a bed, table, stool, and candlestick). In providing this special chamber she has really gone out of her way to be good to a prophet of God like people do who have God's servants in their homes for meals or overnight. Such goodness is too much for an appreciative person like Elisha. He must see she is blessed with something special just as Naaman wanted to reward Elisha for healing his leprosy (II Kings 5:15,16). So as Elisha stretches out on the bed, surveying his special room with enjoyment, he asks his servant Gehazi (introduced here for the first time) to call the woman. It is evident she has not done this with any thought of being repaid for it. She has done good for goodness' sake alone (the highest type of goodness that can be rendered).

What does the prophet have in mind? His assisting the king of Israel in the

recent victory over Moab has given Elisha a favorable access to the king at Samaria, so he suggests he can speak to the king or to the captain in their behalf. Her answer ("I dwell among mine own people") indicates Elisha's speaking to the nation's leaders might involve a move to another place, and her answer shows she would prefer remaining where they are. "Be it ever so humble," the song says, "there's no place like home." Her contentment with where she is living probably means she would be happy wherever she might live. On the other hand, people who are unhappy will probably be unhappy wherever they might move. Contentment is a great attribute of character, and this woman has it. Upon her reply to Elisha, she departs without any further thought of any special gift.

As Elisha asks Gehazi what he might have to suggest, he suggests her childlessness would make the promise of a child a fitting blessing. This time she is summoned to the doorway where the prophet tells her, "About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son." She is sure this cannot happen to her and her aged husband. In her disbelief she responds much like Abraham did at first (Gen. 17:17), like Sarah (Gen. 18:12), and like Zacharias (Luke 1:18). Still at the prophet's set-time she is blessed with the birth of a son.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 2 memory-facts for this event.
2. Where is Shunem?
3. Who lives here?
4. Who often stops here?
5. What do they build for him because he is a prophet?
6. Who is with Elisha on his next visit here?
7. What does Elisha first think of doing for the couple?
8. What is her answer?
9. What does the prophet now promise her?
10. What is her response?
11. Is the promise fulfilled?

46. Elisha also Performs a Resurrection

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 4:18-37.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.

3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. The boy becomes deathly sick and dies.
 - b. His mother goes and gets Elisha.
 - c. Elisha restores the boy to life.

COMMENTS

We say "Elisha also", for his predecessor Elijah likewise performed a resurrection (I Kings 17:17-23). In both instances it is a son who is raised, and both mothers are prominent in the accounts.

Time has passed since the promised son was born to the Shunammite couple. They have had several years of enjoyment from their son now grown to be a lad. It is harvest time, and the boy's father and the servants are in the harvest field. Like any boy still too young to be included in the labor force, he enjoys being where the action is. While he is in the field watching the men work, a severe headache strikes him. He holds his throbbing head and says to his father, "My head, my head." The father does not realize how serious his son's case is, for he and the other servants go ahead with the work while another carries the boy to the house. In life sometimes things are worse than we realize.

The sympathetic mother tries to comfort the child as she holds him on her lap. But it is a losing battle, for even though she holds him all morning, he dies at noon. Throughout these anxious hours of the morning she has wished for Elisha, but she couldn't leave her son to go get him. Now that he is dead, she hurries to the prophet at Mt. Carmel some fifteen to twenty miles west.

Does she know about Elijah's raising the woman's son at Zarephath? Possibly she has this in mind in not telling her husband about their son's death but asking him for one of the servants and one of the asses (so she can get to Mt. Carmel quicker). Nor does she tell him her purpose when he inquires, "Wherefore wilt thou go to him today? it is neither new moon, nor sabbath."

Mounting the ass she orders the servant to make the beast go as fast as possible unless she bids him otherwise.

From their eminence on the mount Elisha and Gehazi see them coming, and the prophet recognizes her at some distance. He bids Gehazi run and inquire if all is well at her house. Her answer to the servant shows she is putting the servant aside as he proceeds directly to the prophet with her case. In life some of our tasks can be performed by others as well as by ourselves while other tasks require our own presence and attention (the woman would not converse with Elisha's servant sent by him, nor was the same servant dispatched by Elisha able to resurrect the boy).

Upon her arrival she falls at Elisha's feet and holds them in an emotional outburst. Gehazi doesn't understand and seeks to thrust her away. But Elisha says, "Let her alone: for her soul is vexed within her: and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me." This statement of Elisha's is useful in accounting for John the Baptist's saying he was not Elijah (John 1:21) when Jesus later said he was (Matt. 11:13,14). Even a prophet knew only the things revealed to him. If God chose not to reveal to John that he was Elijah, he had no way of knowing he was.

Her first words to Elisha reflect complaint: "Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?" At first, of course, she couldn't think she was going to be blessed with a child. Then he was born, and she has loved him so much. Now he is gone. Her sorrows now make her think it would have been better not to have had the child.

Sensing the child is dead, Elisha gives his staff to Gehazi and tells him to hurry to her house and lay it on the boy's face. But this does not satisfy the mother. She says, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." So Elisha accompanies her back to Shunem. On their way they meet the returning Gehazi who reports that nothing happened when he laid the staff across the boy's face. We are not told the effect his report has on

the mother. Upon entering the house Elisha goes directly to the familiar chamber, shuts the door behind him, and prays. Arising from prayer he uses the same procedure his respected predecessor employed at Zarephath (I Kings 17:21)—he stretches himself upon the boy's lifeless form. The warmth of his body begins to warm the lad's body. But still no sign of life. As the prophet paces the floor in the room, he appears to be in a quandary. The staff sent by Gehazi did not work, and now he is not seeing the expected results. For some reason God is delaying the miracle—maybe for Elisha's sake (has he been taking miracle-power for granted?), maybe for the mother's sake (who spoke critically to the prophet on the mountain). God's purpose in momentarily withholding the miracle is evidently accomplished, for when Elisha returns to stretching himself upon the child again, the boy opens his eyes and sneezes seven times. How comforted Elisha is as he bids his servant come up. Gehazi then calls the woman to come up. When she does, her son is alive!

This resurrection is one of only three resurrections recorded in the Old Testament. The others were Elijah's raising the widow of Zarephath's son (referred to above) and the resurrection of the dead man hurriedly buried in Elisha's sepulchre—which is yet to be studied (II Kings 13:20,21).

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 3 memory-facts for this event.
2. Where does the boy get sick?
3. What part of him hurts?
4. Who holds him until he dies?
5. Whom does the bereaved mother want to see?
6. Where is he?
7. How does she get where he is?
8. What does the woman do on arrival?
9. When she is finally able to talk, what does she say?
10. What does Elisha send Gehazi to do?
11. What does she say that causes Elisha to go with her?
12. What success does Gehazi have?
13. What is bewildering to the prophet?
14. How many times does the child sneeze?
15. How does the woman show her great respect for the prophet?

