

Route 66

Second Kings: Divided We Fall

Part 12 - July 12, 2009

Where'd everybody go?!



Wall relief, circa. 700 B.C.

God used the Assyrians (from what is now Iraq) to conquer Israel (the *northern* kingdom), scatter its people, and resettle it with foreigners. This ancient wall relief is from the Assyrian palace of Sennacherib [suh-NAK-uh-rib], and it depicts two Jewish men having their skin flayed by two Assyrians.



"Destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem" - Francesco Hayez, 1867

About 150 years later, God used the Babylonians (who had since conquered the Assyrian's) to overthrow Judah (the *southern* kingdom), to destroy the temple, and to exile the survivors. The book of Kings opens with the building of the Temple (*1 Kings 5*) and closes with the burning of the Temple (*2 Kings 25:9*)!

The once unified, righteous, and respected, 900-year-old (+/-) nation, promised to Abraham, called to Egypt by Joseph, led to the Promised Land by Moses, and secured by Joshua ... is gone. From the very beginning, God had warned His people:

If you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands ... You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess. -
Deuteronomy 28:15a;63b NIV

And now, the nation God established has been erased from the map! But, we're getting ahead of ourselves; let's go back about 300 years, to where we left off last week.



View from Mount Carmel

On Mount Carmel, the prophet Elijah had successfully challenged the 450 prophets of Ba'al to a "god-off". Then he had fled for his life to Mount Horeb (aka Mount Sinai), from the wicked queen Jezebel. And finally he had returned home and took on an apprentice-prophet named Elisha.



Kayakers on the Jordan

Second Kings begins with the end of Elijah's ministry ... and life. Elisha is accompanying Elijah to the Jordan River where God has told Elijah that he'll be taken up to Heaven. By the way, you can keep their names straight by remembering that "J" comes before "S" in the alphabet; and likewise, *Elijah* comes before *Elisha*.

Once there, *Elijah* strikes the water with his rolled up cloak; the water parts and they cross on dry ground. Then *Elisha* says, “Can I have that cloak?!” Actually, he asks for a double portion of *Elijah’s spirit* in order to carry on his ministry. *Elijah* says, “If God allows you see me go, it’s a ‘Yes’”. And suddenly, a chariot of fire raptures *Elijah* in a whirlwind. And God not only lets *Elisha* to see it, He tosses down the cloak!

[*Elijah*] was a man with a **garment of hair [that’s the cloak]** and with a **leather belt around his waist**. - *2 Kings 1:8a NIV*

Let’s jump ahead to the New Testament appearance of John the Baptist.

Now John himself had a **garment of camel’s hair** and a **leather belt around his waist** ... - *Matthew 3:4a NAS*

That’s an allusion to *Elijah*. Remember what Jesus said about John?

And if you are willing to accept it, he is the *Elijah* who was to come. - *Matthew 11:14 NIV*

He’s not *Elijah*; he’s “the Elijah” of his day. John’s father (a priest) was visited by an angel (in the temple), who said that John would minister “in the spirit and power of *Elijah*”. (*Luke 1:17*) And there’s a *wild* theory that after *Elisha’s* death, the cloak and belt were kept in the temple until *Zecharia* gave it to his son.

So, *Elisha* takes the cloak, divides the Jordan, and returns back to a group of prophets who think that *Elijah* might’ve fallen back to earth ... so they send fifty men on a fruitless search. And word of *Elijah’s* ascension spreads and something *strange* happens:



As [*Elisha*] was walking along the road, some youths came out of [*Bethel*] and jeered at him. “Go on up, you baldhead!” ... [he] called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths. - *2 Kings 2:23-24 NIV*

Many believers struggle with this passage where God seems to “devour” what some translations call “young boys” for innocently teasing a silly looking old man. But, here’s the missing context:

- A. Though the word for “youths” here is *most often* used to portray young children, it’s also used to describe *Joseph* when he was 17 years old (*Gen. 37:2*), and even army men (*1 Kings 20:14-15*).
- B. *Elisha wasn’t* old. At this point, he was only about 25.
- C. And he probably *wasn’t* bald. Natural baldness was scarce in the ancient near East; so it carried with it a suspicion of leprosy and therefore “baldhead” became a term of scorn.

