

The Prophets and **THE KINGS**



The Prophets and the Kings

Bible Stories for Children | Father of Love Stories.

Author: Marlise Schneider

Design and Cover: Leandro Pena

Maranathamedia.com

August 2026, 1ed.

BIBLE STORIES FOR CHILDREN

4

The Prophets and **THE KINGS**

FATHER OF LOVE STORIES

MARLISE SCHNEIDER



Dedicated to my beloved children, Lukas and Sarah

Special thanks to Daniel Bernhardt (my husband), Kevin Mullins, Carlos Hernández and Ben Kramlich for their helpful suggestions as this book was being written.

Marlise Schneider

Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS	5
INTRODUCTION	8
1. SOLOMON ESTABLISHES HIS KINGDOM	11
2. SOLOMON CHOOSES WISDOM	15
3. WISE KING SOLOMON	18
4. THE BRAND-NEW TEMPLE	21
5. SOLOMON'S DOWNFALL	25
6. SOLOMON'S ENEMIES	29
7. KING SOLOMON REPENTS	33
8. SOLOMON'S BEST SONG	36
9. THE KINGDOM IS DIVIDED	40
10. KING REHOBOAM	43
11. A WITHERED HAND, A LION AND A DONKEY	47
12. THE LUKEWARM KINGS OF JUDAH	52
13. THE EVIL KINGS OF ISRAEL	57
14. THE DROUGHT IN ISRAEL	60
15. THE FAITH OF THE WIDOW OF SAREPTA	64
16. JEHOVAH OR BAAL?	68
17. THE LORD, HE IS GOD!	72
18. GOD COMFORTS ELIJAH	76
19. THE STILL SMALL VOICE	81
20. GOD REACHES OUT TO KING AHAB	85
21. A STOLEN VINEYARD	90

22. JEHOSEPHAT'S MISTAKE	94
23. THE SINGING ARMY	98
24. KING AHAZIAH CHOOSES A HEATHEN IDOL	101
25. ELIJAH AND ELISHA	105
26. THE DAY THE VALLEY TURNED RED	109
27. TWO KINGS CALLED JEHOHAM	113
28. YOUNG KING JOASH	117
29. GOD'S CARE FOR THE SCHOOLS OF THE PROPHETS	121
30. RESPECTING GOD'S PROPHET	125
31. THE KIND SHUNAMMITE WOMAN	128
32. NAAMAN	132
33. GOD'S MERCY TOWARDS SYRIA AND ISRAEL	136
34. REACHING KINGS THROUGH ELISHA	141
35. JONAH	145
36. THE LAST PROPHETS TO ISRAEL	150
37. THE LAST KINGS OF ISRAEL	154
38. ISRAEL IS TAKEN CAPTIVE	157
39. THREE GOOD KINGS OF JUDAH	160
40. GOD CALLS ISAIAH	165
41. THE VINEYARD AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD	168
42. KING AHAZ AND HIS IDOLS	171
43. PROPHET MICAH	175
44. THE TEMPLE IS REOPENED	178
45. THE CLOCK TURNED BACK	182
46. SAVED FROM ASSYRIA	185
47. TWO DIFFERENT LEADERS	189
48. THE MOST WICKED KING OF JUDAH	193

49. KING JOSIAH HEARS THE SCRIPTURES	196
50. KING JOSIAH SHARES THE SCRIPTURES	200
51. MESSAGES OF COMFORT	203
52. OBADIAH AND JOEL	206
53. GOD CALLS JEREMIAH	210
54. THE SONS OF KING JOSIAH	213
55. THE CLAY VESSEL	217
56. THIS TEMPLE WILL END UP LIKE SHILOH	221
57. A BRONZE WALL	225
58. THE FAITHFUL RECHABITES	229
59. JEHOIAKIM REJECTS GOD’S SCROLLS	233
60. A YOKE FOR JUDAH	237
61. JEREMIAH’S OBJECT LESSONS	241
62. LETTERS TO THE EXILES	245
63. FREEING THE SLAVES	249
64. JEREMIAH IN THE DUNGEONS	253
65. A PRISONER BUYS LAND	257
66. JERUSALEM IS DESTROYED	261
KINGS AND PROPHETS OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH	266
THEMATIC INDEX	268

Introduction

The Bible is, mostly, the story of many different people, living at different times and coming from different backgrounds. The Bible is also the story of how God tries to reach all of us humans, irrespective of our upbringing and context. In fact, the Bible teaches us that when God writes the names of each of His children, He will also record where each one came from (Psalms 87). And how precious it will be for many of them to know that they had loving parents who guided them into the kingdom of God! And how glorious it will be for parents and children's teachers to know that they played an important role in the decisions that children later took, which led them to receive salvation! How joyful it will be for those who taught children, to see that the long hours of toil, prayer, and sometimes frustration, have finally given their everlasting fruit.

Marlise, in her quest to bless our children Lukas and Sarah, began taking notes on the stories she told our kids. Soon, as those notes multiplied, it became clear that they could also be of great value to all those parents who faced similar challenges. Thus, these notes were transformed into a project, of which this is the fourth volume. The story of the people of Israel, from King Solomon until they were taken into exile, are filled with valuable lessons to all of us, especially our children.

This volume continues from Solomon's ascension to the throne, through his son Rehoboam, the splitting of the kingdom in two, and the various kings that continued thereafter and their rebellion, to the

point where, as the Bible describes it, there was no remedy (2 Chronicles 36:16). In these stories we learn of the dreadful consequences of choosing our own ways instead of the Lord's. And while God's chosen people rejected the high calling of being a light to the world, God would still send messenger after messenger, prophet after prophet, to guide them into the paths that lead to peace and life. God did have compassion towards them, but unfortunately, the human heart is desperately wicked, and they mocked and killed and despised God's messengers, to the point in which God would have to let them reap the full consequences of their decisions. And through all these sad stories, we read how God would still work through Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah and many others, bringing light and hope and life. All these stories contain very valuable lessons for everyone, especially our children, so we can know and remember the consequences of abandoning God. But if we hold His hand and hear and treasure His Word, even when it appears that everyone, including God's people, are abandoning Him, God will never forsake nor leave us, even in the most apparently discouraging circumstances.

In preparing these stories, special attention has been given to ensure that they are based on the understanding of the covenants according to the message of Justification by faith. These stories clearly demonstrate how we human beings are unaware of the depth of our sinfulness, self-sufficiency, and distrust of God. In the many Biblical stories within this volume, these realities are manifested, as well as God's constant longing that mankind would receive and treasure His word – that they would receive Christ.

Each lesson contains a Bible verse, which in the author's view, presents the essence of the story. Additionally, the Bible reference is provided for each story, as well as a reference to Ellen G. White

writings for those who would like to read further. At the end of the book, a thematic index has been provided to make it easier to find specific stories.

It is Marlise's desire that this material will be as much of a blessing to you and your family as the preparation of this material has been to our family. May God bless you in your task of being parents and teachers of those to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs.

Daniel E. Bernhardt

1. Solomon Establishes his Kingdom

**These things you have done, and I kept silent;
You thought that I was altogether like you;
But I will rebuke you, and set them in order before your eyes.
Psalm 50:21 (NKJV)**

 *1 Kings 2:12 - 3:1*

Solomon was now the new king of Israel. Would the Israelites respect him as king? So many men had been against David and against making Solomon king; would they let Solomon reign now? He worried about these things, and he decided to do what earthly kings usually do: he began to get rid of anyone who could be a threat to his kingdom.

While David was still alive, Solomon had forgiven the men who had acted against him: he had forgiven his brother Adonijah, High Priest Abiathar, and commander-in-chief Joab. He had told them: “If you don’t cause trouble, you won’t die”.

But sadly, trouble did come. Adonijah, Solomon’s brother, still believed that he should have been king. He spoke and acted in a way that showed that he was trying to get what had belonged to King David. He clearly did not accept that it was fair for Solomon to be king, so Solomon decided that his brother’s behavior was a danger to his kingdom. He told Benaiah, one of David’s mighty men, “Put Adonijah to death.” And Benaiah did.

If Adonijah was a threat, then the other men who had helped him would be a threat, too. Solomon thought about what to do. “Abiathar the priest will not be priest anymore,” he decided. He told Abiathar, “You betrayed King David, and you should die. But I won’t put you to death, because you carried the ark of the Lord, and you suffered with my father when he went through difficult times. But you won’t be a priest any longer. Zadok will take your place as high priest.”

Now it was time to deal with Joab. Joab had been very close to King David, but he had betrayed David in the end. Also, Joab had killed two innocent men (Abner and Amasa), and David had not punished him for it. “It’s time for him to be put to death,” Solomon decided.

When Joab heard that Adonijah was dead, he knew that he would be next. He was so afraid that he ran to the Tabernacle, went to the altar of sacrifice, and grabbed the horns on the side of the altar. This is what the Israelites did if they felt that their lives were in danger. They believed that if they held on to the horns of the altar, they would be safe. “I won’t leave this place!” Joab declared. Since Joab would not leave the Tabernacle, Solomon told Benaiah, “Just kill him right there!” Solomon was asking Benaiah to kill Joab right there in the Tabernacle! Sadly, Benaiah obeyed Solomon, and Joab died. Solomon thought that it was right for Joab to die.

Now it was time to deal with one more man: Shimei. Shimei was King Saul’s relative, and he had insulted David and thrown rocks at him when he was escaping from Absalom¹. But Shimei had begged for forgiveness, and David had forgiven him. Solomon decided, “Shimei has to live. But he might still cause problems if he is free to wander

¹ See Book 3, *The Conquest and the Judges*, story 54, “Absalom rebels against King David”

around and talk to people who live outside Jerusalem. He might plan something against me with those people.” Solomon told Shimei, “You must move into Jerusalem. You may not leave the city of Jerusalem. If you leave the city, you will be put to death.”

Shimei was relieved that King Solomon would let him live. He moved into Jerusalem, and for a while, all went well. Then one day, two of his servants ran away to another city, the city of Gath. “I must get them back!” thought Shimei. He saddled his donkey, rode off to Gath and brought his servants back.

Soon King Solomon found out that Shimei had left Jerusalem. “You knew you weren’t allowed to do that!” King Solomon said sternly to Shimei. Then Solomon commanded Benaiah to put Shimei to death, and Benaiah did. Now all the men who had been a threat to David and to Solomon were dead. Solomon felt safer and more powerful.

To make his kingdom even stronger, Solomon also made friends with the Pharaoh of Egypt, and he married the Pharaoh’s daughter.

So far, Solomon was doing what he thought was best. Any earthly king would have done what he did: killing off the men who were a threat to his kingdom, and marrying the daughter of another powerful king. Would God have wanted all these things for Solomon? No; God would have done things differently. All these deaths that Solomon caused were not God’s decision; they were man’s way of doing things. How could Solomon kill his own brother, Adonijah, and his own cousin, Joab, no matter how evil they had been? God would not have wanted this. But the Israelites had been killing their enemies for hundreds of years now; it was impossible for Solomon to see that this was not the way God did things.

Even though this was not God's way, He had to allow it, because He could not protect Joab, Adonijah or Shimei. These men had left God's hedge of protection long before. Solomon could now do whatever he wanted with them, because they were unprotected. Yet, even though Solomon was not doing things like God would have preferred, Solomon *was* trying to follow God. He worshiped God in the best way he knew how, and God accepted that. If Solomon kept following God, then God would be able to change him and show him how to do things God's way from then on.

There are so many things that we do, which we think are ok to do, but they are actually not God's way of doing things! The only way for us to find out God's way is to spend time getting to know Him. Ask God to help you to know him; ask Him to lead you, so that you can make decisions that completely follow His way of doing things.

2. Solomon Chooses Wisdom

**Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom:
and with all thy getting get understanding. Proverbs 4:7 (KJV)**



1 Kings 3:2-28; 2 Chronicles 1 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 1

Solomon was now the new king. What should he do next? As he thought, he kept on remembering his father's words to him: "Solomon, follow God. Develop good qualities in your character. Always keep God first." Solomon thought, "This is what I'll do first – worship God."

King Solomon called all of his counsellors and the leaders of Israel, and they went to where the Tabernacle tent was. Together, they offered sacrifices in the Tabernacle, and they consecrated themselves to God. "We need God's guidance and wisdom to govern the people," they said, "We want to give ourselves to God and follow Him."

God was pleased that Solomon and the rest of the leaders were asking Him for guidance. He had so many wonderful plans for Solomon and for Israel, but He could only give them those blessings if they kept on following Him. That night, God came to Solomon in a dream.

God said, "Solomon, what would you like me to give you? Ask me for it." Solomon thought carefully and answered, "Lord, you've been so good to my father David, and now you've made me king. But,

Lord, I'm like a child – I don't really know how to do this. Give me wisdom, so that I can know what is good and what is bad. I want to judge the people correctly.”

God was pleased with Solomon's request. Solomon could have asked for so many things: fame, riches, a long life, and a larger kingdom – but he didn't ask for any of these things; he asked for wisdom to be a good king. God said to Solomon, “You asked for wisdom instead of asking for riches, honor or a long life. Because of this, I will give you such wisdom that no one has ever had before, and no one will ever have after you. And I will also give you what you haven't asked for: riches and honor, more than any other king has had before you, and more than any king will have after you. And Solomon, if you follow me like your father did, and keep my commandments, I will give you a long life.”

And God kept His promise. Very soon, the Israelites noticed how wise their king was. Even the nations around them noticed that King Solomon was much, much wiser than any of the other kings. Everyone respected King Solomon, because he was so wise. The Israelites knew that God had given their king this wisdom, and the nations around them also realized this. “The God of Israel has made their king very wise,” they said. As Solomon reigned, the nations around Israel had a chance to get to know the wonderful God of Israel. This was exactly what God wanted: He wanted every nation to get to know Him and to have the chance to follow Him. Through King David, several nations had had this chance, and now they had it again through King Solomon.

The first years of Solomon's reign were good ones. He used the wonderful wisdom that God gave him to learn, study and create. He got to know a lot about nature, animals, plants, birds, insects and fish.

He got to know God more deeply. He also wrote songs and proverbs – short sayings that are full of wisdom. Through his proverbs, he taught people how to live rightly.

King Solomon had asked for wisdom before anything else, and God gladly blessed him with it. We, too, need wisdom before anything else. Wisdom, the Bible says, is Jesus, because Jesus is the “Wisdom of God”. Only Jesus can help us to make the right decisions and to do and say the right things. If we want God’s wisdom, He will be able to bless us with everything else that we need to live a good life. Will you ask God for His wisdom today, like Solomon did?

3. Wise King Solomon

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD.
Jeremiah 9:23, 24 (NKJV)



1 Kings 3:16-28; 4:29-34; 10:1-13; 2 Chronicles 9:1-12, 23. | Prophets and Kings Chapter 4

God kept His promise to Solomon; He gave him great wisdom. One day, two women were brought to the king. They had a problem that was very difficult, and they wanted King Solomon to solve it for them.

One of the women said, "Oh King, this other woman and I both live in the same house. I had a baby, and three days later, she also had a baby. But during the night, she slept on top of her baby by mistake, and he died. So she took my baby boy away from me while I was sleeping, and she put her dead baby next to me. Now she says that my baby is hers."

The other woman answered, "No, this baby is mine! The dead one was yours!" Both women started arguing in front of the king.

How could King Solomon know who the real mother was? God gave him the wisdom. He said, "Bring me a sword." When the sword arrived, King Solomon ordered, "Now, cut the baby in half. Give one half to one mother, and the other half to the other."

The baby's real mother felt terrible. She pleaded with King Solomon, "Oh King, just give her the baby. Please don't kill him!" The other woman didn't feel bad at all. She cruelly said, "He shouldn't be neither mine nor hers; divide him."

Of course, King Solomon wasn't really going to kill the baby, but now he knew who the real mother was. The real mother loved the baby enough to give him away, if that meant that he would at least live. "This woman is the baby's mother. Give him to her, and don't kill him," he ordered.

The people heard about this, and they respected King Solomon. "God has really given him wisdom," they said. Kings and queens in other countries also heard about this. Soon, King Solomon was receiving visits from the kings and queens of several countries. These people wanted to learn from Solomon's wisdom, to rule their countries wisely.

One of the royal visitors that King Solomon received was the Queen of Sheba. She travelled from her far-away country and brought camels loaded with gifts of gold, spices and precious stones for King Solomon. She spent time talking deeply with him and asked him difficult questions. She was amazed that King Solomon could answer them all. He knew so much about so many topics, but most of all, he spoke to her about the secrets of nature, and about the God that created all nature.

The Queen of Sheba said to King Solomon, "When my servants told me about your wealth and your wisdom, I didn't think it could be so. I had to come and see it before I could believe it. Actually, your wealth and wisdom are even more than what my servants told me. Your servants, who stand by you the whole day and hear your

wisdom, are very blessed.” She also said, “Blessed be the Lord your God, who delights in you and put you on the throne of Israel.”

This queen returned to her country with the knowledge of the true God of Heaven. And just like her, other kings got to know about God through Solomon, too. All these kings and queens knew that Solomon’s wisdom came from God, because King Solomon pointed them to God. They understood that Solomon’s God was the God that had all the wisdom.

Through King Solomon’s wisdom, thousands of people got to know the wise God of heaven. God wants to use you, too, so that others can get to know Him through you. Ask Him for the wisdom to know Him more and to point others to Him in your actions and conversations.

4. The Brand-New Temple

Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people. Isaiah 56:7 (KJV)



1 Kings 6; 8; 9:1-9; 2 Chronicles 2-7. | Prophets and Kings Chapter 2

King Solomon had given himself to God and asked Him for wisdom. Now it was time to do what his father David had asked him to do: it was time to build the Lord's temple. King Solomon wanted this temple to be the most beautiful and special temple ever built. He gathered the materials and the workers for this huge project, and soon the work began.

It took King Solomon seven years to build the temple. The workers leveled the land and laid the foundations. They brought in the best wood from Lebanon, and prepared the stone. The temple was built on Mount Moriah, where Abraham had brought Isaac for the sacrifice so many hundreds of years before. This was a holy place, so King Solomon wanted the workers to be silent and reverent as they worked. He asked the workers to cut the pieces of stone somewhere else, before bringing the stone to the building site. The builders worked silently, placing the stones and wood carefully. None of them used an axe or a hammer, so the building site was silent and felt special and holy.

A man called Hiram of Tyre was chosen to build all the furnishings for the new temple. God gave him special talent to be able

to do this. He worked skillfully with wood, gold, silver, brass, iron, stone and linen, and built the beautiful furnishings.

When the temple was completed, it was stunningly beautiful. “I want this to be God’s house,” King Solomon said, “So we will have a special dedication ceremony.” He held this ceremony during the feast of Tabernacles, when all the people from all over Israel would be there to celebrate.

When the ceremony began, all the people were gathered there. King Solomon looked at the large multitude. The leaders of Israel and leaders from other nations were also there, in their best clothes. First King Solomon had them bring the ark into the new temple. As they brought in the ark, the Levites played music and sang. Every six steps, King Solomon offered a sacrifice. His father David had offered sacrifices like this several years before, when he had brought the ark into Jerusalem². Then they brought in the rest of the furnishings and placed them in their correct places in the temple.

As the music continued, something wonderful happened: the temple was filled with a cloud. This meant that the glory of the Lord had filled the temple! God had accepted this temple, and He wanted to be there with His people. King Solomon stood on a platform, raised his hands and blessed the people. Then he knelt down and prayed a beautiful prayer of dedication to God. The people also bowed down during this prayer. He prayed that the people would always come to God, and that other nations would want to come and worship Him here, too. As Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and burnt up the sacrifices and offerings. The temple was so filled with God’s glory that the priests could not enter it! The people

² See Book 3, *The Conquest and the Judges*, story 49, “Bringing the Ark to Jerusalem”.

were amazed and overjoyed to know that God was with them. During the next seven days, they enjoyed a joyful feast of Tabernacles.

King Solomon had done his best to bring the people to God. That night God spoke to him and said, “I have heard your prayer, and I have chosen this temple. If the land gets pestilence or drought, but the people come to me and repent, I will forgive them and heal the land. Also, I will accept people from every land who want to worship me in this house.” God also said, “Solomon, if you follow me like your father did, then someone from your family will always be on the throne. But if you leave me, you will have many problems. If the people leave me, this temple might not last.” God knew that if the Israelites left Him and chose idols instead, He would not be able to protect them anymore from whatever Satan wanted to do to them; He would have to respect their choice to be without His protection.