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 4:38-41.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. One of the sons of the prophets mistakenly makes some poisonous soup.
 - b. Elisha miraculously makes the soup safe to eat.

COMMENTS

Say, what has happened to the kings in this divided kingdom history study? Have you noticed the various events of Elijah's and Elisha's lives are so interesting that for awhile now we have been following their lives instead of events involving kings? In time, of course, we will get back to the kings but not before we follow several more events in Elisha's interesting prophetic career.

Elisha is back at Gilgal where one of the groups of the sons of the prophets is. One day when they are sitting before him, the prophet gives orders to his servant to make some pottage (broth) for the young men. With a dearth upon the land food supplies are in short measure, and people are eating whatever they can find. From all we read about the sons of the prophets, they live very frugal lives. God's servants have always been more connected with work than wealth.

One who goes out into the field to get herbs for the pottage comes across a wild gourd vine from which he fills his lap with its fruit. It was "probably the wild, or so-called 'squirting' cucumber, which he mistakes for the ordinary cucumber, one of the most common and favorite articles of food in the East" (Edersheim).

The abundance he brings back and shreds into the broth makes it a much awaited meal. But as soon as they begin to eat, the error is detected, and they cry out to the prophet in fear, "There is death in the pot," and they immediately stop eating it. The one who shredded the poisonous vegetable into the pottage thought that what he was doing was all

47. A Hard-Times Miracle

right. Sincerity apart from knowledge is not enough but can be tragic (Prov. 14:12).

But there is no need to dump the pottage out when the miracle-working prophet is present. God's miracle-power can overcome poison: Jesus said if the apostles drank any deadly thing, it would not hurt them (Mark 16:18), and Paul shook a venomous beast off his hand into a fire with no resulting damage (Acts 28:3-5). So Elisha proceeds with another miracle. Again it will be a miracle employing "means" such as occasionally characterize a miracle: the tree cast into the bitter waters at Marah (Exo. 15:23-25), the salt cast into the Jericho spring (II Kings 2:21), the moistened clay for the blind man's eyes (John 9:6,7), the anointing oil in miracles of healing by the apostles (Mark 6:13), etc. The means used in this present miracle is meal put into the pottage. This being done, the eating continues.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 2 memory-facts for this event.
2. Where is Elisha at this time?
3. Who are with him?
4. What food is the servant preparing for them?
5. What is the cause of alarm?
6. "O thou man of God, there is _____ in the pot."
7. How is the problem taken care of?

48. Elisha Multiplies Loaves

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 4:42-44.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. A limited amount of food is on hand to feed one hundred men.
 - b. Through Elisha's miraculous help they all eat and have food left over.

COMMENTS

Prov. 3:9 says, "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase." Thus we see a man from Baalshalisha (a city in the maritime plain north of Lydda) bringing his "firstfruits" to the man of God (Elisha). Normally the firstfruits

would be brought to the priest, but as "Barnes" observes, "It appears by this that the Levitical priests having withdrawn from the land of Israel (See II Chron. 11:13,14), pious Israelites transferred to the prophets, whom God raised up, the offerings required by the Law to be given to the priests (Num 18:13; Deut.18:4)." We might observe that the man bringing the firstfruits might have excused himself that since there is no faithful Levitical priesthood, he is not obligated to give his firstfruits. But recognizing Elisha as a man of God, he brings them to him. Would we have done the same, or would we have kept them and used them for ourselves?

The prophet receives it from the giver and orders his servant to set it before one hundred men (probably the sons of the prophets here at Gilgal). The amount would normally be enough to feed twenty men—not one hundred. When his servant balks at such an order, Elisha assures him "They shall eat, and shall leave thereof." And just as Jesus on two different occasions multiplied small quantities of food to make them ample to feed large multitudes (five thousand and four thousand), so Elisha miraculously feeds this group with this limited supply of food. And "they did eat, and left thereof, according to the word of the Lord." Notice here that Elisha's word is "the word of the Lord".

"Clarke" observes, "This is something like our Lord's feeding the multitude miraculously. Indeed, there are many things in this chapter similar to facts in our Lord's history, and this prophet might be more aptly considered a type of our Lord than most of the other persons in the Scriptures who have been thus honoured." Yes, there are similarities between this miracle and Jesus' miraculous feedings: (1) they both began with limited quantities; (2) the servants were told to give food to the people; (3) the servants could see the problem of not having enough for everybody; (4) all ate; and (5) there was food left over.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 2 memory-facts for this event.
2. What does the man bring to Elisha?
3. What does Elisha order done with it?
4. How many is he going to feed?
5. What promise does Elisha make?
6. Does the promise come true?

49. A Great Syrian General is Healed

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 5:1-27.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. The Syrian captain Naaman has leprosy.
 - b. His slave girl tells him of the prophet in Israel who can heal him.
 - c. Elisha tells him to dip seven times in the Jordan.
 - d. He is at first upset with such a ridiculous proposal.
 - e. But when he changes his mind and obeys, he is healed.
 - f. Elisha refuses his generous reward, but Gehazi covets the reward and ends up with leprosy.

COMMENTS

We are here introduced to a foreign military captain (Naaman, head of the Syrian army). He is held in the highest esteem by his king because of a great deliverance to Syria he has brought about, which the Bible says, "By him the Lord had given deliverance to Syria." This deliverance was probably from the oppressing hand of Assyria. We can be sure God had some purpose either in favoring Syria or bringing the man Naaman into the limelight as a background to this miracle.

Verse 2 sounds like border-raids by the Syrians against Israel. In one of these a young girl is taken. Providentially she becomes maid to Naaman's wife. When Naaman becomes leprous, everything looks dark for him and those of his household. By this time the maiden has become a part of the household, so she too is concerned for her master. As a young girl she has adjusted to being a slave which would have been more difficult for an adult to do.

One day she says to Naaman's wife, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." It is obvious the many miracles of Elisha have become household knowledge throughout the Northern Kingdom. The maiden's words are carried by others to Naaman himself. He wishes to go to Elisha, and his king provides him with a letter to the king of Israel.

Outfitted with the king's letter and taking with him a tremendous reward for the prophet (ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment) Naaman is off for Samaria full of optimism concerning the prospect of being healed.