- D. Why do they say, “go on up”? They’re mocking the report of Eliza’s ascension. It’s a mob of young, Jewish, Ba’al worshipers, rejecting God’s prophet with utter contempt.
- E. What is Elisha’s “curse” “in the name of the Lord”? Most likely he cites the Law of God as a warning:

If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve. I will send wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children ... - *Leviticus 26:21-22 NIV*

And when they keep jeering, just to put an exclamation point on the truth of His Word ... “Two bears are out tonight!” This isn’t a display of God’s *cruelty*; it’s a *minor* judgment (to demonstrate the truth and to turn back a rebellious people), so that they won’t have to face the big judgment that must come!

Up until chapter thirteen (when Elisha dies after 50+ years of ministry) the Lord works many miracles through Elisha to comfort *and* confront the Israelites who lived in the northern kingdom:

- He miraculously purifies a bitter spring of water. (2:21)
- He multiplies a widow’s oil (like *Elijah* had done). (4:1-7)
- He raises a young boy from the dead. (4:32-37)
- He multiplies loaves of bread to feed a multitude. (4:42-44)
- He heals a man of leprosy. (5:1-19)
- He causes a borrowed iron ax head to float on water. (6:1-7)
- He announces the miraculous deliverance from a military siege on Samaria that was causing many Israelites to starve.

In all, scripture records seven miracles performed by *Elijah* and fourteen performed by *Elisha* ... so, he got his double portion!

Elisha’s miracles revealed God’s gracious nature to his people, both as individuals and as a nation ... and yet, they didn’t turn. Just look at the litany of the Northern kings and turn on the *sin detector*! We left off with Ahab who married Jezebel.

“Second Kings” begins with Ahab’s son ...

1. ☹ **Ahaziah** [ay-huh-ZIGH-uh], who did *evil* in the eyes of the Lord. He consulted a Ba’al god named “Zebub”: Ba’al-Zebub. He reigned two years, fell through the lattice of his upper room and died. He had no son, so he was followed by his brother ...
2. ☹ **Joram** [JOH-ruhm]. He threatened to cut off *Elisha*’s head until God removed a famine from Samaria. He reigned 12 years and was murdered by an army commander named ...

3. ☹ **Jehu** [JEE-hyoo]. He killed Jezebel and then Ahab's 70 sons and his advisors and family and friends (he went on kind of a spree!). He killed the Ba'al prophets and turned their temple into a latrine. HOWEVER, Jehu was not careful to keep the law of the Lord. He reigned 28 years and was followed by his son ...
4. ☹ **Jehoahaz** [jih-HOH-uh-haz]. 17 years, followed by his son ...
5. ☹ **Jehoash** [jih-HOH-ash]. As Elisha lay dying he gave Jehoash one last chance to put his faith in God but only got a half-hearted response. He reigned 16 years, followed by his son ...
6. ☹ **Jeroboam II** [JER-uh-BOH-uhm]. Evil in the eyes of the Lord. He reigned 41 years and was followed by his son ...
7. ☹ **Zechariah** [ZEK-uh-RIGH-uh]. Again with the evil. He reigned 6 months and was publicly assassinated by ...
8. ☹ **Shallum** [SHAL-uhm], who reigned one month before being assassinated by ...
9. ☹ **Menahem** [MEN-uh-hem]. No improvement. He reigned 10 years and was followed by his son ...
10. ☹ **Pekahiah** [PEK-uh-HIGH-uh]. He reigned two years before he was murdered and replaced by one of his chief officers ...
11. ☹ **Pekah** [PEE-kuh]. During his reign, the Assyrians conquered several cities and began deporting the Israelites. He reigned 20 years before he was attacked and assassinated by ...
12. ☹ **Hoshea** [hoh-SHEE-uh], the *last* Northern king to do evil in the eyes of the Lord. He stopped paying a tribute tax to the Assyrians, and in his 9th year they conquered Israel.

The message of the Kings is simple and straightforward: When we set God aside, we're led into bondage.

During the time of the kings of Israel in the North, things played out a bit different with the kings of Judah in the South. We left off with Asa who was fully committed to the Lord all his life; and he was followed by his son ...