God was pleased that Solomon had built a beautiful temple and had dedicated it. If King Solomon continued focusing on God and leading the people to Him, God would be able to do wonderful things, not only for Israel, but for the other nations as well. The temple would be a big part of this: it would give them a beautiful place to come and pray, give offerings, and learn more about God. The stunning temple would make people curious about the God of Heaven, and they would learn more about this loving God.

Yet there was something that was even more important than the beautiful temple: it was the hearts of God’s people. Would Solomon and the rest of the Israelites let God in their hearts and lives? Would their lives show others around them how wonderful their God was? The Israelites could worship all they wanted in the temple, but it wouldn’t be enough unless their lives showed that God was most important for them. If people from other nations saw the beautiful

temple, and then they met loving and peaceful people in that temple, they would surely want to worship God with them, wouldn't they?

Do you have a place to worship in? What do people see and feel when they come in? Do they feel the love and peace of Jesus? Do you think that newcomers want to come back afterwards? Ask God to help you get to know Him so well that your life and actions might help others to get to know Him, too.

5. Solomon's Downfall

**Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not;
neither decline from the words of my mouth. Proverbs 4:5 (KJV)**



*1 Kings 9:10-28; 10:14-29; 11:1-8; 2 Chronicles 8:1-11, 17, 18; 9:13-28. |
Prophets and Kings Chapters 3, 4*

The first few years that Solomon was king, he focused on God. As God gave him great wisdom and many riches, he thanked God for them and helped the people to look to God as the One who had given him all these things.

But sadly, as time went by, King Solomon began to stop focusing on God. He began to look at himself instead. He knew that no other king was wiser or richer than he was, and slowly, little by little, he became prideful. He began to make decisions that pushed him farther and farther away from God. And as he left God, the people of Israel began to leave God, too.

Solomon knew what instructions God had given to future Israelite kings in Deuteronomy 17. “A king must not have many wives,” God had said. But Solomon didn’t listen. He married many, many women. He married hundreds of women! Many of these women were princesses from other countries. Solomon thought that if he married them, then Israel would be friends with the countries that these women were from. He thought that this would bring peace to Israel. This is what kings usually did, so Solomon didn’t stop to think that he was being really foolish by marrying so many idol-worshiping women.

The first foreign wife he married was the princess of Egypt. When this princess married Solomon, she left her Egyptian idols and began to worship God instead. “If I marry other women, they will also leave their idols and choose God,” thought Solomon, “I am so wise, that I can convince them to worship the God of Heaven.” But sadly, his other idol-worshipping wives did not choose God. Instead, they convinced Solomon to build shrines for their idols. Soon there were idol shrines all over the forest near Solomon’s home. Solomon began to stop looking to God, and looked at his beautiful wives instead. He began to worship their idols, and soon, many of the Israelites followed King Solomon’s example and they started worshiping these idols, too.

Solomon also knew that, in Deuteronomy 17, God had said, “If the Israelites have a king, he shouldn’t buy horses from Egypt for himself, and he shouldn’t gather silver and gold for himself.” The horses, the gold and the silver would make the king to trust in his riches and in his army, rather than trusting in God’s protection. But Solomon didn’t listen. He wasn’t satisfied with the great riches God had already given him. He brought horses from Egypt, because having these horses would strengthen his army. He gathered so much silver and gold that he made gold and silver as plenteous as stones. Then, as if he wasn’t rich enough, he began to charge the people heavy taxes, just so that he could live in a really expensive palace with all the comforts a person could ever have. He could have used his riches to help the orphans, the widows, the sick, or people who needed help, but instead, he used his riches to live in luxury. He even made an impressive throne for himself out of the two most expensive materials: ivory and gold. All the drinking cups in Solomon’s home were made from gold, and every three years he would receive large

ships filled with gold, silver, ivory, apes and peacocks. Solomon was so rich that no one had ever seen anyone wealthier than him.

It was greedy and selfish for the king to live in such luxury and to charge such heavy taxes, and the people noticed it. “We don’t like what King Solomon is doing, it’s not fair. The taxes are too hard on us,” they complained. Now that Solomon had turned away from God, his actions were not wise at all, because wisdom can only come from God.

Another thing that King Solomon did was that, when he built the temple, he didn’t think to ask God which workers should do it. Instead, he chose the worker himself: Hiram of Tyre. It makes sense that Solomon chose him, because this man was the great-great grandson of the man who had built the furnishings for the Tabernacle in the desert. Also, Hiram was the very best and most skilled man of that time. But what Solomon didn’t realize was that Hiram didn’t care so much about doing God’s service; instead, he did the work because he wanted to make money. He charged extremely high wages for his work. Yes, Hiram was highly gifted and one of the only men who could do this work, but if King Solomon had stopped to ask God what to do, God would have given special skills to another man, to someone who was willing to do the work because he loved God, and who did not do it for the money. The rest of the workers saw how much Hiram was charging, and they began to charge high wages, too. They didn’t stop to think that King David and the elders had all given the building materials as offerings, and that the workers should have seen their work as an offering, too. Soon, all over Israel people were charging higher wages than what was fair for their work. God watched what was happening. When the temple was finished, He

accepted it, but He was sad that people had become so greedy while building it.

When the temple was first built, King Solomon had said, “This is the temple of Jehovah”. He would point the people to God, so that when they saw the temple, they would think of God. But as he became prouder, he allowed people to say, “This is Solomon’s temple.” Now, as they looked at the temple, they thought about their king instead of God.

Merchants from many countries would pass through Israel on their way to other countries. King Solomon should have thought, “How can I help these foreign businessmen get to know God? If they learn about God, they will take this knowledge to their own countries!” Instead, he thought, “How can I do business with these people and make more money?” He thought so much about money that he lost the opportunity to bring these people to God.

God was heartbroken as He watched Solomon slowly turning away. He had so many wonderful plans for Solomon and for Israel, but He could not fulfil them if they left God and chose to worship idols. Yet He still kept calling Solomon and the Israelites back to Him. He loved them and would not leave them. Would King Solomon realize this and repent?

King Solomon received everything that a person could ever want, yet he still sinned by being prideful and leaving God. Each of us has received many blessings from God, too – and each of these blessings are there to help us see His love and care. Will you thank God for all that He has given you? Will you ask Him to help you be grateful and satisfied with what He has given you? Will you ask Him to give you wisdom and to be your guide today and in your life?

6. Solomon's Enemies

O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever! Deuteronomy 5:29 (KJV)



1 Kings 11:14-40. | Prophets and Kings Chapter 5

God had always wanted to protect Solomon. He'd given Solomon all the riches, wisdom and fame that a king could ever want – and even more. And through Solomon, God had wanted to bless all of Israel and make it the most peaceful and prosperous country in the whole world.

But with sadness, God watched as Solomon slowly left him. One bad choice after another led Solomon farther and farther from God. And as King Solomon left God, he also left God's hedge of protection.

God kept trying to reach Solomon with every chance He had. But He also respected Solomon's choices. This meant that, after a while, He could no longer protect Solomon, or Israel.

During the first years of Solomon's reign, while he had followed God, Israel had been completely at peace, and all the kings of the countries around them wanted to be friends with Solomon and with Israel. But after Solomon began to worship idols, he was respected less and less. Slowly but surely, Israel began to have problems with other kingdoms.

One of the kings that caused problems for Solomon was Rezon, who was king of Syria. This Syrian king had a story similar to David's story: he had spent years hiding from the previous king of Syria.

Finally, he had gathered a group of men who made him King of Syria. Whenever he could, Rezon caused trouble to Israel.

Then there was Hadad, from the land of Edom. Hadad hated Solomon. When Hadad was a little boy, Solomon's father David, together with his commander Joab, had killed all the men from Edom, including Hadad's father. Hadad had run away and gone to live in Egypt. The Pharaoh protected him and became good friends with him. When Hadad grew up, the Pharaoh said, "You can marry my wife's sister." So Hadad and the Pharaoh became brothers-in-law, and their sons grew up together in the Pharaoh's palace.

Hadad lived like a prince in Egypt, but he was still angry at the Israelites for killing his father. When he heard that both David and Joab, the men who had killed his father, were dead, he said to the Pharaoh, "Let me go back to my country." Hadad liked Egypt and was happy there, but he wanted to be closer to Israel to cause them trouble.

Neither Rezon nor Hadad would have been able to disturb Israel at all if Solomon had been faithful to God. In fact, these men might even have had a chance to get to know God and feel His love and care for them, if only Solomon and the Israelites had followed God's plans for them. The Israelites could have shown all the nations around them how kind and loving their God is, and how much their God loves all people - but they didn't do this.

As Solomon's unfaithfulness continued, God saw, with great sadness, that He would have to do to Solomon what He'd had to do with Saul: He would have to give the kingdom to someone else. He would let most of the kingdom – but not all – go to a mighty man called Jeroboam. Jeroboam was already one of Solomon's officers.

God let a prophet called Ahijab know what was going to happen. Prophet Ahijab found Jeroboam out in a field one day. The prophet was wearing a brand-new coat. He cut his coat into twelve pieces, and said to Jeroboam, “Take ten pieces. The Lord says that He will take the kingdom away from Solomon and give ten tribes to you, because they are worshiping idols. Solomon’s family will keep one tribe, because of David.³ You will be king of Israel. If you follow God’s commands and statutes, He will be with you and strengthen you.”

Solomon was not happy when he found out that one day Jeroboam would get his kingdom. At first, he wanted to kill him, just like King Saul had tried to kill David so many years before. Jeroboam had to run and hide in Egypt; he lived there until Solomon died. But with time, King Solomon accepted God’s decision that the kingdom would be divided, and he began to prepare his son, the next king, to accept what God had said.

God cared for each of the men in this story. They would not have suffered so much war and fighting if God’s people had only listened to God’s advice and followed it from the beginning. But God respected each man’s choice, and He had to allow them to live the natural consequences of their decisions. And, even after their bad choices, God still kept on trying to reach them.

God is always trying to reach you and me, too. He wants us to know Him personally. He wants to guide us and care for us, but He

³ The twelfth tribe, which Ahijab did not mention, is the tribe of Benjamin, whose people decided to stay with Judah and David’s family. There were also the Levites, who lived in different cities all over Israel because they were a special tribe, whose men worked in the Sanctuary service. This tribe did not own sections of land, and could be found in both Judah and Israel. The rest of the tribes joined Jeroboam and formed the kingdom of Israel. You might think it’s nine tribes that went with Jeroboam, but don’t forget that Joseph’s descendants formed two half-tribes: Ephraim and Manasseh, so in this way, Israel ends up having ten tribes.

will only do it if we accept Him and let Him do it. Will you accept His care and guidance today?

7. King Solomon Repents

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.

Ecclesiastes 12:1 (KJV)



1 Kings 11:9-40. | Prophets and Kings Chapter 5

God was sad. He watched as, little by little, King Solomon turned away from Him. God had done so much for Solomon! Twice, God had spoken to him, promising, him, “I will bless you and your kingdom if you follow me and remain humble and faithful.” No other king on earth, ever, had received as much wealth, honor, fame and wisdom as Solomon had. But Solomon began to think that all of these things were his, and forgot that they came from God. As he left God’s counsel and turned to idols, he began to make decisions that were not wise at all.

There is nothing wrong with having comforts and riches; God wants us to enjoy the things He has given us. But Solomon became so interested in his riches that he grew selfish and greedy. He made the people pay taxes just so that he could have more comforts in his palace. He built houses, more than he would ever need, and he planted vineyards and gardens, just for himself. He gathered more silver and gold than anyone had ever seen before. He brought musicians and singers to make music for him in his palace whenever he wanted to. All the kings around him respected and admired him. Solomon should have been happy with all that he had, but he wasn’t.

He had left God, and now nothing could fill the empty feeling he had inside. He felt sad and anxious, and none of his riches could make him feel better. He worshiped idols, hoping that this would make him feel good, but he felt even more worried and restless after that.

As Solomon left God, he also left God's hedge of protection. God stayed with Solomon as much as possible, but He had to let Solomon make his own choices. Soon Solomon did not have peace in his kingdom anymore. One enemy after another began attacking him.

Finally, God sent a prophet with a message to King Solomon. Would he listen this time? "Solomon, you haven't kept my covenant and statutes, so I will take the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant Jeroboam. I will let your son keep one tribe, for the sake of your father David. And also, for the sake of your father David, this will not happen while you're still alive."

Solomon listened. As he heard the prophet's words, his body and mind felt weak. He felt sick as he realized what a terrible thing he had done. He had hurt himself, his family, and his whole country! Would God forgive him?

Solomon felt deep repentance. He realized he had completely ruined God's plans for him as a king, and that he didn't deserve God's forgiveness. But he remembered what he had learned when he was a younger, wiser king: God could forgive, and God could help him. Not only that, but God wanted to help him, because His mercy is everlasting. God had always been right there, waiting and longing to help him.

King Solomon decided to believe in God's love and forgiveness. "I have sinned. I have not done things your way," he confessed. As he turned to God, he received more wisdom, and he wrote a book in

which he tells us how foolish it is to live a life away from God. We can find this book, Ecclesiastes, in the Bible.

From that time on, King Solomon did his best to teach people to return to God. He told the young people, “Don’t make my mistake; stay close to God.” Being rich and famous did not help Solomon; only God did. King Solomon was able to help many of the Israelites return to God, and his writings are helpful to us today, too. But sadly, he couldn’t undo all the damage that his bad influence had caused. After Solomon died, none of the other kings were ever as wise or as prosperous as Solomon had been. In fact, very few of the kings after him even obeyed God at all. God freely forgave King Solomon, but nothing could be done about the people who, during Solomon’s time and after, chose to stay with their idols, away from God.

Solomon always said, after he repented, “Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.” If you stay with God always, from when you’re young, He will help you make good choices. He will help you live the life that He has planned for you. Will you remember God today? Do you choose to follow Him from today onwards?

8. Solomon's Best Song

Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly contemned.

Song of Solomon 8:7 (KJV)



Song of Solomon

King Solomon wrote 1005 songs. One of these songs has been kept for us to read today: it is the Song of Solomon⁴. The Bible also calls it the Song of Songs, or the best song by King Solomon. It is a love song: the story of the love between Solomon and a Shulammite girl that he loved. But it is also a song that helps us to understand the love that Jesus has for us.

King Solomon had many wives, but he didn't really love most of them. Why did he marry them? Because he was a king, and one way that kings made good relationships with other nations was to marry princesses from those nations. It was not wise for Solomon to marry all these women; it was not part of God's plan for his life or his family. But we do know that there was one girl that Solomon truly loved the way God intended: the Shulammite girl, Solomon's true love.

What kind of girl would a king choose? Would he want a rich girl, a princess? That's what many people thought. But Solomon fell in love with a country girl who worked under the sun all day caring

⁴ There are also two psalms that are probably among those 1005 songs: Psalm 72 and Psalm 127.

for her family's vineyards. It seems like her father had died, and her older brothers were in charge and made her do this work. She felt she was not beautiful because she was sunburnt from working under the sun so long. But Solomon didn't see the sunburn; he saw a sweet, beautiful girl, and he began to visit her. At first, she thought he was just a young shepherd, but later she found out who he really was: the king!

One spring morning, Solomon came to see the Shulammite girl. "Let's go for a walk together," he invited, "Winter is past, and it's not raining anymore. The earth is full of flowers, and the birds are singing. The fruit trees smell wonderful!" She accepted his invitation. It was a lovely day for a walk, and they enjoyed this beautiful day together.

One night, the Shulammite had a dream. In her dream, she didn't know where Solomon was. She began to search for him on the streets. She asked the guards, "Have you seen Solomon?" Finally, she found him! She was so glad to have found him, that she hugged him tight and didn't let go of him until they went back inside.

Another night, she had a different dream. In her dream, she was in her house. She heard Solomon knocking on her door. "Let me in!" he called. At first, she didn't want to let him in. She was already comfortably settled in bed. Then Solomon put his hand through a hole in the door. When she saw his hand, she felt bad for not letting him in. She got up and opened the door for him. But when she opened the door, he wasn't there anymore! Where was he? "Solomon!" she called, but there was no answer. She went out to look for him, but she couldn't find him. The guards grabbed her and took off her veil to see who she was. Why was she out on the streets at this hour? She felt ashamed. She also realized that she loved Solomon –

why had she ignored him? At last, she found him in his garden. When they saw each other again, Solomon was not angry at all. He didn't scold her for leaving him outside. He was glad to see her and treated her as if nothing bad had happened. She did not want to lose him again!

After these dreams, King Solomon asked the Shulammite girl to marry him, and she accepted. On the wedding day, Solomon wore a wedding crown that his mother gave him, and he rode on a fancy chariot, decorated with gold and purple, to fetch his bride and take her to their feast. Their wedding was joyful, full of good things to eat and drink. How happy the bride and groom were! They were overjoyed to start their new life together.

After the wedding, the Shulammite felt like visiting her village. Together with Solomon, they went to the spots where they had first gotten to know each other. "Remember when I first spoke to you under this apple tree?" he asked. Of course she remembered! She then said to him, "Look at your signet ring; it's important to you. I want to be as important to you as this signet ring." Solomon was a king, so he always kept his signet ring with him. She wanted to be as close to him, always, as his signet ring.

The rest of the women in town noticed what a close relationship the Shulammite girl had with Solomon, and they admired her for it. When two people love each other, everyone else can notice it, because they are so happy and at peace. Everyone wants to have this kind of love! If people could pay money for love, they would – but real love cannot be bought with money; it is a gift.

This was the Song of Solomon. The Israelites enjoyed this song because they knew it wasn't only talking about Solomon and his Shulammite wife. It is a song that tells us how much God's Son loves

us and longs to be with us. Just like Solomon searched for this girl until she accepted him, Jesus searches for us until we accept Him. Sometimes we reject Jesus and sadden Him, just like when the Shulammite, in her dream, refused to let Solomon into her house. But if we repent, He gladly takes us back, just like Solomon did. Jesus is loving and forgiving, and He loves us completely. He keeps us close to Him like a signet ring, the way the Shulammite asked Solomon to do with her. And, just like the rest of the women in town noticed this love, the people around us will notice when we are in a close relationship with Jesus.

The choice is ours. Do we want a close relationship with Jesus? He is inviting you. Will you accept?

9. The Kingdom is Divided

But godliness with contentment is great gain. 1 Timothy 6:6 (KJV)



1 Kings 11:41 – 12:24; 2 Chronicles 9:29-11:4 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 6

King Solomon had died. One of his sons, Rehoboam, knew that he had been chosen to become the next king of Israel. He traveled to the city of Shechem, where he expected that the people would crown him king.

Someone else also traveled to Shechem, because he hoped to meet Rehoboam and speak to him. This man was Jeroboam, the mighty man of valor, one of Solomon's best officers. Jeroboam was the same man who had been told by a prophet, "You will end up being king of ten of the tribes." But Jeroboam wasn't planning on becoming king just yet. Maybe Rehoboam, Solomon's son, would listen to what Jeroboam wanted to ask him for. Then the kingdom would not need to be split.

Jeroboam, the mighty man, told Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, "Before all the tribes accept you as king, we want you to promise that you will charge us lower taxes than your father Solomon did, and that you will expect less service from us." The people were unhappy because Solomon had gotten richer and richer, while they had gotten poorer and had to work harder than before, just so the king could stay rich. They were tired and wanted this to stop.

Rehoboam decided to think about this. For three days, he spoke to his advisors and thought about what to do. The older men who counseled him said, "Rehoboam, be kind to the people. Treat them

well and speak nicely to them, and they will be happy to have you as king. They will serve you always.” But the younger counselors had different thoughts. They said, “Be strict and harsh with the people. Show them from the beginning that you’re the boss and you’re in charge, and that things will always be done the way you want!”

Who would Rehoboam listen to? Sadly, he listened to the foolish advice of his younger counselors. He liked the idea of being stern and bossy; it made him feel important. God didn’t stop Rehoboam from making this decision. He allowed the people to see exactly what Rehoboam was like, so that they would not want him as their king. It was not God’s will for the king to treat his people like this; the best thing for Israel would be for the kingdom to be divided, so that no king would have so much power over the people again.