Arriving at Samaria he is shown to the palace. The king of Israel reads the letter. Does he feel complimented that the king of Syria has turned to him for help? (Obviously it is a time of peace between the two nations, or the Syrian king would not be sending his general into Israelite territory with such a request.) No, he does not interpret it as a compliment but as an occasion to resume old hostilities between their countries. The king of Israel does not know the background of Naaman's coming—Naaman's maid's suggestion. Evidently the letter says nothing about the prophet Elisha.

The king is in a quandary as to what to do. He can't heal Naaman, and to send him home as he came will appear as a refusal to help. At this point Elisha sends this message to his king: "Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel!" (and so will Israel's king).

As Naaman rides away to the prophet's house, the king is relieved, and Naaman is soon to be where his maid knew he should be (with Elisha instead of the king of Israel). Likely Naaman sends a servant to the door, and the prophet responds by sending his servant (likely Gehazi) with this surprising message: "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean."

There is nothing hard to understand about the instructions. But both the instructions and the way his case is handled are totally different from what the great general had envisioned. In his rage he reveals what he had expected and also his contempt for the thought that dipping in Jordan will do him any good: "Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean?" (Being mountain streams the Syrian rivers are much clearer than the silt-laden Jordan.)

It is obvious from the general's rage he is not intending to follow the instructions, and to him his whole trip has been futile. Besides, his hope of being cured is suddenly dashed to the ground. At this point his servants venture to offer him some sensible reasoning: "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" Yes, he would have carried out difficult instructions if such had been issued. Besides, it won't hurt to follow Elisha's instructions. While Naaman defers to carry out Elisha's order, Elisha is in his house fully aware of the general's thinking. He knows if Naaman obeys, the leprosy will be gone, but if he disobeys, it won't be. Notice, too, he doesn't go out and reason with him, nor does he send out a modified set of instructions that might be more acceptable to him. Here are lessons for us who preach God's message to people.

Naaman's servants' words evidently get through to him even though a general does not usually follow servants' suggestions. But if there is any way to get well, he is now at least willing to try it. So eastward the Syrian entourage heads. Jordan, here we come.

See the great military leader humbling himself as he leaves his chariot and walks out into the stream and dips himself once, twice, three times, etc. The count is

important, for the cure involves a definite number of dips. All remains the same with his disease until he dips the seventh and final time. And then "his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was healed!" Oh, how happy he is! How glad he is he did obey the prophet's order!

There is an interesting analogy between Naaman's dipping in Jordan and baptism today. Some people object to the necessity of baptism, saying water has nothing to do with one's salvation. Does water have anything to do with Naaman's cure? Yes, it is that in which he is to dip. Water doesn't cure him, but he isn't cured without it. Notice, too, that exact obedience is necessary: the right river, the right act (dipping), and the right number of dips.

So thankful is Naaman that even though he is actually part way back to Damascus here at the Jordan, he returns a day's drive to Samaria to give Elisha a reward. He personally goes to the door of the prophet and stands healed before the man of God and proclaims, "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel," and he goes on to ask for two loads of Israelite soil to take back with him (seemingly on which to erect his own altar to Jehovah), for he says, "Thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD." Realizing his own king will still require him to go with him into the house of his god, Naaman says he will be doing it purely as a matter of orders and not as a matter of personal religion, and he states, "In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing."

When Naaman brings forth all the gold and silver and changes of garments, Elisha responds like Daniel will years later when Belshazzar will offer him great gifts and honors for interpreting the handwriting on the wall (see Dan.

5:16,17). Elisha refuses the gifts even though strongly urged by Naaman to receive them. Obviously Elisha is not mercenary in serving God. If he were, he would tell Naaman ahead of time what the bill will be. Would most of God's servants today do as Elisha does here?

So Naaman departs for home with all his gifts, with two mules loaded with Israelite soil, and with a healthy body!

Now Elisha's servant Gehazi would like to have some of the treasure and clothing that Naaman offered Elisha. And his covetousness caused him to fabricate a lie in order to obtain some. He knows what he is going to say as he runs to overtake Naaman: "My master [Elisha] hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments." Believing the request to be from Elisha, Naaman is willing—in fact, he urges him to take two talents of silver so each will have a talent of silver as well as a change of garment. In fact, Naaman's goodness includes dispatching two of his servants to carry it for Gehazi. Naturally Gehazi does not want the servants to go along, or Elisha will find out what he is doing. When they get to a certain tower, he puts the items in the tower, and the men return to Naaman.

Lest Elisha miss him, Gehazi promptly returns to the prophet's presence. The prophet knows everything Gehazi has done. He opens the conversation by asking Gehazi where he has been. Like a disobedient child Gehazi answers, "Nowhere" (a lie). It has been said that a lie is often a twin-sin, meaning a lie is often told in an attempt to cover up some sin already committed. This is what Gehazi is doing.

Now Elisha shows he is fully aware of Gehazi's covetous deed: "Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?" And in his following question Elisha reveals what he could have done with the amount offered him of which Gehazi now holds a part: "Is it a time to receive money, and to

receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?"

And what will Gehazi's punishment be for coveting, lying to Naaman, and now lying to Elisha? "The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever," and the harsh judgment falls on him immediately, for "he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." Gehazi had hoped to better himself, but his sin has ruined him instead.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 6 memory-facts for this event.
2. Tell about Naaman (who he is, his nationality, his position, his disease, etc.).
3. Who suggests Elisha can cure him?
4. Where does Naaman's king send him?
5. What does the king of Israel think when he reads the letter?
6. What message does Elisha send to his king?
7. What does Naaman think Elisha will do when he arrives at his place?
8. What does Elisha tell him to do?
9. What is Naaman's first reaction to Elisha's instructions?
10. Who persuades Naaman to do what Elisha has said?
11. Does Naaman decide to comply?
12. Where does Naaman go after being cured?
13. What does Elisha refuse?
14. What does Gehazi tell Naaman?
15. What does Elisha tell Gehazi?

50. The Borrowed Ax

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 6:1-7.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. As the sons of the prophets are cutting down trees to enlarge their living quarters, the head of a borrowed ax comes off and falls into the river.
 - b. Elisha miraculously retrieves the ax head.

COMMENTS

In spite of the wickedness in the Northern Kingdom an encouraging sign is that the number of the sons of the prophets has grown to the point that their living quarters are too limited. They request permission from Elisha to go to

the timber along the Jordan and get some beams for constructing something larger. Each young man is to be involved. As you can see, theirs is a self-help project. Money is not on hand to hire the building constructed. Much of God's work has to be done on this basis for lack of available funds.

Permission is granted, and Elisha accompanies them upon request of one of the young men. All is going well as the sound of "chop, chop, chop" is heard throughout the area. But all of a sudden the unexpected happens: the ax-head flies off and goes into the river. Matters are made worse when the user exclaims, "Alas, master! for it was borrowed." Is something borrowed more apt to get lost or broken, or does it just seem that way?