1. ☺ **Jehoshaphat** [jih-HAHS-uh-fat], who did right in the eyes of the Lord (and liked to jump. Hence: Jumping Jehoshaphat). He reigned 25 years and was followed by his son ...
2. ☹ **Jehoram** [jih-HOH-ruhm], who married one of Ahab's (perhaps even Jezebel's) daughters! He reigned eight years and was followed by his son ...
3. ☹ **Ahaziah** [ay-huh-ZIGH-uh], bad egg; One year. He was visiting Ahab's son, Joram (who threatened to behead Elisha), just as Jehu went on his killing spree. Wrong place, wrong time. When his mother (Ahab's daughter) found out, she killed the royal family and proclaimed herself Queen! But, Jehoiada [jih-HOY-uh-duh] the priest, hid Ahaziah's one-year-old son in the temple for six years before he could arrange to have grandma seized and killed, and they could declare Judah's new king ...
4. ☹ **Joash** [JOH-ash], a huge disappointment! He did right while Jehoiada lived; but then he abandoned his faith. And when Jehoiada's son spoke out against him, Joash had him stoned.

(2 Chron. 24:17-21). He reigned 40 years before he was killed by his officials and replaced with his son ...

5. ☹ **Amaziah** [am-uh-ZIGH-uh], who reigned 29 years until the people of Judah conspired against him, killed him, and replaced him with his son ...
6. ☹ **Azariah** [az-uh-RIGH-uh] (aka Uzziah) who did right in the eyes of the Lord. But, the people *continued* to worship idols. He reigned 52 years and was followed by his son ...
7. ☹ **Jotham** [JOH-thuhm], a good son who had run the palace for years while his father suffered from leprosy. He reigned 16 years and was followed by his son ...
8. ☹ **Ahaz** [AY-haz]. He desecrated the temple and even sacrificed his own son in the fire of a pagan god! He reigned 16 years and was followed by his *luckier* son ...
9. ☹ **Hezekiah** [HEZ-ih-kigh-uh], who held fast to the Lord! He eradicated idolatry from Judah (just as Assyria conquered Israel). Remember Moses' bronze snake? Hezekiah destroyed it because people were worshipping it! And when the Assyrians came to Jerusalem, God struck 185,000 dead while they slept! Hezekiah reigned 29 years and was followed by his son ...
10. ☹ **Manasseh** [muh-NASS-uh], the most vile king Judah ever knew! He led the people far, far astray, but in his old age he repented. He reigned 55 years and was followed by his son ...
11. ☹ **Amon** [AM-uhn], evil; 22 years. Assassinated by his officials and replaced by his son ...
12. ☹ **Josiah** [joh-SIGH-uh], super righteous! He discovered the book of the Law (which had been lost), and went on a campaign to align Judah with every one of Moses' instructions! He reigned 31 years. He was God's last all-or-nothing attempt to penetrate these people. Sadly, the majority only followed Josiah out of fear, and immediately regressed when he was succeeded by his son ...
13. ☹ **Jehoahaz** [jih-HOH-uh-haz], evil; 3 months. Pharaoh carried him off to Egypt and put a guy named Eliakim [ih-LIGH-uh-kim] in charge and changed his name to ...
14. ☹ **Jehoiakim** [jih-HOY-uh-kim], evil; 11 years. It was under his watch that Judah was first subjugated by Babylon. He died and was followed by his son ...
15. ☹ **Jehoiachin** [jih-HOY-uh-kin], evil; 3 months. He was taken prisoner by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon when the temple was striped and all Jerusalem was taken into exile. They put Jehoiachin's uncle in charge and changed his name to ...
16. ☹ **Zedekiah** [ZED-uh-KIGH-uh], evil; 11 years. The only people left in Judah were the poorest, oldest, and weakest. Yet, Zedekiah decided to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar.

The Babylonians came and killed his sons, put out his eyes, set fire to the temple and the royal palace and every house and building in Jerusalem. They broke down the walls around the city and broke up the bronze portions of the temple (that wouldn't burn).

If your name was up here, would you get a buzzer or a strum? And what would be your spiritual summation? He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. She did right in the eyes of the Lord. Or, they were fully committed all there life.