The Israelites were so exhausted from Solomon’s heavy taxes that they couldn’t stand it anymore. Disappointed and angry, they said, “We will have nothing to do with David’s family anymore.” Ten of the tribes walked away from Rehoboam and joined Jeroboam. They wanted Jeroboam to be their new king. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin stayed with Rehoboam. The kingdom was suddenly divided. Now Rehoboam was the king of Judah, and Jeroboam was the king of Israel.

King Rehoboam was upset. His father Solomon had told him that this would happen, but he refused to accept it. “They are still part of my kingdom!” he said stubbornly, “I will send someone to collect my taxes from these people!” He sent a man called Adoram to collect the taxes, but the people refused to pay him. Instead, they threw stones at Adoram, and he died. King Rehoboam was terrified when he heard this; he got on his chariot and rode as fast as possible to Jerusalem, to escape from the angry people.

Then he said angrily, “I will gather a large army. We will attack the ten tribes for being rebellious!” But before Rehoboam could go out to battle, he received a special visitor. Shemaiah, a man of God, came to see him. He said, “Rehoboam, I have a message from God for you. He says you are not to fight against the ten tribes. These men are your brothers. Let all the men in your army return home. This division of the kingdom comes from God. Don’t fight against it.”

Rehoboam listened to Shemaiah. He sent his army home, and did not fight against the ten tribes. He accepted that, from now on, he and his family would have a smaller kingdom. God had never wished for the kingdom to be divided, but because King Solomon and the Israelite people had turned to idols for so long, and because the king had become so greedy, it was best for the people. God would still do all He could to reach each of the kingdoms. Would the two new kings listen to God and teach their people to follow Him?

Solomon, for a time, had preferred wealth and idols other than God. His son Rehoboam chose power and money over God. If they’d chosen God, they would not have felt the need for all that wealth and power; they would have been happy and satisfied with what God gave them. Are we grateful and content for the things that we have? Thank God today for all that He has given you, and ask Him to help you be happy with what you have. Ask Him to help you make Him the most important part of your life.

10. King Rehoboam

**But they are altogether dull-hearted and foolish;
A wooden idol is a worthless doctrine. Jeremiah 10:8 (NKJV)**



1 Kings 14:21-31; 2 Chronicles 11:5-12:16 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 6

The kingdom of Israel had now been split into two: Solomon's son, Rehoboam, ruled over Judah and Benjamin, and Jeroboam ruled over the rest of the tribes. Rehoboam's kingdom was really small now, compared to the large and prosperous kingdom that his father Solomon had had.

For a time, King Rehoboam tried to follow God. His father Solomon had told him how important it was to obey God and to stay away from idols. He had seen his father turn back to God after having worshiped idols for many years. But King Rehoboam's mother had never worshiped God; she was an idol worshiper. Rehoboam had spent more time with his mother than with his father when he was growing up, and his mother had taught him to worship idols instead of God.

At first, King Rehoboam listened to his father and did his best to follow God. While he did this, God was able to pour blessings on him. Rehoboam made his kingdom stronger by building walled cities for defense. He also filled large stores of grain and wine, to make sure that if there was any trouble, his people would at least have food for a long time. He became quite powerful, but this was all possible because he and the people in his kingdom chose to worship God. Rehoboam's people were not the only ones who worshiped God:

many people from the other ten tribes also chose to follow God. They would come from all over Israel to worship God in the beautiful temple in Jerusalem.

For three years, Rehoboam and his kingdom enjoyed safety and prosperity under God's care and protection. This was Rehoboam's chance to become a good king and to rule his people with fairness and kindness. But sadly, he soon stopped looking to God and became proud. He thought that he was so powerful that he didn't need the God of Israel anymore. He remembered the idols that his mother had taught him to worship, and he turned to these idols instead of God. Why didn't he learn from his father Solomon's mistakes? His father had warned him to stay away from idols, but Rehoboam didn't care.

When Rehoboam left God, he left God's hedge of protection, too. God had to sorrowfully let Rehoboam make his own choice. All too soon, troubles came to his kingdom. In the fifth year that Rehoboam was king, Jerusalem was attacked. King Shishak, the pharaoh of Egypt, came with twelve hundred chariots, sixty thousand soldiers on horses, and thousands more soldiers on foot. King Shishak took the cities of defense that Rehoboam had built, then he came to Jerusalem.

King Rehoboam and all his leaders were gathered in Jerusalem, wondering how to protect themselves from King Shishak. Suddenly Rehoboam received a visitor: it was Shemaiah, the same man who had told him, "Don't fight against the other ten tribes." Now Shemaiah had a new message from God. He said, "The Lord says, 'you have left me, so I have left you in the hands of Shishak.'"

Rehoboam knew that Shemaiah was right. The leaders of Judah also knew that he was right. They humbled themselves, and said, "God is right." They understood that they had been wrong, and that

God was being just. They had left God, so how could God protect them?

Now Shemaiah arrived again with a new message. He said, “The Lord says that because you have humbled yourselves, He will deliver you. Shishak won’t destroy you, but God will allow you to become servants of Shishak. Now you will know the difference between God’s service and the service of other kingdoms.”

God protected their lives, but they watched as Shishak took all the treasures from the temple and from the king’s house. King Solomon had made some shiny, heavy, expensive shields of gold – and Shishak took them all. Rehoboam didn’t have enough gold to make new shields, so he made cheaper shields of brass instead, to replace the stolen ones. How sad and humiliated he must have felt! But he understood that he was to blame for what had happened.

For some time after this, Rehoboam and his kingdom remained humble and worshiped God again, and the kingdom began to prosper once more. Sadly, all too soon the people forgot God again, and they turned to their idols. Hadn’t they learned anything from their humiliating experience? How sad that Rehoboam didn’t use this difficult lesson to turn to God completely! He could have spent the rest of his life enjoying a peaceful and prosperous kingdom under God’s guidance and protection, but he didn’t. For the rest of his rule, he did evil. He never followed God again. What a sad ending to his story!

What about us? Are we willing to put God first, to worship Him, and to turn away from things that keep us separate from Him? We might not have wooden or golden idols to worship, but there are other things that might keep us away from God. Ask Him to help you

get to know Him and love Him more, so that you will desire Him only, and will lose interest in the things that keep you away from Him.

11. A Withered Hand, a Lion and a Donkey

**He that covereth his sins shall not prosper:
but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.
Proverbs 28:13 (KJV)**



1 Kings 12:25 – 14:20; 15:1-6. | Prophets and Kings Chapter 7

Jeroboam was now King of Israel – king of the ten northern tribes. He had been a good leader while he worked for Solomon. Would he still do a good job after he became king? Would he bring the people to God?

It's very sad to say, but as soon as Jeroboam became king, he forgot who had given him the kingdom. Instead of trusting God to lead and protect him, he began to think, "I don't want the people to go to Jerusalem to worship at the temple anymore. If they do, they will end up wanting Rehoboam to be their king. I must stop this!" He decided to build two shrines for the people to worship: one in Bethel and one in Dan. And if that wasn't bad enough, he did something even worse: he built two golden calves, one for each shrine. He hoped these idols would help the people to feel the presence of God. How could he have thought that it was ok to do this?

Then Jeroboam talked to some Levites and said, "I want you to be priests in my new places of worship." But the Levites refused; they knew this was bad. Finally, Jeroboam got men from other tribes, men who did not love God, to be priests in his shrines. The men of Israel

who were faithful to God were worried when they saw what Jeroboam was doing. Many families, especially Levite families, moved to Judah after this. They wanted to worship God properly, away from idols.

After Jeroboam had built his shrines, he invented his own feast. Instead of allowing the people to go to Jerusalem and celebrate the feast of Tabernacles on the fifteenth day of the seventh month as the Lord had directed, Jeroboam announced “We will have a religious feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month.” During his feast, he was burning incense on the altar when a man of God arrived from Judah. This man of God spoke loudly and firmly, saying, “O altar, altar, this is what the Lord says: ‘David’s family will have a child named Josiah, and on this altar, Josiah will offer the false priests that burn incense here!’ Just so you know that the Lord has spoken, the altar will be torn, and its ashes will be poured out!”

As soon as the man of God finished speaking, the altar broke, and its ashes were poured out. This was Jeroboam’s chance to realize that God was warning him that he was in danger. He could have repented, but instead, he got angry at the messenger and tried to attack him. “Grab him!” he ordered, and he stretched out his hand to hurt the messenger. But suddenly, his stretched-out hand became withered and powerless. With horror, he realized he couldn’t use his hand at all! Jeroboam looked at the messenger, terrified. “Please, ask God to heal my hand!” he begged.

The man of God could have said, “No, this is what you deserve – your hand can stay just as it is!” But he didn’t say this. He kindly prayed and asked God to heal Jeroboam’s hand, and God did. King Jeroboam was relieved to have his hand healed again, but he wasn’t really sorry for bringing idols to Israel. He never took them down, even after God had been so kind and loving to him.

Jeroboam now wanted to treat the messenger of God kindly. He said, “Come to my house. Eat and rest, and I will give you a reward.” God’s messenger didn’t need any reward; he didn’t need any payment. All he wanted was for Jeroboam to listen to God’s message and repent!

The messenger answered, “I will not go, even if you give me half of your house. God told me not to eat or drink anything until I reach home.” After saying this, he got on his donkey and started back home.

After he left, an old man who was a false prophet found out what had happened. He decided to meet this messenger. He got on his donkey and met him on the way. The elderly man said to the messenger, “Come to my house; I’ll give you something to eat and drink.” “Oh, no, God told me not to,” replied the messenger. But the older man insisted, “I’m a prophet, too. An angel told me to take you to my home and feed you.”

This was a lie, and the messenger should have known it. If God had already given him instructions, then why would he obey someone who told him to do the opposite of what God had said? But the messenger was hungry, thirsty and tired. He wanted to believe that God had said this to the older man, so he didn’t stop to ask God, “Lord, did you really say this to this man?” He went with him, and enjoyed a nice, satisfying meal at his home.

As they were eating, God used the older man to give the messenger a warning. The older man said, “The Lord says that because you have disobeyed Him, you will die, and you won’t even be buried where the rest of your relatives are buried.”

This was a terrible message – just as terrible as what the messenger had told King Jeroboam! Would he repent? No, he didn’t.

He knew he had been wrong. He also knew that God was willing to forgive – hadn't God forgiven King Jeroboam and healed his hand? There was still time for this man to come back into God's hedge of protection. But sadly, he didn't ask God to forgive him; he ignored the opportunity that God was giving him. He just finished his meal, then got on his donkey and continued his journey.

As the messenger rode on his donkey, a lion appeared. The lion attacked and killed him. Then something strange happened: both the lion and the donkey stood there, next to the dead man. The lion didn't attack anyone anymore. People passed by and they saw this strange sight of a dead man with a lion and a donkey standing next to him. The old man (the false prophet) fetched the man and buried him.

Now people could see how serious it was to leave God. Even God's messenger wasn't safe if he left God's hedge of protection! King Jeroboam could have seen this story as yet another invitation to come to God, but he didn't. He continued worshiping the idols in his shrines, and he led the people into idol worship.

King Jeroboam thought his family would always be on the throne. But it would not be so. One of his little sons, Abijah, got sick. "We should see prophet Ahijah," said Jeroboam. But Jeroboam had been so rebellious to God, he thought Ahijah might not want to speak to him. So he said to his wife, "You go. But disguise yourself, so he doesn't know that you are my wife." Prophet Ahijah was already old and almost blind, so Jeroboam thought that his wife would be able to disguise herself easily.

But God told Prophet Ahijah that Jeroboam's wife was coming. As soon as she arrived, Ahijah said, "Why are you disguising yourself, wife of Jeroboam? I have bad news for you. Your son will die as soon

as you arrive home. And as for your husband, God made him king over ten tribes. But he has not kept God's commandments like David did. He has not followed God with all his heart. He has made idols. So his family will not continue being on the throne. Israel will end up being destroyed because of the sins of Jeroboam, and because he made Israel sin."

Jeroboam's wife sorrowfully returned home, and as soon as she arrived, her child died⁵. The rest of Jeroboam's reign was evil and sad. He never repented. His reign could have been so different, if only he had trusted and followed God!

This chapter is full of stories of men who didn't follow God, and who didn't ask God for forgiveness even after He showed them their sin and gave them the chance to repent. It is a sad story and could happen to any of us if we leave God and put ourselves under the enemy. Would you like to come into God's hedge of protection and stay there always? Ask Him to show you how to stay with Him always.

⁵ Why would God allow this child to die? The Bible says that there was some good in him toward the Lord God of Israel. The rest of Jeroboam's sons were so evil that they weren't even buried properly after they died. This child was the only righteous son that Jeroboam had, so by dying young, he was probably spared from all the evil that would come.

12. The Lukewarm Kings of Judah

And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you. 2 Chronicles 15:2 (KJV)

 *1 Kings 15:1-24; 2 Chronicles 13-16. | Prophets and Kings Chapter 8*

God had promised that someone from David's family would always be on the throne, because David had loved God so much and followed His commandments. And He kept His promise: there continued to be a descendant from David on the throne, even after the kingdom was divided. David's family ruled over what was now called the Kingdom of Judah.

After Solomon's son Rehoboam died, a new king began to reign over Judah. His name was Abijah⁶. Abijah decided to go to war against Jeroboam. How terrible to wage war against other Israelites! He did not ask God whether he should do this. God did not want the Israelite tribes to fight against each other, even if they were now divided into two kingdoms. But Abijah went ahead and gathered four hundred thousand mighty men and got ready for war. Jeroboam gathered double the number of men, and he got ready for battle, too.

Then Abijah climbed up one of the mountains of Ephraim and began to speak to Jeroboam and the Israelites from there. He said

⁶ He is also called Abijam in some parts of the Bible.

loudly, “God gave the kingdom to David and his family, but Jeroboam took it away from Rehoboam!” This was a lie – God had decided that the kingdom should be divided because of Solomon’s unfaithfulness. Jeroboam had not “taken” anything. Then Abijah continued, “Now Jeroboam has built these golden calves! He has sent away the priests and Levites from his land, and other men are acting as priests. You Israelites are worshiping false gods, but we are worshiping the Lord our God. We have the sons of Aaron as priests, and we have the Levites who are taking care of the temple. You, Israelites, have left God, but *we* have God as our captain. Children of Israel, don’t fight against the Lord God of your fathers, because you won’t win!”

A lot of what Abijah said was true: it was true that Jeroboam had brought in golden calves, and that Israel was not worshiping God anymore. But was Abijah *really* following God and having Him as his captain? Was he truly asking God to guide him? No, not really.

Jeroboam heard what Abijah said, but he didn’t care. He wasn’t going to change. His army attacked Abijah’s army from behind, when they were not expecting an attack. Now Abijah and his army were in big trouble! They cried out to God for help, and God heard them. He “smote” Jeroboam and his army right in front of Abijah and his army. When God “smites”, He does not kill anyone; He shows them their sins to give them a chance to repent. This “smiting” made Jeroboam and his army feel scared and confused, because they did not want to repent. They began to run away from the army of Judah. Do you see how, even after God “smote” them, none of them were dead?⁷ Now

⁷ A great example of this “smiting” is found in 2 Samuel 24:10 (KJV) where it says: “And David’s heart smote him after that he had numbered the people.” In the NLT it says it this way: “But after he had taken the census, David’s conscience began to bother him.” (See Book 3, *The Conquest and the Judges*, story 58 “A Plague in Israel”).

the army of Judah decided to chase after the army of Israel, and they killed many of them. It was easy for them to do this, because Jeroboam's army had completely lost God's protection, since they had rejected Him. God never asked the army of Judah to kill the men of Jeroboam; this was their decision. After this war, Jeroboam was so weak that he died not long after that. He never completely recovered.

Even though Abijah told the Israelites that they should return to God, he did not turn to God himself. The rest of his reign was evil. He never really listened to God's guidance, and the Bible says that he was not a good king. He knew all the stories of David and Solomon and could have learnt from them, but sadly, he chose not to.

After Abijah died, his son Asa became king of Judah. Asa started off well: he removed idols and shrines from his land. He followed God, at least at first. Of course, like most kings, he made sure he had strong, walled cities and a good army, in case another army came to attack them. He didn't stop to think that if his kingdom had God's protection, he wouldn't need any of these things. Yet God was patient with Asa.

Then trouble came: the king of Ethiopia brought a huge army to attack the kingdom of Judah. King Asa saw that the army of Ethiopia was much bigger than his own army. He decided to trust God for protection, and he cried out, "Lord, you can help us, no matter the size of our army! We rest in you; you are our God!" God honored King Asa's faith, and smote the Ethiopian army, just like He had smitten the army of Jeroboam: this means that He faced the men in this army with their sins. The Ethiopian army didn't want to accept God, so they only felt fear and confusion when God came to them. They began to run away. Of course, Asa's army ran after them and killed them, because they could not imagine just letting the Ethiopians

go. After they killed the Ethiopian army, they gathered all the spoil (the animals and possessions that the army had brought with them).

Asa had shown faith in God, and this was good. God sent Azariah the prophet to give King Asa a message of encouragement. Azariah said to King Asa, “The Lord will be with you while you are with Him. Don’t forget that every time God’s people have asked for His help, He has helped them. Keep on being faithful to God and leading the people to worship God.”

King Asa was encouraged when he heard these words. He searched for the idols in his kingdom and got rid of them. He also decided that his mother would not be queen anymore because she had built an idol and worshiped it. Then King Asa invited the people to come and gather in Jerusalem. People from all over Judah, Benjamin and even some other tribes of Israel joined, because they wanted to worship God. King Asa offered the spoil from the war to God, and he and the people made a covenant to God, promising to seek Him with all their heart and soul. After that, there was peace in the land for a long while.

Then one more test of faith came to Asa: King Baasha from Israel began to cause trouble. Would Asa ask God for help again, like he had done when the Ethiopians attacked him? Sadly, he didn’t. He sent gifts of gold and silver to a heathen king, the king of Syria, with the message, “Please help me fight against Baasha king of Israel.” The king of Syria did help, and because Baasha did not have God’s protection, he lost the battle and stopped disturbing the kingdom of Judah. But what Asa had done was not good. A prophet called Hanani came and said, “King Asa, why did you trust in the king of Syria instead of depending on God? You’ve been foolish. Now you will always have wars.”

King Asa could have accepted his mistake. He could have repented, but he didn't. Instead, he got angry at Prophet Hanani and put him in prison. After that, he did not come back to God. Near the end of his life, he had a horrible disease on his feet. Even with this disease, he refused to come to God. He hoped that doctors would heal him, but they couldn't. He finally died, away from God. What a sad ending! He had started off trusting in God, then he changed.

How sad God must have felt to see the kings of Judah, David's descendants, going away from Him. How sad that at times they wanted to follow Him, but then didn't. They had allowed other things to separate them from God. This could happen to us, too. Little by little, there might be things creeping in that will begin to separate us from God. Ask Him to show you if there is anything that is stopping you from following Him with all your heart. Ask Him to help you avoid these things, and to focus on Him.

13. The Evil Kings of Israel

**But your iniquities have separated between you and your God,
and your sins have hid his face from you,
that he will not hear. Isaiah 59:2 (KJV)**



1 Kings 15:25-34; 16:1-33. | Prophets and Kings Chapter 8

King Jeroboam was the first king of the ten tribes of Israel when the kingdom was divided. God had chosen him to be king. He could have used this opportunity to bring Israel to God, and to do all the things that King Solomon had not done for Israel. But sadly, Jeroboam made decisions that led the people away from God. He made golden calves and built new places of worship, to keep the people away from the temple in Jerusalem. “If the people worship God at Jerusalem, in the kingdom of Judah, I might lose my power as king,” he thought selfishly. Because of his wickedness, God let him know that all his sons would die, and his family would not continue being on the throne. He had completely lost God’s protection, because he had chosen to leave God’s hedge of protection.

When Jeroboam died, his son Nadab became king. But Nadab only ruled for two years. He was so evil that not even his servants liked him. One of his officers, Baasha, got help from some of the other servants and killed Nadab. As soon as Nadab was dead, Baasha became king, and he killed all of Jeroboam’s other children.