Will the prophet involve miracle-power in something so trivial as to recover an ax-head? He asks to be shown the exact place where the head disappeared. He cuts off a stick and throws it into the river at the spot. And up comes the borrowed item to the joy of the group. It is a matter of course to reach out and take the head and put it back on the handle and continue its use.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 2 memory-facts for this event.
2. What problem faces the sons of the prophets as our event opens?
3. What do they propose doing?
4. Who accompanies them?
5. What calamity happens?
6. How is the matter taken care of?

51. Elisha Foils the Syrian King's Plans

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 6:8-23.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Elisha keeps tipping off his own king concerning the Syrian king's plans.
 - b. The Syrian king dispatches an army to take Elisha.
 - c. Elisha blinds the army and leads it to Samaria.
 - d. He opens their eyes in Samaria where they find themselves captives of Israel.

- e. Syria is glad to be released unharmed.

COMMENTS

The king of Syria plans an attack against Israel. He gets everybody stationed, but his plans misfire because Elisha has tipped off his own king concerning these plans. The Syrian monarch revises his plans, and again the king of Israel escapes. We are not exactly sure how many times this happens, but our text says it is "not once nor twice".

The first time was written off as a coincidence by the king of Syria, but when this continues to happen, he is convinced of sabotage within his own ranks. The reputation of Elisha has continued to spread, and one answers the king in these words: "Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber." Well, if that's who's doing it, let's go get him. This is the king's intention, and he dispatches spies to find out Elisha's whereabouts. Learning he is in Dothan (a place about twelve miles north of Samaria and just south of the Esdraelon Plain) the king sends a large army of men with horses and chariots to Dothan.

One morning when Elisha and his servant arise, the servant sees they are completely surrounded by this Syrian military detachment. The servant (probably the leprous Gehazi's successor) shows fear and alarm when he says to Elisha, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" By Elisha's calm answer you would think Heb. 13:5,6 is already written, and that Elisha has read it, for it says, "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." Listen to Elisha's answer: "Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." And then he goes on to show his less experienced servant the truth of what he has just said: "Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of

the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." No wonder Elisha is unafraid! It is really the Syrians who need to be afraid, as we shall see.

As the army approaches Elisha, he calls on God to smite it with blindness. How stunned with surprise each Syrian is to find he is not only blind but all his comrades are too. Elisha approaches them in their blindness and offers to lead them to the man they are seeking. You would think they would want someone to lead them back to Syria instead. But they consent and follow him. But they gullibly go with their friendly guide not realizing he is leading them south to Samaria where the king of Israel is. Upon arrival Elisha prays once more—this time for their eyes to be opened. And are they surprised again—this time to find themselves in Samaria as captives of the very man they are seeking, of the king of Israel, and of Samaria's soldiers!

The king of Israel realizes Elisha is really the champion on this occasion, so he asks him what he should do with the Syrians. His thought is to smite them, but Elisha looks on them as war captives and responds by saying, "Wouldest thou smite those whom thou has taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow?" Obviously he wouldn't. Elisha directs him to "set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master." Bread-and-water is prisoner food. The king goes far beyond this when he prepares a great provision for them before releasing them.

Can't you imagine the conversation among the Syrian soldiers as they walk back to Damascus? They have had a trip full of unprecedented surprises, and they have learned the man whom they went to arrest has been the author of all their surprises.

Syria decides to leave Israel alone.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 4 memory-facts for this event.
2. What upsets the king of Syria?
3. What does he think is happening?
4. What does one of his men tell him about Elisha?

5. What does he send an army to do?
6. What scares Elisha's servant one morning?
7. What prayer does Elisha pray?
8. What does his servant see?
9. What miracle does he perform on the Syrian soldiers?
10. Where does he lead them?
11. What does Elisha's king ask him?
12. What is his answer?
13. What decision does Syria make concerning Israel?

52. Elisha Predicts Incredible Plenty

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 6:24-7:20.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. The Syrian army surrounds Samaria until the people are starving within.
 - b. The king of Israel's intention to kill Elisha is stopped by Elisha's prediction of incredible plenty by the next day.
 - c. The king's representative who questions the prediction is trampled underfoot in fulfillment of Elisha's personal prediction concerning him.

COMMENTS

Quite some time has passed since Elisha's "victory" over the Syrian army. This time the Syrian army encloses Israel's capital city in a starvation siege. In such warfare a greater power surrounds a city so nobody can either go out or come in. In time all foodstuffs within a city will be exhausted, and then the aggressor can easily break through and slaughter at will with a limited loss of his own men.

This "waiting" has been going on for sometime, and there is now a great famine within Samaria. Prices have skyrocketed (even an ass' head is selling for an exorbitant price as is dove's dung. The bony head will be boiled for broth, and the dung will be fuel.) So bad are conditions that a case of cannibalism is brought directly to the king himself as follows. While he is making an inspection tour around the top of the city's wall to view conditions both outside and inside the wall, he is accosted by a woman who tells him of an agreement she has with another woman. According to their

agreement they had eaten this woman's child yesterday, but the other woman now refuses to give up her child for today's food. Moses predicted such terrible conditions would prevail if Israel forgot God (see Deut. 28:52,53).

This report is too much for the sackcloth-wearing king as he speaks hatefully of Elisha. Why does he have it in for Elisha? Has Elisha called for this situation as punishment from God, or is the king blaming him for not using his miracle-power to change the situation? We think the former.

At that very moment the elders of the nation are at Elisha's house conferring with him. Fully aware of the king's intention to kill him, Elisha tells them "this son of a murderer" (son of Ahab, the murderer of Naboth) is sending a messenger to behead him, and he tells them to keep the door against the messenger, stating the king is close behind him.

Before he is through the above statement, the king's messenger is at his door. The prophet speaks (probably through the door), saying, "This evil is of the Lord." The next statement ("What should I wait for the Lord any longer?") we are attributing to Elisha, indicating it is time now for him to perform another miracle with national significance. So he says to the messenger, to the king, and to the king's "right hand man", "Hear ye the word of the Lord: Thus saith the Lord, To morrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria." What a thing to predict for a starved city and a price-inflated time! The king's "right hand man" exclaims in disbelief, "If the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" And the prophet replies, "Thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not eat thereof." As we shall see in the man's case, it does not pay to disbelieve God, His prophets, or His Word.

King Jehoram doesn't love Elisha, but he does respect his predictions, for he has seen them come to pass in the war with Moab and in the case of Naaman's

leprosy. So since he is prophesying such good for the city, he does not carry out his plan to behead Elisha.