Baasha was king for twenty-four years, but he was just as evil as Jeroboam; he was just as wicked as the royal family that he had

killed. Prophet Hanani came to give King Baasha a message from God. This is the same Prophet Hanani who had visited King Asa of Judah to give him a warning from God. He said to King Baasha, “You have done evil just like Jeroboam. You made Israel sin, and turned them against God. So, just like in Jeroboam’s family, your children will not be on the throne.”

When Baasha died, his son Elah became king, but ruled for only two years, just like Jeroboam’s son Nadab had. Elah died just like Nadab had died: one of his servants called Zimri killed him and all his brothers. Zimri became the next king, but he only lasted seven days! The people heard that he had killed the king’s family, and they didn’t like it. They picked a new king called Omri. When Zimri heard there was a new king, he was so afraid that he went into his palace and started to burn it down. As the palace burnt down, he died in the fire.

The new king that the people had chosen, Omri, was no better than the kings before him. He did even more evil than any of the others had done. He started a new city called Samaria. From then on, Samaria became the capital of the kingdom of Israel.

When Omri died, his son Ahab became king. Ahab was the worst king of all. He married a heathen princess called Jezebel. Jezebel taught her husband Ahab to worship a horrible idol called Baal. Because of Jezebel, Ahab built places of worship for Baal, and he and the Israelites began to worship this horrible idol. Soon Israel was far away from God, worshiping Baal and another idol called Ashtoreth.

Israel had gotten worse and worse. God watched with great sadness as the kings left Him and led the people away from Him. Not one of these kings followed Him – not even one! They were just like heathen kings, worshiping idols and trying to solve their problems

without asking God for help and guidance. They got to the throne by killing and lying and cheating. They lived in constant fear because, just like they had killed others, they were sure that others wanted to kill them, too. They had no peace or joy. God watched with sadness; He had never wanted the kings of His people to live this way!

But God still didn't give up on His people; He kept trying to reach them. There were still men and women who, in spite of their evil kings, were willing to listen to God and worship Him. When the kings completely failed to lead the people to God, He began to send them good and faithful prophets. He would not let the people go until He had tried everything He could to bring them to Himself.

The stories of the kings of Israel are some of the saddest in the Bible. These kings had everything they needed to know God and to choose Him, but they didn't. They had the Scriptures, they knew all the stories of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David and Solomon. They knew they could come to God, but they chose not to. This could happen to any of us: we might know a lot about the Bible, about what God has done for His people, but we might still make the wrong choices and not follow Him. Do you wish to follow God, to make Him your Guide and your God? Ask Him to help you always stay close to Him.

14. The Drought in Israel

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 (NKJV)



1 Kings 17:1-7 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 9

King Ahab was now king of Israel. And what an evil king he was! His wife, Queen Jezebel, worshiped a horrible idol called Baal. And now she was teaching Ahab and the rest of Israel to worship this idol! King Ahab was not willing to listen to God, but as long as there was hope, God tried to reach him. Again and again, God sent a prophet to speak to him. The prophet's name was Elijah.

Elijah lived in the countryside, away from the cities. The evil that happened in the cities, and all the idol worshiping, made him sad. He spent a lot of time praying, and he was not afraid to speak up for God when God asked him to. "The people are leaving the God of life! Please, Lord, help them repent before it's too late for them!" he would pray. God answered Elijah's prayer and said to him, "I will allow a drought in the land." Why? Because the people believed that dew and rain came from Baal, and not from God. They needed to see that Baal could not give them any rain. "Tell King Ahab that there will be a drought," God instructed Elijah.

Elijah left his home immediately and made the long trip to King Ahab's palace in Samaria. He even traveled during the night to get there sooner! When he finally arrived at the palace, he went in immediately. The guards didn't notice when he entered, and he didn't stop to ask them for permission. He just entered and walked straight to where the king was.

King Ahab looked up and was startled to see Elijah. Elijah, dressed in rough clothes, lifted his hand towards heaven and announced, "I affirm by the living God that there will be no dew nor rain these next years!" Would this help Israel see that they needed God, and that Baal could do nothing for them?

Ahab was so surprised that he did not even know what to say. And before he could say anything, Elijah had disappeared. Of course, Ahab was unhappy with what Elijah had said, and soon he and Queen Jezebel began to search for him so they could kill him. But they could not find him, because God protected Elijah.

"Go and hide in the brook Cherith," God instructed Elijah. Elijah was well hidden in this brook among the mountains. The brook gave him sweet water to drink, and God also sent him some very special helpers: each day, black ravens would come and bring him bread and meat to eat. Elijah could trust God completely; all his needs were met. And what did he do when it rained? Well, it didn't rain, because just as God had said, the rain and the dew stopped falling.

At first, no one believed Elijah when he said it wouldn't rain. But as the weeks went by, they realized that he had spoken the truth. They began to pray to their idol, Baal, and to their other idol, Ashtoreth. "Send us rain!" they begged. But no dew or rain fell on the earth. The hot sun beat down upon the earth. Soon the ground was so dry that the plants withered up, the streams and rivers dried up, and

the sheep, cows, goats, horses and donkeys began to die from hunger and thirst.

Would the people remember God now? Would they ask God to bring rain? Sadly, no, they didn't. Queen Jezebel kept saying to the people, "It's all Elijah's fault that there's no rain! If we kill him, then Baal will send rain again." But no one could find Elijah, because God was hiding him and keeping him safe.

"Well, if we can't kill Elijah, we will at least kill the other prophets of God!" decided Jezebel. She found and killed several of the prophets, but there were many that she could not find, either. That's because Obadiah, the governor of King Ahab's house, decided to help these men. He hid one hundred prophets of God in a cave and sent them food and water. He knew that if Queen Jezebel found out, she would kill him, but he was willing to risk his life for these good men.

Two years passed, and the land was drier than ever. The people were suffering. The animals were dying. Yet the people still did not ask God for help. Couldn't they see that without God, there is no life? They were asking Baal for help, but Baal was not alive; Baal could not help them. God was longing to help them. Would they ask Him?

Elijah trusted God, and God took care of him during the drought. The one hundred prophets that Obadiah hid in the cave also trusted God and were cared for. I'm quite sure that even the prophets who were killed by Queen Jezebel died trusting that God would give them eternal life. But King Ahab, Queen Jezebel and most of the Israelite people did not trust God. They trusted in Baal, a lifeless idol, instead, so God could not bless them like He longed to. The lack of water in Israel showed that the Israelites did not have God's Spirit guiding them, because water represents the Spirit of God.

Do you trust God? Do you believe that He wants to give you life and blessings? Ask Him for His Spirit to guide you and to help you see all the wonderful blessings He has been giving you.

15. The Faith of the Widow of Sarepta

**How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!
Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your
wings.
Psalm 36:7 (NKJV)**

 *1 Kings 17:8-24 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 10*

Two years of drought had gone by. All that time, Elijah had been safe, hiding in the brook Cherith. But after so many months of no rain, the brook began to dry up. Soon there would be no more water for Elijah. God instructed him, “Go to the city of Sarepta, in the country of Zidon. You will live there with a widow. I have instructed her to feed you.” There was no safe family in Israel for Elijah to stay with, so God sent him to live with a non-Israelite family. This woman knew very little about God, but she believed in Him, and she followed the little bit that she understood.

When Elijah arrived to the gate in Sarepta, he found this widow gathering sticks to make a fire. “Please give me some water,” Elijah asked politely. As she was leaving to fetch the water, Elijah said something else: “Please bring me a little bit of bread, too.”

What a difficult request Elijah made! The widow stopped and answered, “I only have a handful of flour and a little oil. I was going to cook it for me and my son, and then we will die, because there’s no more food.”

Elijah understood. He assured her, “Don’t be afraid.” Yet he still insisted, “Do what you said, but bring me some first, then make some for you and your son. The Lord God of Israel says that you will not run out of flour and oil until He sends rain upon the earth.”

Would the widow believe God’s words through Elijah? Elijah was a stranger to her; she had never met him before. Would she have faith? She decided that she would believe God. She went home and used her last bits of flour and oil to make bread for Elijah. As she was making the bread, she realized that the oil kept flowing from her jug if she needed it, and that there was always flour in her barrel. God had kept His word! After feeding Elijah, she was able to make enough bread for herself and her son. After that, as long as the drought lasted, she always had enough flour and oil to make bread for Elijah, her son and herself. God honored this widow’s faith and gave them enough food through all that time.

Everything seemed to be going fine after this. The land continued to be dry, and it was still difficult to find food, but the widow, her son and Elijah were safe. Every day, the oil jug and the flour barrel held enough to make the bread they needed. The widow knew that the God of Heaven was doing this for her, and she gladly trusted Him.

Then something terrible happened. One day, the woman’s son suddenly got sick and died. She was heartbroken. She couldn’t understand how this could happen to her. She went to Elijah and, full of sorrow, said, “What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come here to remind me of my sins and kill my son?”

This is what most people believe about God. They think, “I’m a sinner, so God probably wants to punish me. All the bad things that happen to me are because God is punishing me for my sins.” Is this true? Of course not! God doesn’t want to punish; He wants to save. If

we feel like sinners, it's because He is showing us what our problem is, so that He can then help us. We are all sinners, but God is doing everything He can to help us, not to hurt us. Would the widow be able to understand this?

Elijah was sad that this had happened. "Give me your son," he told the woman kindly. He took the boy from her arms. The woman had given Elijah an upstairs loft to sleep in, and now he carried the little boy there. He gently placed the boy on the bed. Then he began to pray. "Oh Lord," cried Elijah, "Have you brought even more suffering to this woman? She's letting me stay here, and now her son is dead!" Even Elijah had a hard time understanding what was happening, but he chose to trust God. How would God show this widow that He loved and cared for her? Would He give back this little boy his life? Now Elijah stretched himself upon the child three times, and full of faith, he prayed, "Oh Lord my God, please give life to this boy again!" God heard Elijah's prayer, and the little boy opened his eyes. God had given him back his life!

How joyful and relieved Elijah must have felt! He picked up the boy in his arms and carried him back, alive, to his mother. "Look!" he said to her happily, "Your son is alive!" The woman was overjoyed. As she hugged her son, she said to Elijah, "This proves to me that you are a man of God, and that what God says to you is the truth." This had been a big test of faith for her, a very difficult one. She knew very little about God, but now, with all that had happened since having Elijah in her home, her heart was completely opened to hearing and learning more. We don't know what she and Elijah talked about after this, but we can be quite sure that she willingly listened to everything that Elijah shared with her about the God of Heaven. She had believed in God before, but now she was even more open to learning

as much as possible about Him. How wonderful it is to learn about a loving, merciful God who comforts us and cares for us! Would you like to get to know our loving God more? Tell Him so today.

16. Jehovah or Baal?

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not. Psalm 115:4-5 (KJV)



1 Kings 18:1-29 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 11

For three years, there was a drought in Israel. All that time, King Ahab had been searching all over for Elijah to kill him. But God protected Elijah and kept him safe and hidden from King Ahab.

After three years, God instructed Elijah, “Go and show yourself to King Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth.” Elijah immediately got ready for the long journey to King Ahab’s palace. On the way there, Elijah met Obadiah, the man who was in charge of King Ahab’s household. Obadiah was looking for grass for the king’s horses and mules. He was a good man; he had protected and helped one hundred prophets so that King Ahab and Queen Jezebel wouldn’t kill them. Obadiah was both surprised and happy to see Elijah. Elijah said to him, “Go and tell the king that I’m here.” “Oh, no, I can’t do that,” Obadiah said, “What if you disappear again? The king will be very angry with me if he hears that I met you but didn’t arrest you. He’s been looking everywhere for you.” Elijah promised Obadiah, “I will show myself to King Ahab today.”

So Obadiah went to tell King Ahab that Elijah was coming to him. King Ahab hated Elijah, but he was also afraid of him. What terrible thing would Elijah say now? When King Ahab met Elijah, he said

angrily, “Are you the one who is troubling Israel?” King Ahab wanted to blame Elijah for the famine, even though it was not Elijah’s fault. Elijah calmly answered, “I have not troubled Israel; it was you and your father’s house, because you have left God’s commandments and have followed other gods.” Elijah was not afraid of King Ahab and all his soldiers. He felt safe, because God was with him, and he was doing God’s work.

Elijah made an invitation to King Ahab: “Let’s meet on Mount Carmel. Gather all of Israel there, and the 450 prophets of Baal.” Ahab agreed. A few days later they were all gathered on Mount Carmel: the prophets of Baal, King Ahab and Elijah. The people stood on the side of the mountain and watched. They wondered what was going on. Elijah seemed so alone there, the only worshiper of the God of Heaven. But he wasn’t alone; strong, invisible angels surrounded him.

Elijah looked around him. Everyone could see that the altar of God, which had been built there long ago, was broken. It reminded them that for many years, the Israelites had not worshiped God. Elijah spoke to everyone there, saying, “How long will you doubt between two opinions? If the Lord is God, then follow Him. If Baal is god, then follow him.” Elijah waited to hear if anyone would say, “Jehovah is God!” But no one said anything. Then Elijah continued, “I am the only prophet of the Lord left. But Baal has 450 prophets here. Let’s bring two bullocks. The prophets of Baal will sacrifice one bullock and place it on wood, but they will not light a fire. I will do the same. You will call upon the name of your gods, and I will call upon the name of the Lord. The God that answers with fire, let Him be God.”

Everyone thought that this suggestion from Elijah was good. None of the prophets of Baal dared to say, “No, Elijah, we won’t do this.” Wouldn’t that make Baal look bad? They all said, “You’ve spoken well, Elijah.” Now that they had agreed, Elijah, said, “You may start first, since there’s many of you.”

The prophets of Baal were terrified. They knew that their idol Baal would probably not send them a fire, but they pretended to be strong and sure of themselves. They prepared the wood, killed the bullock and placed it on the wood. Then they began to chant and cry out to Baal, asking him to hear them and to burn up their offering. For hours they danced, leaped and screamed. They even cut their skins with knives to make their blood flow. They hoped that by hurting themselves, Baal would answer them. But their idol was not alive; it did not answer them. Elijah mocked them, saying, “Cry out louder! Maybe he is talking, or he is busy, or he might be away on a trip. Or maybe he’s sleeping, and you need to wake him up!” Of course, no matter what the prophets of Baal did, their idol did not send them fire. Baal did not answer them.

Elijah watched them carefully. He knew they might want to cheat, and they would try to light a fire secretly. But with Elijah watching them, none of them did it. Satan would have wanted to send a fire, but God did not let him do it. The dead bullock still lay there, on the wood, and there was no fire.

All morning had passed, and noon had passed. It was now 3.00, the time of the evening sacrifice. The prophets of Baal were exhausted after all that screaming and dancing. The cuts on their bodies hurt, and their clothes were stained with blood. The prophets of Baal felt desperate, even angry. They were so desperate that they began to insult Baal and say bad words to him! But still, no fire fell on

the altar. Now that it was evening, they gave up. They didn't know what else to do.

The people had been watching the whole day. "What the priests of Baal are doing is horrible!" they thought. Many of the people were already tired of watching the bleeding men dancing, and of hearing their loud screams. "What will Elijah do now?" they wondered.

It was clear that their manmade idol, Baal, did not hear. It did not care. It couldn't hear, care about them or help them, because it was not alive. But we will see in the next story that God is alive, and He does hear and care. Aren't you glad that we have a God who doesn't ask us to scream, dance and cut ourselves? We don't need to do all those things for Him to hear us; He hears us right now, and He is willing to help us. Will you thank Him today?

17. The Lord, He is God!

Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. 1 Kings 18:37 (KJV)



1 Kings 18:30-40 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 11

It was 3.00, time for the evening sacrifice. The Israelites, King Ahab, the 450 priests of Baal, and Elijah were all on Mount Carmel. Elijah had invited the priests of Baal to offer a sacrifice and ask Baal to send fire to burn it up. “I will do the same and ask the Lord to send fire, too. The God who sends fire, He is the true God,” suggested Elijah.

The prophets of Baal were first. All day long they had been calling to their idol, screaming and dancing and asking him to send fire to burn up their offering. They had even cut their skins with knives, hoping that if they hurt themselves, Baal would answer them. But he didn’t; no fire fell down. Now they were tired, and they stopped. They quietly left the altar.

The prophets of Baal had given up. The Israelites had been watching the whole day, and they were tired of all the yelling, dancing and blood. They realized that Baal worship was horrible. Everyone was quiet. Elijah gently invited the people, “Come near to me.” Then he walked over to the broken-down altar of the Lord. He silently took twelve stones, one for each tribe of Israel, and built the altar of Jehovah once more. The people watched quietly. They were afraid, because they didn’t know what to expect.

When the altar was fixed, Elijah dug a trench around the altar. Then he placed wood on it, killed his bullock, and placed it on the altar. Now he commanded, “Fill four barrels with water, and pour it over the sacrifice and the altar.” He wanted the altar to be *flooded* in water. Three times they poured four large barrels of water onto the altar. The water flowed from the sacrifice, down the altar, and even the trench was full of water. It was clear that no *human* would ever be able to light a fire on this altar. Elijah wanted the people to be sure that when the fire came, it was from God.

Now Elijah said, “For so long you have left Jehovah! Humble your hearts and turn to God, so that He can bless your land again!” Then he bowed down reverently, raised his hands, and prayed. How different was Elijah from the prophets of Baal! There was no yelling, no dancing, and no cutting with knives. Elijah prayed, “Lord, let the people know today that you are God, and that I am your servant. Show them that you are superior to Baal, so that Israel will return to you. Let the people know that you are the Lord, and that you have turned their hearts back to you.”

As soon as Elijah finished praying, flames of fire descended from heaven and burnt up the sacrifice. It didn’t only burn up the bullock and the wood; it burnt up the stones and the water from the altar, too! The people were amazed. They didn’t dare to look at the fire; they bowed down instead. Together, all the people began crying out loudly, “Jehovah, He is God! Jehovah, He is God!”

The people realized in their hearts, “We have dishonored God. He is kind, just and merciful. He’s also powerful. He’s so different to this Baal idol that we’ve been worshiping!”

The priests of Baal watched. They could have repented and joined the people, but they didn't. Now these men were not protected anymore, because they clearly and purposely rejected the God of Heaven. Now God directed Elijah, "Take the prophets of Baal; don't let any of them escape." These men had to be faced with their sin of idolatry. Would they ask God for mercy and forgiveness? Would any of the people pray for these men and encourage them to turn to God? Would Elijah pray for them and encourage them to repent? No. No one tried to help these men turn to God, and none of these men repented. Instead, Elijah and the people understood that, since these men were guilty of unrepented idolatry, they were worthy of death, and now that they had arrested them, they killed them. The people were able to do this easily because these prophets had rejected the God who could protect them.

When God faces us with our sins, He does it as an invitation for us to repent. He wanted to do the same for these prophets of Baal. It's sad that none of them repented, and it's also sad that Elijah and the people didn't even think of trying to help them. In Deuteronomy 7, God had already explained how the Israelites should "destroy" idol worshipers: "Don't let your children marry them, and don't make covenants with them; destroy their altars and their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden idols." All of this would end up driving the idol worshipers away, so that eventually, there would be no more idol worshipers in the land.

This is how God had instructed the Israelites to destroy, but for so many generations, they had chosen to kill instead, and Elijah chose to do the same. He later realized that he had not followed God's will when he killed these false prophets. He felt discouraged and prayed, "I am no better than my fathers." His ancestors had

killed their enemies, and now he had done it, too. If Elijah hadn't killed them, these men would probably have died some other way, since they had no protection. God had never commanded Elijah to kill them.

That day, God answered Elijah's prayer. He showed the people that He was God, and that *He* was bringing their hearts back to Him. He loved them and was still trying to reach them, even after they had stopped worshiping Him. He will always try to bring us to Him, as long as we're not rejecting Him. If we reject Him, He will respect our decision, and He will leave. But He will not give up if there is still hope. Isn't it wonderful that we have a God who searches for us, and that *He* is the one who brings us to Him? *He* does the work; all we have to do is accept Him and not reject Him, and He will help us to know Him. Will you let Him?

18. God Comforts Elijah

And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him.