But how is such a prediction to be fulfilled? From where is this fine flour and barley to come and in such abundance the price will be so cheap? God, who inspires the prophet's predictions, has His way of bringing this prediction to pass. And He will use four lowly lepers and not the king nor his army. The means He will use brings to mind the "base things" and "things which are despised" of I Cor. 1:28.

What about these lepers? They also are victims of this famine. To sit longer is merely to await death for them. And since the famine is in the city, it will do them no good to try to get into it. Their best option seems to be to go begging at the Syrian camp. If the Syrians kill them, they are going to die of starvation anyway, and if they feed them, they will live. So they decide to give it a try, but they decide not to go to their camp directly from Samaria's gate but to approach their camp from the other side ("the uttermost part of the camp").

As they make their way around and then arrive at the other side of the camp, how surprised they are to find the camp vacated! Where are the Syrians? Well, God has caused them to hear the noise of chariots, horses, and a great host. The Syrians concluded it was hired help (supposedly the Hittites and the Egyptians). At the time there was just enough twilight left for the fearful Syrians to grab what they could and escape for their lives. Thus the forsaken camp.

Oh, what a feast the hungry lepers have! Then after eating their fill, they gleefully begin plundering the campsite of silver and gold and raiment. What an unexpected turn of events for them! But one of them has a conscience with a resulting fear. He says to his comrades, "We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household." And the others concur. If they think they

have good news to tell immediately, what about us who have the Good News for a lost world? What about our conscience? What about our fear of not sharing it?

But the king is skeptical, fearing it to be a military trick whereby the Syrians are hiding, just waiting for Samaria to open the gates, and they can pour forth into their city. Yet he does order an investigation, and there is found a path of dropped garments and vessels all the way to the Jordan. So the camp is indeed evacuated. The Syrian flour and barley are brought to the gate of Samaria for governmental sale to the starving people. The prospect of food has turned the populace into animals rushing for food, and the king's "right hand man" who has been appointed to be in charge of the food sale is knocked down in the mob and trampled underfoot. In his death is fulfilled the prediction he will see this but not eat of it.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 3 memory-facts for this event.
2. What is causing a famine in Samaria?
3. What problem does a woman bring to the king?
4. Whom does he blame for their terrible condition?
5. What does he vow to do about it?
6. What good news does Elisha predict that causes the king to spare him?
7. What does the king's "right hand man" exclaim?
8. How does Elisha reply to him?
9. What decision do four lepers make?
10. In what condition do they find the Syrian camp?
11. Why is it thus?
12. What does the king fear is taking place?
13. How does the king's "right hand man" die?

53. The Shunammite Woman and Her Land

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 8:1-6.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. While the Shunammite woman is out of the country during the drought, another has taken over her property.
 - b. He will not vacate upon her return to Shunem.
 - c. When she comes to the king with her problem, Gehazi is telling the king about Elisha's miracles including the resurrection of her son.

- d. The king orders her land restored to her plus its crops while she was away.

COMMENTS

The Bible's coverage of the tremendous prophetic career of Elisha continues with another interesting event—a prophetic career not distinguished by long-range Messianic prophecies (he predicted none) but by predictions with immediate fulfillments and great miracles performed for the benefit of contemporary individuals like Naaman and the Shunammite woman and for the benefit of contemporary groups like Jericho and the sons of the prophets.

As we begin a consideration of the present event, we need to back up somewhat in time for its setting. Is Elisha's announcement to this woman of the coming drought following the last event studied (is there another famine coming?), or does her coming back into the land follow the last event because that famine is now over? In v. 1 the American Standard reads that Elisha had spoken to her in times past of the coming famine. I take it that sometime before the most recent event(s) studied, Elisha had spoken to her of the coming years of famine, that she believed him and left her country for those famine years, and that now she is back and is bringing her problem to the king. This fits the different tenses of the verbs in this section, and coming on the heels of Elisha's great miracle of "plenty" for Samaria probably accounts for the king's special interest in the other miracle-reports concerning Elisha.

Let us back up then to Elisha's announcement of the famine. Is it also possible this is the same famine that was on when Elisha healed the broth for the sons of the prophets, the "death-in-the-pot" incident (II Kings 4:38-41)? The fact the Lord "called for" this famine shows it to be sin-related. This good woman, of course, was not connected with the sin, but if she had stayed in the land, she too would have suffered because of it. She went to

sojourn in Philistine country as Abraham (Gen. 20:1) and Isaac (Gen. 26:1) had done before her. Like Egypt, Philistia often escaped famines that struck other places.

In her leaving Shunem for the duration of the drought, the prophet Elisha loses his good home at her house. In this, though, we see the prophet's unselfishness in his thinking of her personal welfare for the famine years rather than his own.

The time of her return is providentially timed with King Jehoram's asking Gehazi about the numerous miracles of Elisha. Jehoram has to be impressed by the prophet's great miracle at Samaria when he himself could do nothing about the food shortage prevailing throughout his city (II Kings 6:24-26). In the honesty of his own heart he has to know the "prophet" was more powerful in the matter than the "king". It is as Gehazi is reciting the unusual resurrection of the Shunammite boy that his mother comes to the king on business, and the boy is with her! Gehazi can hardly believe his eyes when he sees them just as he is telling about the miracle involving them. Note the providential timing. He exclaims to the king, "This is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life!" To see the very boy who was resurrected and to talk with his mother about it makes Gehazi's report more sure and more impressive to the king.

Now when she reports her problem (a stranger is living in her house, farming her land, and refusing to get out), the king is immediately on her side. He summons an officer to go with her to see that her house and land are restored as well as the fruits of her land while she was away.

Gehazi's connection with this event poses a problem. Since Naaman's cure, Gehazi has been a leper. Some say this event, therefore, has to be out of chronological order, this happening before he became leprous. But I am not comfortable with this thought. "Clarke," I think, more accurately observes that the king has an insatiable curiosity to know the private history of a man who had done

such astonishing things, and from whom could he get this information except from the prophet's own confidential servant? ...As to the circumstances of Gehazi's disease, he might overlook that, and converse with him, keeping at a reasonable distance, as nothing but actual contact could defile."

We might observe also Jehoram asks Elisha's servant for the information rather than the prophet himself because he knows Elisha does not think very highly of him (see II Kings 3:13,14), and he also recalls in the last event he had once vowed to take his life (II Kings 6:31) before Elisha performed the great miracle for his city.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 4 memory-facts for this event.
2. Where does the Shunammite woman go during the famine years?
3. What problem does she face upon her return?
4. Which miracle of Elisha is Gehazi telling the king about when the woman comes with her problem?
5. What order does the king give concerning her?