Isaiah 30:18 (KJV)



1 Kings 18:41-46; 19:1-8 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 12

God could finally bless Israel again! After what had happened on Mount Carmel, the people confessed their sins and turned back to God. They wanted to be His again. Now God could finally bless them with rain again! Elijah knew this, so he said to king Ahab, “Get up, eat and drink, because there is the sound of abundance of rain.” There wasn’t even a single cloud in the sky yet, but God had told Elijah that the rain would soon come, and Elijah believed God’s words. He wanted King Ahab to arrive home safely before the storm arrived.

Now Elijah went to the top of the mountain to pray. He prayed as he waited for the rain to come. He said to his servant, “Go and look out at the Mediterranean Sea, and tell me if there are any clouds yet.” The servant went and looked. Then he came back and said to Elijah, “There is nothing.” No clouds! But Elijah still trusted God. He kept on praying for the rain to come. Again and again, Elijah sent his servant to look at the Mediterranean Sea. Six times, the servant went and looked, then came back saying, “There is nothing.” Elijah didn’t give up. He kept praying. He knew that God could give them rain. He wanted all of God’s blessings, so as he prayed, he also asked God to

forgive his sins. He was not at peace after killing all those prophets of Baal, even though it had seemed like the right thing to do then. He didn't want any sin to block God's blessings from him and the people.

One last time, the seventh time, Elijah sent his servant to look for clouds on the Mediterranean Sea. This time, the seventh time, the servant came back and said, "There is a little cloud, like a man's hand, rising over the sea." This was enough. Elijah knew that this little cloud would turn into a big cloud with lots of water. Elijah said to his servant, "Go and tell King Ahab to prepare his chariot and to leave before the rain stops him." The servant went quickly to King Ahab.

Soon enough, it was nighttime, and the rain began to fall. King Ahab was still preparing to leave. Now it would be difficult for him to get to his palace in the dark night, with all the rain. Elijah found King Ahab's chariot and began to guide it home. For many miles he ran in front of the chariot, showing the king the way. Elijah ran in the dark and under the rain, and God gave him the strength to do this so that he could help King Ahab to arrive home safely. King Ahab was a wicked king and had never respected God, but Elijah was being kind and respectful to him. By his actions, Elijah was telling King Ahab, "You are still the King of Israel. I respect you." King Ahab should have felt grateful for what Elijah did. This was his chance to see how much God cared for him. If God's prophet was still treating him with care and respect, then surely God loved him and was giving him a chance to repent! King Ahab still had the opportunity to turn into a good king for the people of Israel, and to lead them away from idols and back to God.

Sadly, King Ahab didn't stop to think about all that God had done for him that day. Instead, he went straight into his palace and found

his wife, the wicked Queen Jezebel. He told Jezebel all that had happened that day. “Elijah killed all 450 prophets of Baal,” he told her. Queen Jezebel was furious when she heard this.

Elijah was staying outside the city, and a messenger came to him, saying, “Queen Jezebel says that she wants to kill you tomorrow because of what you did to the prophets of Baal!” Elijah was afraid when he heard this. Whenever a person kills someone, they’re always afraid that someone will kill them afterwards. If he had not killed anyone, he would not have been afraid. He would have stayed, and most probably, he would have met with Queen Jezebel. God would have used Elijah to face Queen Jezebel with her sins, and the people would have understood much more clearly how wicked this queen was. Sadly, this opportunity was lost, because Elijah, instead of staying, fled for his life. He did not stop to ask God for protection. He did not even stop to think that God had not asked him to run away. He just fled. Elijah was not following God’s plan by running away, but God loved him deeply. God understood what Elijah was feeling, and He was patient with him.

As Elijah traveled, he had sad, discouraging thoughts. “Why is King Ahab still listening to Jezebel, after all that happened? Will the people of Israel ever really turn to God?” Elijah could only think of what seemed to have gone wrong. He didn’t think about how wonderful it was that God had shown Himself to the people on Mount Carmel. Elijah should have been joyfully thinking: “Finally, King Ahab and the people could see that Jehovah really is God, and that Baal is nothing!” But he wasn’t thinking that. Instead, he said to himself, “All of this was a failure! King Ahab still listens to the wicked queen, and the people will do whatever Ahab does!” Elijah was not thinking right, and he was not feeling happy at all. He needed comfort, and this

comfort needed to come from God. Only God could help him to change his thoughts. Only God could help him see that he was not understanding things correctly. But Elijah didn't turn to God. He just kept on thinking his sad, discouraging thoughts.

Finally, Elijah was too tired to keep on walking. He had arrived at the desert. He was too tired to even think. He sat down, exhausted, under a juniper tree. "Let me die, Lord," he prayed, "I am no better than my fathers." Elijah felt so alone, and he even felt that God was far away from him. But God was right there. God loved Elijah deeply, and He gave him what he needed first: sleep. Elijah was so tired that he lay down and fell asleep. God knew that after Elijah felt rested, he would feel better, and he would be able to hear God's voice again.

After a few hours, God sent an angel to awaken Elijah. The angel touched Elijah gently, and spoke softly and pleasantly. Elijah woke up terrified, but then he realized that there was nothing to fear. A kind angel had woken him up! "Get up and eat," said the angel gently. Elijah looked, and there was a clay jar with cool, fresh water, and a cake baking on hot coals. Elijah ate, then he fell asleep again. God let him sleep.

A few hours later, the angel woke him up tenderly again. "Get up and eat," said the angel, "You have a long journey ahead of you." Where would God take Elijah? He would soon find out. After eating, Elijah went on a long journey, where God led him. For forty days and forty nights he walked, until he reached a cave in Horeb. God had shown Himself to all of Israel, but here in Horeb, He would show Himself to Elijah in a special way.

Elijah had been God's special prophet and had done great things, but right after, he became discouraged and felt like a failure. This is because he had killed all those prophets of Baal, and suddenly he

became afraid, and he forgot that God wanted to protect him. God was patient with Elijah. He knew that Elijah still had many things to understand. God patiently cared for him, even when he was discouraged and hardly prayed at all. God did all He could to help him feel better. He wanted Elijah to truly get to know Him, and He brought Him to Horeb for this.

God knows you and understands you, too. He understands your weakness, your sadness and your discouragement. He is patient with you, even if sometimes you get into trouble because of your own bad decisions. He will always be there, trying to bring you back to Him. He wants you to know Him as He truly is. Will you thank Him for His patience toward you? Will you ask Him to be with you and to show you what He is really like?

19. The Still Small Voice

...The Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. 1 Kings 19:11-12 (KJV)



1 Kings 19:9-18 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 13

All his life, Elijah had longed to help bring the Israelites back to God. He had watched sadly as the people chose their idols instead of God. He had spoken boldly to them, and to King Ahab, about their problem. Then, after the long drought, God had used him to show the people that the true God was Jehovah, and not Baal.

There were many things that Elijah understood correctly, and this is why God was able to use him to speak to the people. But there were still some things that Elijah did not understand clearly, and he would need to understand them before he could complete his work of bringing the people back to God. Elijah had been bold to speak up against the sins of the people, but he had been terrified when Queen Jezebel threatened to kill him. Why had he been afraid? He did not need to be afraid, but he was afraid because deep down, he still did not completely understand what God's character was like. He had killed the 450 prophets of Baal because he thought that was what God wanted. But after that, he became afraid that someone would kill him. This made him feel sad and discouraged. He found it hard to pray. He

was confused and angry. Why was he feeling this way, when he had done so much for God?

God wanted to remove this confusion from Elijah's mind. He brought Elijah to the cave in Horeb so that He could show Himself to Elijah in a special way. God met Elijah at the entrance of the cave. Through an angel, God spoke to Elijah, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah? I sent you to the brook of Cherith, then to the widow of Sarepta, and to Mount Carmel. I gave you strength to guide King Ahab's chariot back home. But who sent you here?"

Elijah was hiding in the desert now, but God had not told him to do this. Why was Elijah here? Elijah tried to justify himself. He knew he shouldn't have fled, but there were good reasons why he had done that. He answered, "I have always served you the best I can, Lord, but the people have left your covenant. I am the only one left who worships you, and now they want to kill me!"

The angel said to Elijah kindly, "Come out of the cave and stand before the Lord, and listen to His word." God was about to show Elijah something wonderful. What would happen when the Lord passed by?

While Elijah was still inside the cave, there was a great strong wind. It was so strong that it split the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces. But was God in that wind? No, He wasn't. Then there was an earthquake, but God wasn't in that earthquake, either. After that a fire came, but God was not in the fire. Where was God?

Right after that, Elijah heard a still, small voice, like a whisper. When Elijah heard this voice, he covered his head and face with his mantle, and went to the entrance of the cave. God was in the still, small voice. This is who God is: a gentle, loving God, who speaks kindly to us. He is not violent or destructive like a strong wind, an

earthquake or a fire. He doesn't hurt and destroy; He speaks words of life to us.

Now that Elijah could see this, God again asked gently, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah was still discouraged, and he answered, "I have always served you, but the Israelites have broken your altars and killed your prophets. Now I'm the only prophet left, and they want to kill me."

God patiently answered, "You still have a work to do. Return to Israel. I want you to anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, and Jehu to be king over Israel. I also want you to anoint Elisha to become a prophet in your place." Then God said, "There are seven thousand people in Israel who have never worshiped Baal."

Elijah listened. He was not alone! He was not the only one who worshiped God – there were seven thousand more! God was still with him, and God was still giving him work to do for Him. He didn't need to run and hide anymore; he could trust in God's protection. Why had he stopped trusting God? He was grateful for God's patience and love towards him.

As Elijah started the long journey back to Israel, he had much to think about. God is not in the wind, the earthquake or the fire. God is in the still, small voice. Since this was true, where then did the wind, earthquake and fire come from? They were a reflection of the violence that was inside Elijah's heart. The wind, the earthquake and the fire showed what Elijah was like – not what God is like. God is not a God of violence. His ways are not hurtful or destructive. He gives life, health and peace. Killing the 450 prophets of Baal with the sword had not been part of God's instructions. After killing these men, it was only natural for Elijah to fear that someone would come and kill him, too. Elijah was grateful for God's patience towards him. Now he was

certain that God would keep on protecting him, and he was eager to continue doing God's work.

God is in the still, small voice. He is gentle and loving. Do you hear His still small voice? Ask Him to help you hear Him, to guide you, and to give you a gentle character like His.

20. God Reaches out to King Ahab

For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. Ezekiel 34:11 (KJV)

 *1 Kings 20*

King Ahab of Israel was a wicked king. Yet God still used every opportunity to reach him. Would King Ahab ever turn to God? Would he ever let God guide him and the people of Israel?

One day, the king of Syria, Ben-Hadad, decided to attack Israel. He invited thirty-two other kings to join him, and together they formed a huge army. This great army surrounded the city of Samaria, where King Ahab was. King Ben-Hadad threatened King Ahab: “I will take your gold, your silver, your beautiful wives and your children.”

King Ahab knew that the Syrian army was too strong for him, so he answered, “I and all that I have is yours.” Then Ben-Hadad said, “I also want you to give me whatever I want from your house and from the houses of your servants.” Now King Ahab was not happy. He said, “No, we won’t give you that.” Isn’t it strange that King Ahab had said “yes” to giving his wives and children to Ben-Hadad, but now he did not want to give the things from his houses? How confused Ahab was!

Ben-Hadad threatened: “If you don’t give me what I asked for, I will attack you!” Everyone knew that the Syrian army was stronger

than the Israelite army; Israel had no chance to escape! But Israel had a God who was stronger than the Syrian idols. Would Ahab let God help him?

A prophet came to King Ahab and said, “The Lord says, ‘I will deliver this great army into your hands today, and you shall know that I am the Lord’”. Ahab had not even asked God for help, but God was giving him an opportunity to trust in Him. King Ahab didn’t usually look to God for help, but now he accepted the help that God was offering, and he got his army ready for battle.

Meanwhile, Ben-Hadad and his men waited outside the city. They were so sure they would win, that they began to drink alcohol carelessly, as if they were celebrating. Suddenly they saw that some young Israelite leaders were coming out of the city.

Ben-Hadad was not afraid of these few Israelite men. He told his soldiers, “Catch them and keep them alive!” But suddenly, the whole Israelite army appeared right behind these young Israelite men. The Syrians were not expecting the whole Israelite army to come out, and they got scared. They began to flee, and the Israelites ran behind them and killed many. Ben-Hadad himself escaped on a horse.

The battle was over, and Israel had won, just as God had said. But the problems with Ben-Hadad would not end here. The prophet warned Ahab, “The king of Syria will attack again.”

The Syrians were upset that they had lost the battle. They said to Ben-Hadad, “The Israelite gods are gods of the hills, and we fought on the hills; that’s why they won. Their God is not God of the valleys, so we should fight in a valley.” Ben-Hadad agreed. He gathered his huge army again and went to fight against Israel in one of the valleys.

The prophet said to King Ahab, “God will deliver the Syrians into your hands, because they say that God is only God of the hills, but

not of the valleys. You will know that He is the Lord.” When the battle started, the Syrians were completely unprotected by God. We can see this especially because the Syrians tried to hide in one of the cities. They thought they would be safe in the city, but suddenly, the city walls fell on them, and thousands of Syrian soldiers died. Ben-Hadad, the Syrian king, had hidden in one of the rooms of the city, and he survived. He got out and went humbly to King Ahab. “Please let me live,” he begged.

King Ahab should have asked God what to do, but he didn’t. Instead, he said, “Ben-Hadad is my brother. I will give him back some of his cities. Let him go home in peace.” This sounds very kind, but was this what he was supposed to do? He was not doing this out of kindness; he was doing it because he felt weak. God had delivered Ben-Hadad into Ahab’s hands, but Ahab was now giving Ben-Hadad more power. He should have guarded Ben-Hadad and asked God what to do⁸.

By letting the Syrian king go and giving him cities, he was acting as though he did not care about what God had done for Israel that day. He was doing exactly what King Saul had done long ago with Agag the king of the Amalekites⁹.

Now the prophet had to show Ahab how wrong he had been. He did this in a really strange way. First, the prophet went to a man and commanded him, “The Lord says you must strike me.” The man didn’t do it, so the prophet said, “Because you have not obeyed God’s command, a lion will kill you.” It is clear that this man’s heart was not right with God. What other commands from God had he been

⁸ You will see later that the prophet says “I was given a man to guard”, just like Ahab was given Ben-Hadad to guard.

⁹ See Book 3, *The Conquest and the Judges*, Story 36 “Saul is Rejected.”

ignoring? He could have said, “Lord, please forgive me. Help me to do what you ask!” But he didn’t say or do anything, and the prophet’s warning came true. He was unprotected when the lion came.

Right after this, the prophet found another man, and said, “Strike me, please.” This other man listened and struck him and hurt him. How strange that God would ask someone to hurt the prophet! Why would He do that?

Now the prophet, who was wounded, covered his eyes with a bandage so no one could recognize him. He waited by the road for the king to pass by. When Ahab passed by, the prophet said to him, “I went to battle, and someone brought a man to me. I was told to guard this man, and if the man escaped, I would have to pay a talent of silver, or I would die. And the man escaped!” King Ahab answered, “You have judged yourself; that’s what will be done to you.”

Now the prophet removed the bandage from his eyes, and King Ahab realized who he was. The prophet looked at Ahab and said, “The Lord says that because you have let Ben-Hadad go, you and your people will die.”

King Ahab had refused to understand what God was asking of him, so in this very strange way, God had to help him clearly see what he had done. Ahab realized, “Oh, I’ve been hurt by Ben-Hadad, just like the prophet is hurt. And I let Ben-Hadad go when I should have guarded him.” Ahab didn’t like to see this. He returned to his palace feeling moody and displeased, because he knew he had done things wrong.

Ahab thought, “I agreed that the prophet should die because he let the man get away. But I let Ben-Hadad get away, too, so my kingdom will receive more attacks.” He knew that, because of his

fault, the Syrians would be able to keep on attacking him and the Israelite people. Yet even now, he refused to ask God to help him.

All this time, God had tried to patiently reach Ahab and the Israelites, helping them and protecting them, but King Ahab had refused to see it. He didn't want to repent and ask God to change him; he just wanted to keep on doing things his way, and he felt as miserable as ever. How sad that he didn't accept what God was offering him!

Isn't it wonderful that we have a God who searches for us, and loves us before we even accept Him? Isn't it wonderful that He is so loving, patient and willing to help? Do you want to accept Him today and let Him be your guide?

21. A Stolen Vineyard

**The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,
A broken and a contrite heart–
These, O God, You will not despise. Psalm 51:17 (NKJV)**



1 Kings 21 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 16

King Ahab was the most wicked king that Israel ever had. His wife, Jezebel, was an evil woman, and she influenced Ahab so that he became even more wicked than before. Jezebel was the daughter of a heathen king, and she worshiped Baal. She made sure that her husband, King Ahab, worshiped Baal with her and stopped worshiping God. Together, Ahab and Jezebel led the Israelites to worship this idol and to leave God.

It seemed that everything that Ahab did was evil. He was an idol worshiper, and he was mean and selfish. In fact, he was so selfish that he could not stand it whenever he could not have his way. Whatever he wanted, he would get, no matter what.

One day, while King Ahab was in his palace, he looked out the window and saw a beautiful vineyard that was not far from the palace grounds. The vineyard belonged to a man called Naboth. “I want that vineyard!” King Ahab thought, “I can grow herbs in it. It is so close to my palace, that it should be mine!”

King Ahab offered to buy the vineyard from Naboth. “Tell me how much it’s worth, and I’ll pay you. Or I can give you another vineyard, a better one, somewhere else,” Ahab offered. But Naboth didn’t want to sell his vineyard. “I’m sorry, King Ahab, but this

vineyard belonged to my father, my grandfather, and his father. It belongs to my family. I don't want to sell it," he answered. Naboth was right: the vineyard was not supposed to be sold. When the Israelites had entered the land of Canaan, God had given each family a plot of land, and He had instructed them to keep the land within their family. There was no reason for Naboth to have to sell his vineyard to anyone, not even to the king. Ahab should have understood this; he knew what God had said to the people about their land. But King Ahab didn't care; all he knew was that he wanted that vineyard, and he had to have it. The more he thought about the vineyard that he could not have, the more upset he felt. Finally, he was so moody and discouraged that he ended up getting sick, and he stopped eating. All he could do was lie in bed and sulk.

Queen Jezebel watched her husband Ahab, and she was annoyed. In her mind, no one should dare to say "no" to King Ahab. She decided that she would solve this problem herself. She marched over to Ahab and said, "Ahab, aren't you the king? Now, get up and eat. Cheer up! I will give you that vineyard!"

Then Queen Jezebel sat down and wrote letters in the name of King Ahab. In these letters, she gave evil instructions to the leaders of the town where Naboth lived. She wrote, "You must accuse Naboth of saying bad things against God and against the king. Then take him out and stone him." The town leaders knew that Naboth had not done any of these things, and that it was wrong to do this to him. They should have said to Ahab, "This is not right. We don't want to do this to an innocent man." But sadly, the leaders didn't try to do the right thing; they simply followed Jezebel's orders. They accused Naboth, then they stoned him.

Now Naboth was dead; he could not stop King Ahab from taking the vineyard anymore. Queen Jezebel went to Ahab and said, “Get up now, and get your vineyard!” Ahab didn’t care what Jezebel had done to help him get the vineyard. He just got up and went to Naboth’s vineyard and made it his.

This was not good. God loved Ahab and was grieved that he was doing so much evil. Throughout Ahab’s life, God tried to reach him to help him repent and change. While King Ahab was still in Naboth’s vineyard, God sent Elijah there to talk to him. Ahab wasn’t expecting Elijah to visit him, so he was startled when Elijah showed up. He didn’t like to see Elijah there; he knew that whatever Elijah would say was not going to be pleasant. “Have you found me, my enemy?” Ahab asked.

Was Elijah really Ahab’s enemy? No, he wasn’t. God was sending him to help Ahab, not to hurt him.¹⁰ Elijah spoke clearly to King Ahab, saying, “The Lord says, ‘You’ve killed and also taken what is not yours. You’ve done evil. Now I will do evil to you, and take away your descendants, just like I did with kings Jeroboam and Baasha. And as for Jezebel, dogs will eat her. And your descendants will be eaten by dogs and by birds.’” Why was this going to happen? Was God really going to make all of Ahab’s family die? No, it would not be God doing this; this is what Satan wanted to do to them. God longed to protect Ahab and his family, and to bless them. But they had chosen Satan’s ways, and they had chosen to worship Baal. They had rejected God. He would respect their choice, withdraw from them and allow the natural consequences of evil to run its self-destructive course.

¹⁰ Hundreds of years later, Jesus would say in Revelation 3:19: “Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline”. This means He shows them their faults and teaches them how to change.

Ahab was upset when he heard Elijah's words. He knew that Elijah was not lying, and that these things really would happen. He tore his clothes, wore sackcloth (a coarse, rough fabric, typically made from goat hair), fasted and moved about his palace quietly. This way, he showed some repentance, but not complete repentance. The Bible doesn't tell us whether he asked for forgiveness, or whether he returned the vineyard to Naboth's family. But at least he acted humbly after he heard Elijah's words. God said to Elijah, "Ahab has humbled himself before me. Because of this, I will not bring the evil while he's still alive. It will happen when his son is king." God is so merciful that He was willing to wait until Ahab's death before withdrawing completely from Ahab's family. Ahab had at least humbled himself before God, and even that was enough reason for God to show him some mercy. If only Ahab had turned to God completely! God could have done so much for him, and for his whole family!

The story of King Ahab is a sad one, because even though God longed to bless him, he chose a life without God. Throughout Ahab's life, God called him and tried to reach him. Right until the end, God showed Ahab His love and care for him. But God respects our choices, and with great sorrow, He respected Ahab's decision to continue living without Him. God respects your decisions, too. Do you want to follow God, and to enjoy His guidance and blessings? Tell Him of your decision. Ask Him to help you make good decisions, and to help you get closer to Him today.

22. Jehoshaphat's Mistake

But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a little while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. 1 Peter 5:10 (KJV)



1 Kings 22:1-44; 2 Chronicles 17-19; 20:35-37. | Prophets and Kings Chapter 15

While evil King Ahab was ruling Israel, the kingdom of Judah had a king who was completely different: King Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat was a good king; he loved God and wanted to follow Him. His father Asa had been a good king, and he wanted to follow God just like his father had. He tried to take the people of Judah away from idol worship, and to bring them back to God.

God blessed King Jehoshaphat. The people loved him because he was kind, and they brought him many presents. Even heathen kings brought him gifts of sheep, goats and silver. With all these presents Jehoshaphat became very wealthy. Yet his riches did not stop him from being faithful to God.

“I want the people to follow God!” Jehoshaphat decided. So he did all he could to make this happen: he destroyed all the places where idols were worshiped. He also sent priests all over Judah, so that they could visit the different towns and teach the Scriptures to the people. The people paid attention to what the priests taught, and

they repented from their sins. It felt as if the land of Judah was alive again; the people had returned to God, and there was joy and peace in the land. For many years, they enjoyed a time of peace. None of the other nations came to disturb them. God was able to fully bless them and protect them, because they had chosen Him.

But then Jehoshaphat made a mistake that would bring trouble to Judah. He allowed his son, Jehoram, to marry Athaliah, the daughter of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. This was not God's plan. Why did Jehoshaphat let his son marry the daughter of the most wicked king of Israel? Because he thought that this would help to bring peace between Israel and Judah. But sadly, it only brought disaster.

Now that King Ahab and King Jehoshaphat were close, Ahab asked Jehoshaphat for a favor: "Help me to fight against the Syrians." King Jehoshaphat quickly said yes. "We are one people," he answered. But he felt a bit unsure of what he had just agreed to do. "Let's ask God if this is what we should do," he suggested to Ahab.

King Ahab had stopped consulting God long ago. He brought 400 false prophets and asked them instead. He knew that the prophets of the Lord would probably say, "Don't fight against the Syrians; God won't be with you." But the false prophets would say exactly what he wanted them to say. They all said, "Go; God will deliver your enemies into your hand."

King Ahab was satisfied after hearing the false prophets, but King Jehoshaphat was not. "Let's ask a prophet of the Lord," he insisted. Ahab said, "Well, there's Micaiah, but I hate him because he never says anything good about me." "Let's bring him in anyway," insisted Jehoshaphat.

A messenger went to fetch Micaiah. The messenger said, "You'd better tell the kings that they will be successful; that's what all the

other prophets have said.” Micaiah answered seriously, “I will only speak what God wants me to say.”

Now Micaiah stood before the two kings. Each king was seated on a throne, wearing rich kingly robes. Micaiah looked at Ahab and said what he knew Ahab wanted to hear: “Go; the Lord will deliver your enemies into your hand.” King Ahab knew that Micaiah was not saying the truth; Micaiah showed it in the way he spoke. “Tell me the truth!” demanded King Ahab. Now that both kings were ready to hear the truth, Micaiah spoke. And just as Ahab had feared, Micaiah had nothing pleasant to say. “I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep without a shepherd,” said Micaiah, “And the Lord said, ‘They have no master; let them return to their house in peace.’”

This did not sound good at all. Micaiah was telling them that the battle against Syria would not go well. God was warning them against fighting the Syrians. But Ahab wanted to fight anyway. Hadn’t he already beaten the Syrians before? Micaiah continued, “The other prophets are lying when they say you will do well in battle.” This made King Ahab angry. He ordered his soldiers to put Micaiah in prison.

Jehoshaphat heard and saw everything, but still, he felt like he could not say “no” to Ahab. “I’ve already promised him that I would help him,” Jehoshaphat thought. So he and his army joined Ahab and his army, even though God had warned against it.

Just like Micaiah had said, the battle did not go well for Israel. King Ahab was seriously wounded in battle, and he died that evening. Out of mercy, God protected Jehoshaphat from being hurt. That evening everyone returned quietly to their own homes, just like Micaiah had said they would.

When Jehoshaphat returned to Jerusalem, Prophet Jehu met him with words from God: “Why did you help the ungodly?” Jehoshaphat listened and accepted this message. Jehu continued saying, “There are still good things found in you, because you’ve tried to get rid of idol worship and to follow God.” There was still hope for Jehoshaphat; not all was lost!

King Jehoshaphat learned from this sad experience. After this, he tried to do better. He ruled fairly. He chose good, honest priests and Levites, and placed them as judges over the people. He also made his cities stronger and safer. In spite of his mistake, he is remembered as a good king. Meanwhile, King Ahab learnt nothing. Badly hurt after the battle, he refused to repent. He died a short time later, and is remembered as the most wicked king that Israel ever had.

Jehoshaphat made one last mistake later on in his reign. He made friends with Ahab’s wicked son Ahaziah, who became king of Israel. Together, they agreed to build ships and send them to Tarshish. They hoped to do business with those ships. But a prophet came and warned Jehoshaphat, “The ships will be destroyed.” God allowed a storm to come and break the ships, and this stopped Jehoshaphat from doing any more business with such a wicked king.

God is loving and patient. When we make mistakes, like Jehoshaphat did, He is ready to forgive, help and restore us. If we repent, He can still work in our lives, just like He did with Jehoshaphat. Ask God to help you see your mistakes and to give you repentance. Ask Him to restore you and to keep working in your life, and to help you be close to Him always.

23. The Singing Army

Thus saith the Lord unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for 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... for the Lord will be with you." 2 Chronicles 20:15,17 (KJV)



2 Chronicles 20:1-34 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 15

King Jehoshaphat was a good king. One day he received terrible news: “The Moabites and Ammonites have formed a huge army, and they’re coming to attack Judah!”

King Jehoshaphat had spent several years strengthening his army and his cities. But right now, he was not thinking about how strong his army or his cities were. He thought about how strong his God was. After his sad experience with King Ahab, he had learnt that he should ask God for help before doing anything else. He announced to the people, “We will fast and pray for God’s protection.”

All the people, even the elderly, the women and the little children, gathered together by the temple court. They listened quietly as King Jehoshaphat prayed and asked God to help them. “Our eyes are upon you,” King Jehoshaphat prayed. Then people prayed, “Confuse our enemies, so that you may be glorified!” While the people were still gathered, God gave a message to a Levite called Jahaziel: “The Lord says, do not be afraid. This battle is not yours, but the Lord’s. Tomorrow you will go to them and meet them, but you

won't need to fight. Set yourselves, and stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord. He is with you."

What comforting words these were! King Jehoshaphat and the people bowed down and worshiped. They praised God loudly with the help of the temple musicians. Singing seemed like the best thing to do right then.

Early the next morning, the people gathered together and went to meet the enemy army. Jehoshaphat encouraged them, "Believe in the Lord!" Then he appointed singers to sing praises to God for His promise of victory. The whole group went forward, singing praises. "Praise the Lord, for His mercies endure forever!" they sang. What a strange way to fight a battle! They only sang; they used no swords, spears or arrows. And this is exactly how God wanted them to fight the battle. This is how God had always wanted His people to "fight": by trusting Him and praising Him, and not by going forward and killing people.

When Jehoshaphat and his people arrived where the enemy army was, they found something shocking: all the enemy soldiers were already dead! There was not even one soldier alive to attack them. What had happened?

Without realizing it, the enemy army had destroyed itself. First, the Ammonite and Moabite soldiers had killed another heathen group of people, the people of Mount Seir, then they had gotten confused and killed each other. Not one soldier survived.

The people of Judah were amazed. God had fought this battle for them! They had only had to trust Him, and He had done it all! Joyfully, they began to gather all the valuable possessions of the dead soldiers like food, utensils, clothing and weapons. There were so

many useful things to collect, that it took them three days to gather them all!

With much joy and gratefulness, they returned to Jerusalem and gathered together to sing and to praise God. What a wonderful God they had! The nations around them heard what had happened, and they feared the God of Judah. For the rest of his reign, King Jehoshaphat enjoyed peace; no other nation came to attack his kingdom again.

God offers to fight our battles for us. He just wants us to trust Him and let Him work. He would have wanted to help the Israelites and the people of Judah in this way from the beginning, if only they had let Him. He wants to help you fight your battles, too. Will you let Him do it? Will you trust Him?

24. King Ahaziah Chooses a Heathen Idol

**Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.
1 Corinthians 10:14 (KJV)**



1 Kings 22:45-53; 2 Kings 1 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 16

After Ahab died, his son Ahaziah became king. Ahaziah was evil, just like his father. He worshiped Baal and ignored God. God could not protect him or help him. During his reign, the Moabites disturbed Israel constantly, and Ahaziah had no peace. One day he was in his room upstairs and had an accident: he fell through a window and was badly hurt. He called some servants and said, “Go to the land of Ekron, and ask their god Beelzebub if I’m going to get better.” Why was the King of Israel consulting the idol of another nation? Didn’t Israel have the true God, Jehovah?

King Ahaziah’s servants began traveling to Ekron. On the way, a prophet of God met them. He said, “Return to the king, and tell him, ‘Do you ask Beelzebub for advice, because there is no God in Israel? Now, this is the message from the Lord: You will not get up from your bed; you will die.’”

The servants were surprised. They didn’t know who this man was, but they returned to the king with the message. King Ahaziah asked, “What did the prophet look like?” They answered, “He wore clothes made of hair, and a leather belt around his waist.” Now King

Ahaziah knew who this prophet was – it was Elijah! King Ahaziah also knew that if Elijah had said it, then it would come true. He should have been grateful that God had sent Elijah with this terrible message, because if God was doing this, it meant that there was still hope for the king to repent and to change. But would he repent? No, Ahaziah refused to admit his guilt. Instead, he got angry at Elijah and sent a company of fifty soldiers to arrest him.

Elijah sat on top of a hill and watched the soldiers coming for him. The captain called out to Elijah, “Man of God, the king wants you to come down.” Elijah was afraid to go to those soldiers. So he answered, “If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty soldiers!” To everyone’s shock, fire fell down instantly and burnt up all the soldiers.

King Ahaziah sent another company of fifty soldiers, and again Elijah said, “If I am a man of God, let fire fall down on you!” And fire fell down once more.

Everyone who watched was sure that God was sending down the fire, because Elijah had asked for it. In fact, many years later¹¹, when Jesus was on earth, His disciples James and John remembered this story and used it as proof that it was ok to wish for fire to come down from heaven and burn up those people who deserved it. But what did Jesus tell them? He said, “You don’t know what kind of spirit this is from.” He let His disciples know that it was wrong to ask for fire to fall on people and burn them. And remember, God had already shown Elijah that He was not in the fire. God had not been the one to send the fire from heaven. Why not? First of all, because that is not what God does. Also, Elijah’s words showed that he was scared and

¹¹ See Book 1, *The Life of Jesus*, story 48, “Loving the Samaritans”.

doubting. He had said “if I’m a man of God”. Why had he said “if”? Wasn’t Elijah sure that he was God’s prophet? When Satan tempted Jesus in the desert¹², he said to Jesus, “If you are the Son of God”; He wanted Jesus to doubt whether He was the Son of God. Now Elijah was being tempted to doubt whether he was a man of God. If he had been sure, he would never have said “if”. All he needed to do was to trust in God’s protection, not to say “if”, and not to ask for fire to fall on the soldiers! Satan used Elijah’s words as an invitation to send the fire, and because the Israelite army was unprotected by God, he was able to send this fire.

Now King Ahaziah sent a third company of fifty soldiers. The captain of this company knew what would happen to him and his men. He and his soldiers came to Elijah humbly. He bowed down in front of Elijah and begged, “O man of God, please let my life and the life of these fifty men be precious in your sight!” He was trying to say to Elijah, “I know that you’re a man of God. There is no if here. I also know that you can save our lives!” This captain’s faith and humility saved his and his men’s lives; God protected them.

Before Elijah could say anything, the angel of the Lord instructed him, “Go with these men. Don’t be afraid!” Oh, if only Elijah had not been afraid, and had waited for the angel’s instructions, the other one hundred soldiers would not have died! This time, Elijah went with the captain to see King Ahaziah. Bravely, Elijah gave the king a message from God: “The Lord says you’ve sent messengers to consult Beelzebub, the god of Ekron. Isn’t there a God in Israel that you can consult? Because of this, you won’t recover; you will die.” Was God making Ahaziah die because he had asked an idol for advice? No;

¹² See Book 1, *The Life of Jesus*, Story 10, “Tempted in the Desert”.

God was telling him what was going to happen if he continued choosing idols instead of the God of life. Ahaziah had left God's hedge of protection, and had placed himself under Satan's destroying hands. God was trying to help him by giving him a chance to repent.

King Ahaziah had seen the works of God during his father's reign, but he didn't care. He knew the history of all that God had done for Israel, but he refused to pay attention to it. By sending his servants to consult Beelzebub, he was saying to all the nations around him, "I trust the god of Ekron more than the God of Israel." He had chosen an idol instead of Jehovah. Sadly, he died without ever repenting or turning to God. Since he had no son, his brother Jehoram became king in his place.

Throughout all of King Ahaziah's life, God tried to reach him, but in the end Ahaziah made his own terrible choice, and God respected it. You can make your own decision, too. Do you want to live a life with God? Tell Him so, and ask Him to guide you.

25. Elijah and Elisha

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering. Colossians 3:12 (KJV)



1 Kings 19:19-21; 2 Kings 2:1-18 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 17

Elijah had been a powerful prophet for the Lord. God had been able to use him to break down idol worship in Israel. Also, Elijah had gotten so close to God that he had finally understood that God's character is gentle and merciful, not violent and cruel. God would soon take Elijah up to heaven with Him, and Elijah would never die. But before Elijah could be taken to heaven, God wanted to prepare another man to be His prophet in Elijah's place.

"Go and anoint Elisha to take your place," God instructed. Elisha came from a family who worshiped God. His father had never worshiped Baal. When God had said, "There are still seven thousand who have not worshiped Baal," he must have thought of Elisha's father.

When Elijah arrived at Elisha's home, he found him plowing his father's fields. Elijah walked past Elisha. As he walked past, he placed his mantle on Elisha's shoulders. Then he kept on walking. Elisha understood: "He is letting me know that I will be a prophet in his place!" Instantly Elisha started running towards Elijah. "Please – let me kiss my parents good-bye, and I will follow you!" Elisha cried out.

Elijah looked at young Elisha and answered kindly, “Go back. What have I done to you?” Would Elisha really follow him? Would he be willing to leave his comfortable home and his parents?

Yes, Elisha was more than willing. To show how determined he was to leave his comfortable life behind, he took a yoke of oxen and killed them. He used the instruments of the oxen to build a fire. Then he boiled the oxen and made a meal for the people who were with him. Once this was done, he began to follow Elijah everywhere and did whatever Elijah asked him to do.

Elisha gladly learned everything that Elijah taught him. He refused to leave him. Time passed, and on the day that Elijah would be taken to heaven, both men went to visit the schools of the prophets. These were schools that Prophet Samuel had started, but they had been closed down after the Israelites had turned to idols. Elijah had worked hard to start these schools again and help them grow. These were places where young men could learn God’s Word and God’s ways. These young men were called “the sons of the prophets”, and they helped to encourage the Israelites to leave their idols and follow God.

Elijah and Elisha visited the schools that day. In each of the schools, Elijah had said to Elisha, “Stay here. The Lord wants me to go on.” But Elisha had answered, “No, I will not leave you!” At each of the schools, the young men said to Elisha, “Did you know that the Lord will take away your master from you today?” “Yes, but don’t talk about it,” Elisha answered. He did not want Elijah to leave, and he was determined to be with him right until the very last minute.

Now they had left the last school and arrived at the Jordan River. Fifty young men watched as Elijah and Elisha stood at the edge of the Jordan, ready to cross it. But how would they cross this deep river?

Elijah quietly took his mantle, wrapped it together and smote the waters with it. The waters opened up, and both men crossed the river on dry ground.

After they crossed the river, Elijah said to Elisha, “Before I’m taken from you, ask what I can do for you.” Elisha knew exactly what to ask for: “Please let a double portion of your Spirit be upon me.” What was Elisha asking for? He was asking for the Spirit of God to guide him just like it had guided Elijah. And he wanted a double portion because he felt that he really needed God’s help; he couldn’t do it alone. It was a very good thing to ask for.

“You have asked for a hard thing,” Elijah answered, “But you will receive it if you see me when I’m taken from you.” Both men continued walking and talking, and suddenly a chariot of fire with horses of fire appeared and swiftly took Elijah to heaven. Elijah never died; he is like those who will be alive when Jesus comes, and who will never die.

Elisha saw everything, and cried out, “My father, my father! The chariot of Israel and its horsemen!” He was sad that Elijah wouldn’t be with him anymore; he was grateful for all the guidance he had received from him. Elisha ripped his clothes in two to show his sadness. Then he picked up something really special from the ground: Elijah’s mantle. This mantle had fallen from him when the heavenly chariot had picked him up. It reminded Elisha that he had been chosen to be God’s prophet in Elijah’s place.

Elisha walked back towards the Jordan. When he reached the shores, he did just what Elijah had done before: he struck the waters with Elijah’s mantle, and the waters parted so he could cross the river on dry ground. The sons of the prophets saw him, and they realized that Elisha really was God’s chosen prophet. He really was the man

who would be in Elijah's place. They came to meet Elisha and bowed to him, showing him that they respected him and accepted him as God's prophet.

Elisha knew that Elijah had been taken to heaven, but some of the young men were not quite sure. "He might be on some mountain, or in some valley," they said, "Let's send fifty young men to look for him." Elisha kept telling them not to do that, but they insisted, so finally Elisha said, "Send them." Of course, these fifty young men searched and searched for three days, and found nothing. Now they were convinced that Elijah really would not return; he was now in heaven.

Elisha had been chosen to do one of the greatest works a man can ever be given: to be God's prophet. Even though he had been chosen for this, he was always humble. He did not think himself important, and he knew that he needed God's guidance and wisdom. This humility, and this trust in God, made him useful for God's work. Someday you will find that God has chosen you for a special work, too. Ask God to help you be humble and willing to learn, just like Elisha was, so that you can be useful for God's work.

26. The Day the Valley Turned Red

But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. John 4:14 (KJV)

 *2 Kings 3:1-25*

King Ahab was dead. His son Ahaziah, who had become king after him, was dead, too. Ahaziah had no sons, so his brother Jehoram became king after him. Jehoram was evil, but not quite as evil as his father Ahab had been. Even though he did not really follow God, he at least put away the image of Baal that his parents had made.

One day, King Jehoram got upset. He realized that the king of Moab was not paying all the taxes he had paid while King Ahab was still alive. The king of Moab had thousands and thousands of sheep, and he had often paid King Ahab with sheep and wool. But now that Ahab was dead, the king of Moab refused to give the new king of Israel any more sheep or wool.