54. The Syrian King Consults Elisha

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 8:7-15.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Ben-hadad of Syria in his sickness sends for Elisha.
 - b. Elisha predicts his messenger Hazael will become Syria's king.
 - c. Hazael returns and smothers Ben-hadad and takes over in his place.

COMMENTS

What is Elisha doing in Damascus, Syria's capital? Since this event will introduce us to Hazael, one of the men God talked about to Elijah (I Kings 19:15-17), God has likely sent him here in connection with Hazael's becoming king of Syria. That is what comes out of this visit.

Elisha is apparently safe in Syria as well as in Israel, for his miracles involved in healing Syria's general Naaman (II Kings 5:10,14) and his handling the whole Syrian army (II Kings 6:8-23) have gained him a reputation so that even foreign countries respect him.

At this time the Syrian king Ben-hadad is sick, and hearing Elisha is in the city, he desires a good word from him that he will recover. His thought is if Elisha says he will recover, he will. Hoping to gain his favor, he sends a tremendous gift to him—a gift of "every good thing of Damascus" borne on forty camels! Barnes observes, "Forty camels were laden with it, and this goodly caravan paraded the streets of the town, conveying to the prophet the splendid gift designed for him. Eastern ostentation induces donors to make the greatest possible show of their gifts, and each camel would probably bear only one or two articles." Even so it still represents a tremendous gift for Elisha. Your writer's guess is the prophet does not accept it—he didn't Naaman's great gift (II Kings 5:5,15,16).

The man whom the king sends to make the inquiry is Hazael. Elisha says to tell the king, "Thou mayest certainly recover." Then to Hazael the prophet says about Ben-hadad, "Howbeit the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die." In other words the king is going to die even though it will not be from his sickness.

One has to figure out the pronouns in v. 11. Is this verse talking about Elisha or Hazael—or both? In view of later verses it seems it is Elisha who looks and looks at Hazael without saying a word until Hazael is ashamed and finally asks, "Why weepeth my lord?" He says it is because of what he can prophetically foresee about Hazael—that he will be utterly cruel in the mistreatment of Elisha's own people. Though Hazael cannot foresee this at this time, according to Amos 1:3,4 this is the way he will turn out.

It is obvious from the American Standard that Hazael does not yet visualize himself in such a powerful act,

for he says, "What is thy servant, who is but a dog, that he should do this great thing?" (v. 13) to which Elisha says, "The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria."

The king is happy upon Hazael's return, for he tells him that Elisha has said, "Thou shouldest surely recover." Now David knew he was to succeed Saul as king of Israel, but he did nothing to hasten the time. But Hazael is of a different spirit, for on the following day he takes a water-saturated cloth into the king's chamber and overpowers the helpless king as he smothers him to death and immediately takes over as king.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 3 memory-facts for this event.
2. Why does Ben-hadad send Hazael to Elisha?
3. Tell of the gift the king sends to Elisha.
4. Will the king die of his present sickness?
5. What did God reveal to Elisha concerning Hazael's future?
6. Why does Elisha look intently at Hazael and weep?
7. How does Ben-hadad die?

55. Jehoram Becomes Co-Regent with Jehoshaphat

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 8:16.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram begins to rule alongside his father.
 - b. Jehoram is ruling in the North.

COMMENTS

Usually the death of the king takes place before a new king is crowned either in Judah or Israel. Normally we read the king slept with his fathers (died), and his son reigned in his stead. But Jehoshaphat, who has been king of Judah during the Elijah-Elisha years, is still king in the South, and he will follow a different procedure. While he is still living, he personally has his firstborn son crowned co-regent with him. We are not told why, but it may have been to give some relief to Jehoshaphat or to be sure the proper son will be ruling after his death or to train him in ruling

before it all falls into his lap when his father dies. In the same way some colleges employ the same procedure, installing a new president to serve a while under the existing president. This tends to give continuity to existing policies and to prepare the incumbent for the role he is to fill.

Thus, both kingdoms have Jehorams as kings. In this same era of time they will both have Ahaziah's also. In Israel it is Ahaziah first and then Jehoram while in Judah it is the reverse order (Jehoram first and then Ahaziah). Judah's Jehoram is thirty-two when he begins his co-regent rule (II Kings 8:17).

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 2 memory-facts for this event.
2. Who is Jehoram of Judah's father?
3. Who is ruling in the North at this time?

56. The Good King Jehoshaphat Dies

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read I Kings 22:50; II Chron. 21:1-3; II Chron. 20:34.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Upon his death Jehoshaphat is entombed at Jerusalem.
 - b. His son Jehoram continues as king.
 - c. Jehoshaphat leaves rich gifts and cities to his other sons.

COMMENTS

The good Jehoshaphat of Jerusalem has reigned twenty-five years over Judah. Much of his reign has paralleled King Ahab's twenty-two year reign in Israel. His has been an eventful reign (a Jehu, son of Hanani, will later write a full account of his reign). Jehoshaphat's firstborn Jehoram, who has been ruling co-regent with him for several years, will now continue as sole ruler of Judah. But Jehoshaphat did not forget his other six sons, leaving each of them large gifts of silver, gold, and other things as well as certain fortified cities.

You may notice in the list of these sons there are two Azariahs. In the Hebrew the two names show a slight variation ("Black").

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 3 memory-facts for this event.
2. Where is Jehoshaphat entombed?
3. How many sons did he have?
4. How come there are two Azariahs?
5. Which son becomes Jehoshaphat's successor?
6. What do the others inherit?
7. Who will write an account of Jehoshaphat's eventful reign?

57. Judah Declines under Jehoram

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Chron. 21:4-20 and II Kings 8:17-24.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Jehoram kills his six brothers and other princes.
 - b. Influenced by his wife he is wicked like his father-in-law (Ahab of the North).
 - c. Edom and Libnah revolt from his control.
 - d. A writing of Elijah foretells the troubles to befall Jehoram because of his wickedness.
 - e. Philistia and Arabia plunder his palace and take his family members.
 - f. He dies after two years of intense suffering.

COMMENTS

Why does Jehoram kill his brothers and the princes? In order to eliminate any power-threat to his rule. History records many such cases of suspicion and intrigue among members of royal families. Now that they are out of the way, he feels secure in his kingship. But God has taken note of his heartless act (probably unprovoked by anything his brothers or the princes did), as God sees all that takes place on earth (see Prov. 15:3), which proves that the best laid plans of men do not always carry through to fulfillment.

This cruel act is but an indication of the character of the one now occupying

the once sacred throne of David in Jerusalem. He has as his wife Athaliah, daughter of the wicked Ahab and a "reincarnation" of her wicked mother Jezebel, and Athaliah has a strong influence in his administration. Things in Judah are now bad enough for God to destroy it from the face of the earth, and the only reason He doesn't is because of His special promises to David. Nevertheless God begins to reduce Jehoram's power by enabling both Edom and Libnah to revolt from under his rulership.

As Jehoram builds idolatrous high places in Judah and compels the inhabitants of Jerusalem to participate in his idolatry, a special writing of the now deceased prophet Elijah is delivered to him. We are not told in whose custody the writing has been since Elijah's passing—maybe Elisha's. The writing pays special tribute to three good kings preceding him (David, Asa, and Jehoshaphat) from whose ways Jehoram has departed while choosing the ways of Ahab, a wicked king of the north. In this he is preferring the ways of his wife (daughter of Ahab) to his own godly ancestors. It is noticeable that the women in his wife's line are husband-dominators: Jezebel dominated Ahab (I Kings 21:25), and Athaliah is dominating Jehoram, for II Chron. 21:6 says the reason he is walking in the ways of Ahab is because of her. The troubles Elijah's communication foretold will come because of following Ahab's ways and because Jehoram killed his brothers (said to have been better than he).

When God brings the invaders Philistia and Arabia into Judah who carry off Jehoram's treasure and some of his family members, you would think he will repent. But there are many people even today who disregard what God is bringing on them and continue in their wicked ways.

And how terribly he suffers from diseases during his final two years until finally his bowels fall out. And because of all the reverses that have come during his regime, when he dies they do not honor

him as they would usually do for their king. He departs "without being desired", and he is not entombed among the kings.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 6 memory-facts for this event.
2. What atrocity marks the beginning of Jehoram's reign?
3. Who is his wife?
4. Who is her father?
5. What two places revolted from under Jehoram?
6. What troubles does Elijah's writing foretell for him?
7. Who brings Philistia and Arabia against him?
8. Tell of his final illness.
9. What shows he died dishonorably?

58. Another Ahab-Related King in the South

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Chron. 22:1-5 and II Kings 8:25-28.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Ahaziah joins Jehoram of Israel in his battle against Hazael at Ramoth-gilead.
 - b. Jehoram goes to Jezreel after being wounded in battle.

COMMENTS

Although we associate the Judean offspring of Ahab with wickedness, "Barnes" makes a worthy observation when he says, "Such names as Athaliah, Jehoram, and Ahaziah indicate that the Baal-worshipping kings did not openly renounce the service of Jehovah. Athaliah is 'the time for Jehovah', Ahaziah 'the possession of Jehovah', and Jehoram or Joram 'exalted by Jehovah'."

Ahaziah is also called by two other names: Jehoahaz in II Chron. 21:17 and Azariah in II Chron. 22:6. Having more than one name was something more common in Bible days than today. For instance, the fisherman of Galilee was called "Simon" (John 1:41), "Cephas" (John 1:42), "Peter" (John 1:44), and "Simon Peter" (John 1:40). Other examples: "Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus" (Acts 1:23); "Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas" (Acts

4:36); and "Judas was surnamed Barsabas" (Acts 15:22).

In the preceding event when the invaders took King Jehoram's family (II Chron. 21:17), they somehow missed Ahaziah (the youngest). According to our present text the invaders killed his brothers. Now with King Jehoram dead, the inhabitants of Jerusalem still have Ahaziah to keep the Davidic line on the throne. His short reign of one year will be accounted for in a forthcoming event (No. 71).

His mother Athaliah is again spoken of as daughter of "Omri" whereas II Kings 8:18 calls her the daughter of "Ahab". In II Kings 8:26 where the text calls her the "daughter" of Omri, the marginal note calls her the "granddaughter". With all matters considered it appears she was the daughter of Ahab and the granddaughter of Omri. "Barnes" comments that "son" and "daughter" were used by the Jews of any descendants (compare Matt. 1:1).

At this time Israel and Syria are again having war over who is going to have Ramoth-gilead. You will remember that it was when Jehoshaphat and Ahab were at war with Syria over Ramoth-gilead that Ahab was mortally wounded (I Kings 22). As the king of the South Ahaziah comes up and goes with the king of the North Jehoram (his relative), it reminds one of that former event. Well, again the king of Israel is wounded, but not mortally as was Ahab. Because of this they withdraw from the battle, and Jehoram stops at his city Jezreel to recuperate, and Ahaziah returns to Jerusalem. From the next event to be studied it appears Jehoram has left several of his captains (including Jehu) at Ramoth-gilead.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 2 memory-facts for this event.
2. What are Ahaziah's two other names?
3. Why is he, the youngest of the deceased king's sons, made king instead of one of his older brothers?
4. How long does he reign?
5. Who is ruling in the North?
6. At what city do they join together in battle against Syria?

7. Which king is wounded?

59. Jehu is Anointed to Destroy Ahab's House and Baalism

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 9:1-13.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Elisha sends a servant to anoint Jehu secretly.
 - b. He tells Jehu he is divinely commissioned to bring judgment on the house of Ahab and on Jezebel.
 - c. His fellow-officers publicly proclaim him king.

COMMENTS

As King Jehoram is resting and recuperating at his city Jezreel from the wounds he received at Ramoth-gilead, he is unaware of God's intentions concerning him, nor is he aware of a sudden conspiracy against his throne about to take place. This reminds us that while God knows what is going on in every place, we humans are often ignorant of what is "just around the corner". Thus we are told, "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Prov 27:1).

As far back as Elijah at Mt. Sinai, God has mentioned Jehu's coming part in eradicating the wickedness brought into Israel by Jezebel. Hopefully you will remember Elijah was commissioned to anoint Hazael as king over Syria, Jehu as king over Israel, and Elisha as prophet in his stead (I Kings 19:15-17). Anointing Elisha was done in Elijah's lifetime (I Kings 19:19-21). Because of Ahab's humbling himself after Elijah pronounces divine judgment on him over the Naboth-vineyard matter (I Kings 21:20-29), God has held up the anointing of Hazael and Jehu until the proper time. Thus, it is Elisha instead of Elijah who fulfills the Hazael (II Kings 8:7-15) and Jehu anointings (this event).

Now that God's time has arrived for bringing judgment on the house of Ahab,

Elisha sends one of the sons of the prophets with anointing oil to Ramoth-gilead to anoint Jehu. When he arrives, he finds Jehu and other high-ranking officers together, who have been left by the wounded Jehoram to maintain Ramoth-gilead against Hazael of Syria.