“I want to attack Moab,” Jehoram decided. He counted his men and invited King Jehoshaphat of Judah to join him in the battle. “Yes, of course,” Jehoshaphat agreed. The king of Edom also joined them, and for seven days their large army traveled across the desert. Soon they ran out of water, and they couldn’t find any. The men needed water, and so did their animals. What could they do now?

King Jehoshaphat, who was closer to God than the other two kings, suggested, “Isn’t there a prophet of the Lord, whom we can ask what to do?” “Elisha is nearby,” someone suggested.

Both King Jehoshaphat and King Jehoram went to see Elisha. Elisha looked at Jehoram and said seriously, “Go to the prophets of Baal that your mother and father had.” But Jehoram refused. He didn’t worship God, but he still wanted to hear what God’s prophet would have to say. Elisha answered, “The only reason I will answer you is because King Jehoshaphat is here.” God would be able to bless Jehoram because he was with Jehoshaphat, a man who loved God.

Elisha then said, “Bring me a musician!” While the musician played the harp, God gave Elisha a message for the two kings. Elisha said, “Make this valley full of ditches. And then, even though there will be no wind or rain, this valley will be full of water, enough for you, your men and your animals. And God will deliver the Moabites into your hands.”

Then Elisha told them, “You will smite every fenced city, cut down every good tree, stop all wells of water, and cover the good land with stones.” This was something that kings often did when they conquered someone’s land. It was not something that God wanted.

Elisha was telling them what they would do, not what God wanted them to do. God had commanded them, long ago, to never destroy the fruit trees and fields of a city that they conquered.¹³ They were the ones who wanted to destroy fences, wells, trees and good land, but they preferred to think that, because Elisha had told them

¹³ Deuteronomy 20:19-20 “When you besiege a city for a long time, while making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an ax against them; if you can eat of them, do not cut them down to use in the siege, for the tree of the field *is* man’s *food*. Only the trees which you know *are* not trees for food you may destroy and cut down, to build siegeworks against the city that makes war with you, until it is subdued.”

about it, this meant that God was commanding them to destroy these things. They should have been shocked at the thought of destroying good land and beautiful trees, but this did not bother them.

The Israelites followed God's instructions to make ditches all over the valley. And just as God had said, that morning the valley was suddenly filled with water. God honored their faith and gave them plenty of water – more than enough!

Then the Moabite army arrived. They looked at the valley and felt a big shock: the valley was filled with a red liquid! "This is blood!" they said to each other, "They're all dead! Let's go and take their things!" What the Moabites saw was not blood; it was just water. The water looked like red blood because of the way the sunlight was shining on it. They were sure that all the Israelites were dead, and that this was their blood.

The Moabites should have just gone home. They should have taken the red water as a warning that something bad was about to happen. They could have asked God for help and wisdom on what to do. But they just marched on towards the Israelite camp, hoping to find valuable things there. They were shocked when they found that all the soldiers from Israel, Judah and Edom were alive and strong. They chased after the Moabites and killed them. They also destroyed their cities and their land, just like Elisha had predicted.

Israel, Judah and Edom won this battle, and Moab was weakened after that. How sad it must have been for God to see all of this happening! The King of Moab was an evil man, and his rejection of God made it impossible for God to protect him and his people. As for Israel and Edom, they were blessed because they had joined King Jehoshaphat of Judah, a king who wanted to worship God and hear

His voice. God did the impossible for them; they thought they would die of thirst, but He gave them what they needed: water.

What does water represent in the Bible? God's Spirit. By giving them water, He was telling them that He was offering His Spirit to them. His Spirit is life – without God's Spirit, we cannot have life, and God wanted them to have life. How sad that after this, the kings of Edom and Israel still did not open their hearts to God! Imagine how much more God could have blessed their nations!

God longs to give you His Spirit, too. This world is so wicked that it's like a dry valley, and God wants you to have the “water” you need to live; He wants you to have His Spirit. Do you accept it?

27. Two Kings Called Jehoram

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.

Psalms 91:1-3 (KJV)



2 Chronicles 21-22; 2 Kings 8:16-29; 9 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 16

King Ahaziah son of Ahab was now dead. Since he had no son, his brother Jehoram had become king of Israel in his place. While Jehoram was king of Israel, Jehoshaphat king of Judah died. And in his place, Jehoshaphat's son, whose name was also Jehoram, became king. Now both Israel and Judah had kings called Jehoram! Jehoram of Judah, Jehoshaphat's son, was married to Athaliah, the sister of King Jehoram of Israel. This meant that King Jehoram of Israel was the brother-in-law of King Jehoram of Judah.

Both kings got along really well, but sadly, both were evil. Jehoram of Israel was not as evil as his father Ahab had been, but he was still wicked. Jehoram of Judah was even more evil; his father Jehoshaphat had been a good king, but he chose to be cruel and wicked. First, he killed all his brothers, to make sure none of them would take his throne away from him. Then he led the people of Judah to worship idols again.

Because Jehoram of Judah was so evil, Prophet Elijah sent him a letter¹⁴. It said, “The Lord says that because you have not followed the ways of your father Jehoshaphat, and the ways of Asa, but instead you’ve done evil like the kings of Israel, you will be struck by a plague. You, your wives and your children will get very sick.” Was God Himself sending a plague upon Jehoram and his family? No, it was not God doing this; God was letting Jehoram know what would happen once he was out of God’s protection.

Jehoram of Judah didn’t repent after reading this letter, and he was completely unprotected now. The Philistines and Arabians invaded his territory. They took all the valuable things from his palace. They killed all his wives and children, except his wife Athaliah, his youngest son Jehoahaz (Ahaziah), and his daughter Jehosheba, who was married to the high priest. After this, Jehoram of Judah got really sick, just like God had warned him, and he died. His youngest son, Jehoahaz (Ahaziah) became king in his place.

Jehoahaz (Ahaziah) was a wicked king, and he was king for only one year. He constantly followed the evil advice of his mother Athaliah. His uncle Jehoram of Israel and his grandmother Jezebel were still alive, and he would visit them often and listen to their evil counsel.

Now both Israel and Judah had wicked kings. But in the Kingdom of Israel there had been so much wickedness, for so long, that it was now time to choose a new family to rule over Israel. God chose a man

¹⁴ Hadn’t Elijah already been taken to heaven? Even though the stories are written in this order in the Bible, there is evidence that Elijah must have been taken to heaven *after* he witnessed Elisha’s ministry of kindness, so yes, when this story happened, he had still not been taken to heaven. Through Elisha’s gentle ministry, Elijah was able to learn what he had not understood before about God’s non-violent and gentle character. By the time Elijah went to heaven, he completely understood God’s merciful character, and he was ready to be taken to heaven.

called Jehu, the captain of Israel's army, to become the new king. Jehu did what he understood he had to do: he went to the king's palace to kill all of the king's family. King Jehoram of Israel was at his palace, healing from some battle wounds. His nephew Jehoahaz (Ahaziah), King of Judah, was visiting him. Jehu came in and killed both kings and the royal family in the palace. He also killed the servants and heathen priests that were with them. How sad that the Israelites had chosen, from the beginning, to kill instead of letting God solve their problems! But these kings had rejected God's protection, so Jehu was able to kill them easily.

Then the story became even sadder. The queen of Judah, Athaliah, received the news that her son, the king of Judah, and that all her family in Israel, had been killed. When she heard this, she did something unthinkable: she killed all of the king's children (her own grandchildren!) and anyone else related to the king. Why did she do this? She wanted to make sure that she could keep on being queen now that her son was dead. With all the relatives gone, she was sure that no one would take the throne away from her. But she did not know that one of her grandchildren was still alive: the wife of the high priest had taken little Prince Joash and hidden him in the temple, to keep him safe from wicked Queen Athaliah.

Little by little, the warnings that God had given to King Ahab began to come true. Now almost all of Ahab's family was dead. How different things would have been if these kings had chosen to worship God! How God had longed to protect this family from the plague and death that came! But He had to respect their choice to reject Him and His protection.

God invites each of us to dwell "under the shadow of the Almighty"; to have Him as our refuge and fortress. Don't be like the

kings of Israel and Judah; don't reject His care and protection. Will you come under the shadow of the Almighty and trust in His care and love today?

28. Young King Joash

**Where no counsel is, the people fall:
but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.
Proverbs 11:14 (KJV)**

 *2 Chronicles 23, 24; 2 Kings 11-12 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 16*

Wicked Queen Athaliah wanted to have all the power in Judah. When her son, the king, died, she killed all her grandchildren, and all of the king's relatives – anyone who might take the throne away from her. But she didn't realize that one of her grandsons was still alive. Little Prince Joash survived because his aunt, the wife of the high priest, took him and hid him in one of the rooms in the temple. This good woman's name was Jehosheba¹⁵, and her husband the high priest was called Jehoiada.

In the secret rooms of the temple, she and her husband raised the little boy. They taught him about God, and they told him that one day he would be king, and he would bring the people of Judah back to God. Meanwhile, the evil queen Athaliah kept on ruling Judah.

For six years, little Joash stayed hidden. When he turned seven years old, it was time to crown him king. High Priest Jehoiada made plans with the Levites and all of the leaders of Judah, and they secretly planned the coronation ceremony. They made sure that there would be soldiers just outside the temple to protect little Joash and all

¹⁵ Jehosheba was King Jehoram's daughter, probably from a different wife than Athaliah. She was also the sister of King Jehoahaz (Ahaziah).

the men who were with him. Then they gathered at the temple and brought Joash there. High Priest Jehoiada and his sons, the priests, anointed Joash and crowned him king. “God save the king!” they cried out.

The people were overjoyed to have this little boy as their new king. He was a descendant of King David, and he had been raised by the high priest. It would be a relief to be ruled by him instead of the evil queen Athaliah! Everyone cried out joyfully.

Athaliah, the wicked queen, heard all the noise, and she came to see what was happening. She saw the little king standing, with trumpet players near him. The leaders of Judah were surrounding him. Then she heard the trumpets sound, and singers and musicians began to make music. The people sang and praised loudly.

Athaliah was so upset that she tore her clothes and began to shout, “Treason! Treason!”

She wanted the soldiers to take little Joash away and kill him. But instead, the soldiers followed the orders of the high priest, and they took her away. After she died, there was peace in Judah once more. Now there was no one to stop little Joash from becoming king.

Even though Joash was just a little boy, he was a good king. He followed the advice of the high priest, and helped to lead the people back to God. The people of Judah followed him and broke down the altars and idols of Baal, and they even killed the priests of Baal. They wanted to worship God instead of this horrible idol.

As long as Jehoiada the high priest was alive, King Joash did what was right. King Joash noticed that the temple of the Lord was broken and needed repairs. It looked so run-down that it was not pleasant to worship there. He instructed the priests and Levites, “Gather money from the cities of Judah and repair the temple.” But

time passed, and no one gathered the money, and no one fixed anything.

After a few years, Joash decided he would do something to solve this problem. He made a large wooden chest and placed it at the gate of the temple. Then he gave an invitation to the people: “Bring in your offerings for the temple, just like Moses asked the people to do when they were in the desert.” The people were happy to have a chance to help fix the temple. They liked the idea of bringing in offerings just like the Israelites in the desert had done. They were happy to know that soon they would worship God in a beautiful temple.

Day by day, the Levites would bring the chest to King Joash and empty it in front of him. Then they would take the empty chest back to the gate, where the people would keep on bringing offerings. Day by day, they gathered the money, until there was enough to pay for all the materials they needed, and to pay the workers. Soon the temple was like new again, and the people felt blessed to worship God in a beautiful building.

A few years after the temple was repaired, High Priest Jehoiada died. Joash had always followed his advice. But now that the high priest was dead, King Joash began to listen to bad advice from the leaders of Judah. These leaders worshiped idols, and King Joash joined them in this sin. God sent prophets to speak to him and to the leaders, but they refused to listen to God’s warnings.

One of the men who came to speak to King Joash was Zechariah, High Priest Jehoiada’s son. Zechariah and King Joash were like brothers; they had known each other since they were little and had been raised together by Zechariah’s own father. Zechariah loved Joash and was worried by what was happening in the kingdom.

“Joash, why have you left God’s commandments? He cannot help you to do well if you continue like this,” Zechariah pleaded with the young king. Joash should have listened to Zechariah; he should have felt Zechariah’s love and concern. But instead, he got angry and did the worst possible thing: he ordered his men to stone him. He was willing to kill him, just so he wouldn’t have to listen to him anymore.

God could not be with Joash after this; Joash had clearly rejected Him and His protection. Now Joash and the kingdom of Judah were completely unprotected. The army of Syria came and killed several of the leaders of Judah and took many valuable things from the land of Judah. King Joash was wounded during this attack, and he never recovered. While he was still in bed in his palace, trying to heal from his wounds, his own servants killed him. They said to each other, “King Joash killed the sons of Jehoiada the high priest. How could he do such a terrible thing?”

What a sad ending to what could have been a beautiful life! King Joash had been especially saved and chosen, and he had begun as a good king, but then he followed the wrong advisors, made wrong choices and completely left God. This could happen to any of us: if you are reading these stories and learning about God, it is because God has chosen you. Will you follow Him and His counsel?

29. God's Care for the Schools of the Prophets

But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19 (KJV)



1 Kings 16:34; 2 Kings 2:19-21; 4:38-44; 6:1-7. | Prophets and Kings Chapters 18, 19

Many years before, the prophet Samuel had started some special schools called “the Schools of the Prophets”. He had noticed that young people were not properly learning God’s Word from their parents, so he opened these schools for young men to have the chance to learn God’s will and study the Scriptures. These young men, called “the sons of the prophets”, later became leaders who taught the Israelites to leave their idols and worship God. After Samuel died, the people slowly abandoned these schools and forgot about them. Elijah had worked to start these schools again, and to make sure that the young men were receiving the instruction they needed.

Now Elisha had taken Elijah’s place, and he kept on working for these schools. He visited them often, and showed them God’s care and love while he was there.

One time Elisha visited the school near Jericho. When the men of Jericho heard that Elisha was there, they went to him. “Elisha, we have a problem,” they said, “There is no good water in our city.” The men of Jericho did not deserve to have water. Why? Because after the

walls of Jericho fell down many years before, God had told the Israelites, “Do not rebuild Jericho.” But wicked King Ahab had decided to rebuild it, against God’s will. And as the city was being rebuilt, something terrible happened: the chief builder had two sons, and his sons died. Clearly God’s protection was not with the Israelites when Jericho was being rebuilt.

And now the men had come, asking Elisha to help them find water for this city. Elisha answered, “Bring a new pot with salt inside it.” The men brought him what he asked for. By doing this, they showed that they now had faith in God. Elisha went to the spring of water and poured the salt from the new pot into it. He said, “The Lord says, ‘I have now healed the waters.’” Now the whole city of Jericho had good water! God showed His love and compassion by doing this; they did not deserve this water. Would the men of Jericho see that God wanted to heal their hearts, just like He had healed the waters?

Another time, Elisha visited the school at Gilgal. There was a famine in the land, and food was hard to find. One of the young men went to the field and found some wild gourds. He didn’t know that the gourds were poisonous; he thought they would be good to eat. He happily gathered them, cut them up and cooked them in a large pot. When the food was ready, everyone gathered around to eat. Suddenly one of the young men cried out, “This gourd is poisonous! There is death in the pot! What shall we do, Elisha?”

Elisha calmly answered, “Bring me some flour.” Elisha threw the flour into the pot, and then he instructed, “Serve it, so that everyone can eat.” The young men believed Elisha, and they ate. God had given them safe food to eat that day!

Another day, a man arrived at the school of Gilgal with an offering for Elisha: bread from his first harvest, and fresh ears of grain. Elisha said to his servant, “Feed the people with this.” Elisha’s servant knew that this bread and grain were not enough to feed all the men that were with them – there were one hundred men there! “Should I give this to one hundred men?” he asked doubtfully. “Yes,” answered Elisha, “Give it to them, because God says that they will eat, and there will be leftovers.” They believed Elisha’s words, and everyone sat down to eat. And just as God had said, there were leftovers.

Another time, the young men from one of the schools said to Elisha, “The school is too small for us.” They had an idea: “Let’s go to the Jordan, cut some trees and make a place for ourselves there. Will you come with us, Prophet Elisha?”

Elisha thought this was a good idea, and he went with them. They arrived at the Jordan and began cutting down trees. Suddenly one of the boys cried out. “My axe head just fell into the water!” The Jordan River was deep; it would be impossible to find the axe head again. “Oh no,” the young man worried, “The axe head was borrowed!” How would he ever be able to return it to its owner?

Elisha kindly asked, “Where did it fall?” The young man showed him the spot. Elisha cut down a stick and threw it where the axe head had fallen. Instantly, the iron axe head began to float in the water! Then he said to the young man gently, “Go and get it.” The young man happily went into the water and gathered the floating axe head. What a miracle! How thankful he must have been to God that day!

Elisha was a kind prophet who helped to show the people how loving and compassionate God is. In every miracle, people could see

that God cared for them and wanted what was best for them. They just had to decide whether they would follow God or not.

God wants what is best for you, too. He wants to supply all your needs. Will you accept Him? Will you trust Him to care for you?

30. Respecting God's Prophet

And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 (NKJV)



2 Kings 2:23-24; 4:1-7. | Prophets and Kings Chapter 19

The young men who studied in the schools of the prophets knew that Elisha was God's prophet, and they loved and respected him. Through Elisha, they learnt more about God's love, care and compassion for them.

But not everyone respected Elisha. After Elisha healed the waters of Jericho, he went to Bethel, where one of the schools was located. After the kind miracles that God had performed through Elisha, you would have thought that everyone would treat Elisha with love and respect. But on his way to Bethel, a group of young men saw him. It was a large group; more than forty of them. They saw Elisha walking alone. They should have thought, "Now that Elijah is gone, Elisha is alone. How can we help him?"

But instead, they began to make fun of him. They mocked him for not going up to heaven like Elijah had, and they also teased him for being bald. "Go up, bald head, go up!" they chanted, laughing. Their taunts were a curse to Elisha; they hurt him. Making fun of

Elisha would also hurt them, because by mocking Elisha, they were rejecting God.

Elisha turned around and let them know that they were being cursed; that they were in danger. Why? Because by rejecting God's prophet, they were rejecting the life and protection that God wanted to give them. Would these young men repent of what they were doing?

No, they did not repent. Suddenly, two big female bears came out of the woods. These bears had always been in the woods, but they had never hurt anyone, because God had been protecting His people from them. Now that these young men were mocking Elisha, they lost God's protection. The bears attacked them and seriously injured forty-two of them.

Even though these young men had not respected Elisha, there were others who did. One day a woman came to see Elisha. She started crying, and said, "I am a widow. My husband was one of the students in the schools of the prophets; he loved God and worshiped Him. Now that he's dead, I have to pay some debts, and if I don't, my sons will be taken as slaves."

Elisha answered kindly, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?" She answered, "The only thing I have is a pot of oil."

Elisha instructed, "Go to your neighbors and borrow as many empty vessels as you can. Then go inside your house with your sons, close the door, and start pouring the oil into the vessels."

The woman did exactly as Elisha had instructed her. To her amazement, she poured and poured, and the oil kept on coming out. After pouring into many pots, she said to her sons, "Give me one more vessel," and they answered, "There aren't any more." As soon

as they said that, the oil stopped pouring. Now she had a room full of pots filled with oil! Amazed, she went to tell Elisha what had happened.

“Now you can sell the oil and pay your debts,” Elisha told her kindly. God had honored the woman’s faith. She had believed Elisha’s words and had done everything he had told her to do, and now she would have the money that she and her sons needed. How grateful they must have been!

Each person in Israel had a choice: they could accept God’s prophet and receive blessings from him, or they could reject him and lose God’s blessings. In accepting Elisha, the people showed that they had faith in God; in rejecting Elisha, they were rejecting God, too.

God has placed certain people in your life, too, so that through them, God can bless you, guide you and protect you. Do you know who these people are? Thank God for them, and pray that they will always be close to God, too, so that they can keep on being a blessing to you and to others.