Since Jehu is a rugged man of war, he does not fear to go alone into a secret chamber with the young man to see what his mission is. Undoubtedly the young man introduces himself as one of the sons of the prophets from Elisha and proceeds to give him Elisha's message, beginning with the prophetic beginning, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel." Otherwise it would be strange for him to be accepting this as a divine call to kingship from an unidentified stranger whose coming seems bizarre to Jehu's fellow-officers.

Jehu is all ears as he is told God is making him king over His people Israel, that he is to make the house of Ahab like the exterminated houses of Jeroboam and Baasha, and that Jezebel is also to come to her end. Jehu has long been associated with the military under Ahab and his successors, but his loyalty to them up to now is no deterrent to his willingness to go against them to become king himself.

After the messenger of Elisha makes a hasty exit, Jehu comes forth to his comrades who ask him what is going on. He either means or at least says they know the messenger and his mission, which they deny knowing whereupon he decides to break the news to them. Their willingness to proceed with a military recognition of him as king would indicate they prefer him to Jehoram.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 3 memory-facts for this event.
2. Who sends his messenger to anoint Jehu?
3. Where is Jehu at this time?
4. Does he anoint Jehu publicly or privately?
5. How do Jehu's fellow-captains indicate their approval of him as a new king replacing the present king Jehoram?

60. Jehu Begins by Killing Israel's Jehoram

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read II Kings 8:29 and II Kings 9:14-26.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Ahaziah of Jerusalem is visiting the recovering Jehoram at Jezreel.
 - b. Jehu makes a speedy chariot trip to Jezreel.
 - c. When Jezreel's watchman spot him and his group at a distance, Jehoram dispatches a messenger to see if the group is coming peacefully.
 - d. When two groups of dispatched messengers are not allowed to return, Jehoram and Ahaziah go out personally to meet the group.
 - e. When Jehoram senses it is a conspiracy, he hastily tries to escape only to be shot in the back by Jehu.

COMMENTS

With the public proclamation of Jehu as king, he knows he must act hurriedly to get to the reigning King Jehoram at Jezreel before word does. He gives order that nobody be allowed to leave Ramoth-gilead to carry any news to Jezreel. Taking a small detachment with him, they cross the Jordan and head straight for Jezreel.

From the tower atop Jezreel's wall the watchman spots their group at a great distance. Jehoram dispatches a messenger to inquire if the group is coming in peace. As the watchman watches, he sees the messenger is taken into custody and not allowed to return. Jehoram sends out a second messenger, and he is not allowed to return either. By this time the group is getting closer, and the watchman analyzes it as Jehu by his furious driving.

Jehoram is surprised Jehu would leave his post at Ramoth-gilead, so he and Ahaziah get in their chariots to go out to see what the problem is. Obviously they do not sense any danger until Jehu answers his question about "peace" by saying, "What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?" It doesn't take Jehoram long to realize this is a different Jehu than he has known and trusted. As he orders his chariot to wheel around and get going to safety, he hollers out to his

comrade, "There is treachery, O Ahaziah!" And these must be his last words, for before he is out of arrow-shot, Jehu pulls the bowstring with all his might, the arrow hits him in the back piercing his heart, and he falls to the floor of his chariot like a shot bird. At the same time Ahaziah is making his get-away.

Jehu makes a hasty decision concerning Jehoram's burial based on what he remembered of Elijah's words to Ahab when Ahab took possession of Naboth's confiscated vineyard (compare v. 26 with I Kings 21:19-24).

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 6 memory-facts about this event.
2. Where is Jehoram at this time?
3. Why does Jehu not lose any time getting where Jehoram is?
4. What does Jehoram do when the watchman tells him of Jehu's unidentified group?
5. What does Jehu do with Jehoram's messenger?
6. How many such messengers does Jehoram send?
7. How does the watchman identify Jehu as the group gets nearer?
8. What mistake do Jehoram and Ahaziah make?
9. What question does Jehoram ask as he and Jehu meet?
10. How does Jehu answer him?
11. What does Jehoram holler out to Ahaziah?
12. How does Jehu kill Jehoram?
13. What order does he give concerning Jehoram's dead body?

61. Ahaziah is Sought Out and Killed Also

ASSIGNMENTS

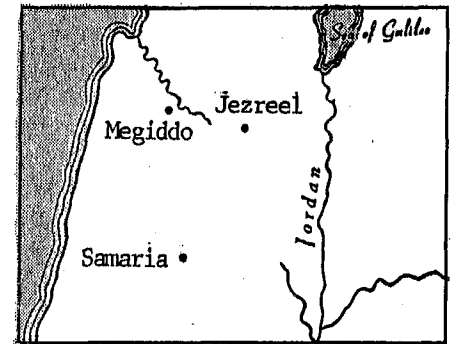
1. Read II Chron. 22:7,9 and II Kings 9:27,28.
2. Study the event until you can tell it.
3. Memorize these facts about the event:
 - a. Jehu finds and wounds Ahaziah.
 - b. He escapes Jehu but dies at Megiddo.
 - c. His body is returned to Jerusalem for burial.

COMMENTS

Our two accounts of Ahaziah's death are very brief, and what details they contain are not as easily harmonized as most Bible events reported by two or more writers. Without being dogmatic permit your writer to compile a harmony of the two accounts as follows: "But when Ahaziah the king of

Judah saw this, he fled by the way of the garden house. And Jehu followed after him...And he sought Ahaziah: and they caught him, (for he was hid in Samaria,) and brought him to Jehu...And Jehu said, Smite him also in the chariot. And they did so at the going up to Gur, which is by Ibleam. And he fled to Megiddo, and died there. And his servants carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him in his sepulchre with his fathers in the city of David...because he was the son of Jehoshaphat who sought the Lord with all his heart. So the house of Ahaziah had no power to keep still the kingdom."

Notice the accompanying map for the places involved in this event.



MAP OF ISRAEL

Jezreel = From which Ahaziah fled after Jehoram was shot.

Samaria = Ahaziah hid here until found by Jehu's men.

Megiddo = To which he escaped after being wounded and where he died.

Jerusalem = Where he was buried.

This sudden turn of events resulting in the premature death of Ahaziah accounts for his reigning only one year (II Kings 8:26).

Thus we come to a natural break in Divided Kingdom History when both kingdoms have simultaneously lost their kings, and when both kingdoms will start with new kings.

QUESTIONS

1. Recite the 3 memory-facts for this event.
2. Where do they find the hiding Ahaziah?
3. What order does Jehu give concerning him?
4. Where does he die from being wounded?
5. Where is he buried?