31. The Kind Shunammite Woman

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness. Galatians 5:22 (NKJV)



2 Kings 4:8-37; 8:1-2 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 19

Prophet Elisha helped people get to know how compassionate and caring God is. To do this, he had to travel a lot, and he depended on the kindness of others for food and shelter. There was a woman from the town of Shunem who always received Elisha in her home when he passed by there, and made sure he had food to eat.

One day this woman, the Shunammite, said to her husband, “Elisha is a man of God, and he passes by here often. Why don’t we build a little room for him, with a bed, a table, a stool and a lamp, so that he can have a place to sleep every time he comes?” Her husband agreed, and soon the room was ready. Elisha was delighted with the room. How thoughtful this family was towards him! He wanted to do something kind for them in return.

Elisha said to her, “You’ve been so kind and caring to do this for me. What can I do for you? Can I speak to the king for you? Do you need any favors from the king?” The woman answered, “Thank you, but I don’t need anything.” She was happy with her life and her home, and she had only done this for Elisha out of kindness.

But Elisha knew there had to be *something* he could do for her. His servant Gehazi had an idea. He said to Elisha, “She doesn’t have any children, and her husband is old.” Yes! That’s what Elisha could do for her! He could ask God to give her a child. He said to the woman, “At this time next year, you will have a baby boy.” The woman had not asked for this, but she was overjoyed. How wonderful it would be to have a baby!

Just like Elisha said, the woman had a baby boy. She loved her little boy, and enjoyed caring for him and watching him grow. Then one day, the little boy went to the field with his father. They were gathering the harvest, and it was hot. Suddenly the boy began to cry in pain, “My head, my head!” A servant took him to his mother, and he sat on her lap all morning. His mother thought that he would feel better, but he didn’t. He got weaker and weaker, and died at noon.

The Shunammite woman was distressed. Why did her little boy, her gift from God, die? She decided not to tell her husband yet. Maybe, just maybe, Elisha could do something. She put the little boy on Elisha’s bed and closed the door, then she went to her husband. She didn’t say anything about their son. She just said, “Ask one of the servants to get me a donkey. I need to see Prophet Elisha.”

“Why do you need to see him now?” asked the husband, confused, “It’s not Sabbath or New Moon; it’s not a day in which people usually visit a prophet.” She didn’t say anything, and he let her go to Elisha. If Elisha could help her son, then her husband would never have to feel the sadness that she was feeling now.

When she arrived where Elisha was, she fell to the ground in front of him and held on to his feet. Elisha’s servant Gehazi tried to stop her, but Elisha said, “Leave her alone. She is very distressed. The

Lord hasn't yet told me what has happened." Now she told Elisha about her little boy, and asked desperately, "Did I ask you for this son? Why did you give him to me, then?"

Elisha prepared to go to Shunem with the woman. He said to Gehazi, "Go ahead of us, quickly. Take my staff and place it upon the face of the child." Gehazi did this, but when he placed the staff on the child's face, nothing changed; the child was still dead. Then Elisha arrived. He closed the door behind him, and prayed to the Lord. Then he lay upon the child and put his mouth over the child's mouth, his eyes upon the child's eyes, and his hands on the child's hands. The little boy felt warmer now, but he did not wake up. Then Elisha got up and went to the house and paced around the house. Then he returned to the room and stretched himself upon the child again. This time, the little boy sneezed seven times, then opened his eyes.

The little boy was alive! God had raised him back to life. The Shunammite woman was so relieved and grateful that she fell at Elisha's feet, bowed to him, then picked up her son and went out.

Elisha did even more for this kind woman. He told her, "There will be a famine soon. You and your household should move somewhere else for seven years." The woman believed Elisha and moved her household to the land of the Philistines.

After seven years she returned. She went to the king to beg him to give back her land and her house. When she arrived to see the king, she found Elisha's servant Gehazi talking to him. The king had asked Gehazi, "Tell me about the great things that Elisha has done." Gehazi answered, "He restored a woman's son back to life. And O King, this woman who is asking for her land back, she is the woman. Elisha restored *her* son back to life."

The king was impressed by the story. He had not been interested in giving her back the land before, but when he heard Gehazi's story, he ordered one of his officers to give her back all that was hers.

The Shunammite woman had been kind to Elisha without expecting anything in return. This kindness came from the Spirit of God; it is a fruit of the Spirit. She was letting God guide her, and this led her to be kind and helpful to God's prophet. In reflecting God's kindness, she was able to receive God's kindness, too, in ways that she never would have imagined. God wants to teach each of us to be kind, too, just like He taught the Shunammite woman. Will you ask Him for His fruit in your life?

32. Naaman

**Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant?
Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of
the Lord and rely on his God. Isaiah 50:10 (ESV)**



2 Kings 5 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 20

God's plan had always been to reach all nations, not just Israel. It was sad that Israel, the people God had chosen as His messengers, were not following His plan at all. Because of the unfaithfulness of the Israelites, God removed His hedge of protection at times, and the Syrians had been able to invade them. But even these invasions could turn into a blessing, if only God's few faithful people trusted Him.

During one of the invasions, the Syrians took some of the Israelites as slaves. One of these Israelites was a young girl who believed in God and worshiped Him. Her parents had taught her about God, and even after she was taken to Syria as a prisoner, she kept on believing. She was taken to the home of Captain Namaan, one of the bravest Syrian officers, and she became the slave of Namaan's wife.

One day, this young girl found out that her master Namaan was sick with leprosy, the worst and most dreaded disease of that time. How would you have felt if you were this girl? She could have been secretly happy that Namaan, the man who had captured her and taken her away from her home, was now so sick. But she had God's

Spirit of love in her heart. She felt sad for Namaan and his family, and she wanted to help. Then she did what God had always wanted His people to do: she used this as an opportunity to share about her merciful God. She said to Namaan's wife: "Master Namaan could see Prophet Elisha in Israel, and be healed." The Syrian idols couldn't heal Namaan, but Israel's God could!

Namaan decided to go to Israel to ask for healing. He gathered gifts and asked his king to write a letter to the king of Israel¹⁶. The letter said, "I am sending you my servant Namaan. Please heal him." Then he traveled to Samaria, where the king of Israel was. When the king of Israel read the letter from the king of Syria, he was upset. He tore his clothes and cried out, "Do you think I am God, that I can heal this man? The king of Syria is just picking a fight with me!" He didn't even think of asking God what to do. He didn't think of calling in a prophet to ask for advice, either, but Elisha heard what was happening, and said, "Let Namaan come to me, and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel!"

Namaan rode his chariot to Elisha's home. He stood at the door and expected to meet the prophet. But Elisha didn't appear; he sent a messenger instead. The messenger said, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and you will be healed."

Namaan was annoyed. Was this all? Why didn't Elisha himself come to speak to him? Wasn't he, a Syrian officer, important enough for the prophet to see him? And why did he have to wash in a river? He said angrily, "The rivers in my country are better and more beautiful than the Jordan. Why don't I wash there?" He turned around and prepared to go back home.

¹⁶ Probably King Jehoram, Ahab's son.

But Namaan's servants tried to gently stop him. "Sir," they said, "If the prophet had asked you to do something great, wouldn't you have done it? Then, why not do this simple thing?" "You're right," Namaan agreed, "I will wash in the Jordan." Namaan chose to believe Elisha's words from God, and he dipped himself in the Jordan seven times. The seventh time, he came out of the water completely healed!

Namaan was overjoyed. He returned to Elisha's home to say thank you. "Please take these gifts," he urged Elisha, offering gold, silver, and clothing. "No," answered Elisha. God wanted to heal Namaan freely; he didn't have to pay anything to receive God's blessings. Namaan insisted on giving the gifts anyway, but Elisha firmly but kindly replied with a "No".

As Namaan left, carrying all his gifts back with him, Elisha's servant Gehazi watched, amazed. How could Elisha have said "no" to such rich gifts? But he should have understood. He had been with Elisha for many years, and he had seen the wonderful miracles that God had freely done through him. God's blessings were free to anyone who believed, and Naaman needed to understand this. It would have been wrong for Elisha to accept the gifts.

But Gehazi did not want to understand. He wanted the gifts! So secretly he caught up to Naaman and told him a lie: "Sir Namaan, my master asked me to come and tell you that we have just received two visitors, and we need some silver and clothing." Naaman was happy to give Gehazi what he asked for, and even more.

Gehazi rushed back home and hid the silver and clothing. He thought Elisha would never find out what he had done. But Elisha knew. He asked Gehazi, "Where have you come from?" This was a chance for Gehazi to confess what he had done and to ask for forgiveness, but he did not. Instead, he lied, "I didn't go anywhere."

Elisha was sad. He looked at Gehazi sternly and said, “Is this the time to receive riches? Now you and your descendants will receive Namaan’s leprosy.” God knew that if Gehazi left His hedge of protection, Satan would be free to do whatever he wanted with him – and would give him leprosy. He was warning Gehazi, through Elisha, what would happen unless he turned to God for help. It’s sad that Gehazi did not repent, and did not ask God to help him. He became leprous instantly, and was never healed.

Naaman was grateful to be healed, and ever since then, he worshiped only God, and he stopped worshiping the Syrian idols. He followed God as best he could, with the little knowledge that he had. How different was Gehazi’s story! Gehazi had seen God’s miracles through Elisha and he had heard the Scriptures, but still he chose to follow his own ideas rather than God’s instructions.

How much do you know about God and His Word? Would you like to be like Gehazi, who ignored what he learned, and chose his own ideas instead, or would you like to be like Naaman, who followed God according to what he had learned? Ask God to help you to know Him more today, and to show you how to follow Him.

33. God's Mercy towards Syria and Israel

**But God, who is rich in mercy,
for his great love wherewith he loved us. Ephesians 2:4 (KJV)**



2 Kings 6:8-33; 7 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 21

For years, the Syrians had been disturbing the Israelites. Every time they could, they planned attacks on the Israelites. With time, the king of Syria noticed something: the Israelites were getting harder and harder to attack. It seemed as if they always found out what he was about to do, and they were ready for his attacks. This was happening because more Israelites were now listening to Elisha's teachings and accepting God, so God was protecting them. God would tell Elisha what the Syrians were about to do, and Elisha would let the king know.

The Syrian king was troubled. "Which of my men is telling the Israelites of my plans?" he asked. His servants answered, "None of your men are doing this. Prophet Elisha is the one who finds out and tells the king of Israel." "Then I want you to get him and bring him to me," he ordered his men.

That night, a huge army of Syrian soldiers, horses and chariots surrounded the city where Elisha was staying, and they waited quietly. Elisha's servant woke up early and saw the vast army. He was scared and cried out, "Elisha, what will we do?!"

Elisha answered calmly, “Don’t be afraid. The army with us is larger than their army.” Army? What army? Elisha’s servant could only see one army: the Syrian army. What was Elisha talking about?

Elisha prayed, “Lord, please open his eyes, so that he may see.” Suddenly Elisha’s servant saw something that he hadn’t seen before: there were horses and chariots of fire all around them! It was a heavenly army, and it was spread all over the mountain where their city was. God was protecting them!

Now Elisha prayed, “Lord, please smite the Syrian army with blindness.” And the whole Syrian army became blind. This blindness showed that these soldiers were spiritually blind; they couldn’t see the things of God, and now they had become physically blind, as well. Elisha went to the Syrian soldiers and said, “This is not the way. This is not the city. Let me take you where you should go.” Gently he guided them to Samaria, where the king of Israel was. If the Syrians wanted to fight against Israel, they should have gone to Samaria where the king of Israel was, not to the city where Elisha was. When all the soldiers were inside the city, Elisha prayed, “Lord, please open their eyes so they can see.” With horror, the Syrian soldiers realized they were trapped inside Samaria. The king of Israel was excited. “Oh, my father Elisha, shall I smite them?”

How wonderful that the king of Israel¹⁷ was asking what to do. He had not made up his mind to do things his own way. God could finally show His mercy through the Israelite king! Elisha answered clearly, “No, you shall not smite them. Feed them, then let them return home.” The king of Israel obeyed Elisha. He gave the Syrian soldiers plenty of food and drink, then let them go home in peace.

¹⁷ King Jehoram, son of Ahab

This was how God would have wanted the nations to deal with each other: with mercy and kindness. For a while, the Syrians stopped disturbing the Israelites. How could they hurt the Israelites after they had received such mercy?

Sadly, Ben-Hadad the king of Syria was not a kind man. After a while, he forgot about the mercy of the Israelite king, and he decided to disturb again. The Syrian army surrounded the city of Samaria again for a long time. It was so long that the people in Samaria ran out of food, because they could not go in or out of the city. They began to eat unclean animals like donkeys, and then some people even started to eat other people!

The king of Israel should have realized that this was happening because of their sins. He should have turned to God and repented, but instead, he blamed God for what was happening. And because he blamed God, he wanted God's prophet, Elisha, to be put to death. He sent a messenger to fetch Elisha.

Elisha was sitting in his home, talking with the leaders of Israel. When the king's messenger came to get him, Elisha did not go with him. But he told the leaders, "Tomorrow, everyone will be able to buy food for very cheap prices." How could this happen? This did not seem possible. One of the king's officers did not believe Elisha at all. He said, "Even if God made windows in heaven, could this happen?" Elisha answered him, "You will see it, but you will not eat any of it."

The next day before sunrise, four lepers sat outside the city gate. They weren't allowed to be in the city because they had leprosy, but they would usually beg for food outside the gate. Now, of course, no one could give them any food. "Why are we just sitting here?" they said to each other, "We will die here. Maybe we should beg for food

at the Syrian camp. They might kill us, but they might also just feed us.”

The four lepers went to the Syrian camp, but to their surprise, there was no one there! All the Syrian soldiers had run away. God had made them hear the noise of horses, chariots and a great army. “The Egyptians are coming to help the Israelites!” they thought. They had fled in fear, leaving all of their things behind.

The lepers went inside a tent. They found food inside and began feasting on it. They also found clothing, silver and gold, and took it and hid it. Then they looked at each other and said, “This is good news! We must tell the king. It wouldn’t be right to keep quiet and not tell the others.” They went quickly to the city gate and began to tell the gatekeepers what they had seen.

The king of Israel was afraid at first. “The Syrians are probably hiding in the field, waiting for us to come out.” He sent some men out to see the camp and make sure it was safe. Yes, the camp was safe! The Syrians had even left a trail of clothing and vessels all the way to the Jordan River! They had dropped these things as they fled, and the Israelites could clearly see where they had passed through, and that they had gone far away. What joy the people had! They were excited to take all the food and possessions that the soldiers had left behind.

Just like Elisha had said, the people were suddenly selling food for very cheap prices. Everyone could eat again. Remember the officer who had not believed Elisha? He stood at the city gate and watched as the people brought in all the food. The people were so excited that they didn’t even notice he was there; they trampled over him as they entered the city, and he died.

God showed mercy to both the Syrians and the Israelites: He freed the Israelites from the Syrians, and none of the Syrian soldiers

needed to die. As far as they let Him, He cared for them and protected them. He showed His love for them in every way He could. He didn't want any of them to die or to suffer. Why were their hearts so hardened towards Him?

God is loving and merciful to us, too. He will do all that is possible for you to be saved. Will you accept His love and care? Will you thank Him for His mercy and patience towards you?

34. Reaching Kings through Elisha

**The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.
Psalm 145:9 (KJV)**

 *2 Kings 8:7-15; 13 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 21*

Elisha was a much-loved prophet. In Israel and Judah the people respected him as a man of God and asked for his advice. But it wasn't only the people of Judah and Israel who asked Elisha to give them counsel; even the king of Syria respected and trusted Elisha.

Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, had attacked Israel many times. Yet he still thought of Elisha when he had questions. One day, Ben-Hadad got sick. He wanted to know if he would get better, so he sent his officer, Hazael, to ask Elisha about this. Hazael brought Elisha forty camels full of gifts, and said, "Ben-Hadad wants to know: will he recover from his illness?"

Elisha looked at Hazael sadly. "Tell him he can recover," Elisha answered, "But the Lord has shown me that he will die." Then Elisha began to cry. Hazael felt uncomfortable. "Why are you weeping, sir?" he asked. Elisha answered, "I'm crying because I know all the harm you will do to Israel." "Me?" asked Hazael, "I'm nobody. How would I do this?" Elisha responded, "The Lord has shown me that you will be king over Syria."

Hazael returned home. Just like Elisha had said, he told Ben-Hadad, “The Lord says you can recover.” Ben-Hadad’s illness would not be deadly. But Ben-Hadad died anyway. He didn’t die because of his illness; he died because Hazael decided to kill him. Hazael thought that, since Elisha said he would be king over Syria, he might as well kill Ben-Hadad as soon as possible, so he could become king really quickly.

Hazael should have been grateful that God was telling him that he would be king. He could have asked God to guide him and show him how to rule his country. He should have waited until God told him it was time for him to be king. But he was not interested in following the God of Israel. How sad that he missed out on having God as his protection, helper and guide!

When Hazael became king of Syria, Jehoahaz was king of Israel. Jehoahaz was the son of King Jehu, the man who had killed all of Ahab’s family. Jehoahaz was an evil king, and because of this, God allowed Hazael of Syria to oppress Israel. The Israelites suffered under the Syrians until finally King Jehoahaz begged God, “Please free us!” God is merciful, and he gladly saved the Israelites. Did the Israelites turn to God after this? Sadly, they didn’t. They kept on worshiping their idols, even after God had been so kind to them.

When Jehoahaz died, his son Jehoash¹⁸ began to reign. Jehoash was also an evil king who worshiped idols. Yet, just like the Syrian kings, he liked to talk with Elisha, even though he never gave his heart to God.

One day King Jehoash came to visit Elisha. Elisha was sick and about to die, but he still received the king and talked to him. Jehoash

¹⁸ Also called Joash of Israel.

was worried because the Syrians were attacking Israel. He cried and asked Elisha what to do.

Elisha instructed, “Pick up your bows and arrows. Now, hold your bow.” The king held his bow, and Elisha put his hands on the king’s hands. “Now, open the window towards the east,” said Elisha. Then he instructed, “Shoot.” After the king shot his arrow, Elisha said, “God will deliver you from Syria, and you will smite them.”

Now Elisha commanded, “Take your arrows. Now, smite upon the ground.” The king struck the ground three times, halfheartedly, with his arrows, then stopped. Elisha was disappointed. He said to the king, “You should have struck five or six times, then you would have smitten Syria completely. But now, you will only smite Syria three times.”

By only striking the ground three times, the king had shown that he had little faith in God’s words through Elisha. This lack of faith would affect all of Israel. King Jehoash could have repented right then, but he didn’t. He just accepted what Elisha had said, and did not try to change. What Elisha said came true: Jehoash only defeated the Syrians three times after that, but the Syrians kept attacking them during the rest of his reign.

Shortly after this, Elisha died. He had been a faithful prophet of God, much loved by the people. He had shown them how loving and merciful God is. He had even showed God’s love and care to kings who never accepted this love.

Elisha had been such a special man, so close to God, that something amazing happened even after his death. The Israelites were fighting against the Moabites when one of their men died. Just as they were taking him to bury him, they suddenly saw that a band of enemy soldiers was following them. They hurriedly put the dead

man into Elisha's grave so that they could get away quickly. But as the dead man fell on Elisha's bones, a miracle happened: he was raised to life again! He got up and escaped with the rest of the men. This incredible miracle should have helped the Israelites to truly see that Elisha was God's prophet, and that God wanted to give them life. How hardened were their hearts!

Can you see God's love and care for you? Can you remember the things that He has done for you and your family? Don't be like the Syrian and Israelite kings who asked for counsel but never gave their hearts to God. Let God guide you completely, like He would have liked to guide those ungrateful kings.

35. Jonah

For I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Jonah 4:2 (KJV)



Jonah; Matthew 12:40, 41 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 22

Nineveh was a very wicked city. The worst crimes were committed there. It was a city in the land of Assyria, and the Assyrians were enemies with the Israelites. None of the Israelites would ever have thought that God cared for this wicked, heathen city. But God did care; He cared about *all* cities and *all* people, and He knew that in this city there were still some people whose hearts would be open to learning about Him, if only they were given the chance.

God spoke to a prophet called Jonah and said, “Go to Nineveh, and warn them that they are in danger because of their wickedness.” Warn Nineveh? Why bother with such a wicked city? God couldn’t save such horrible people, could He? Jonah did not want to do what God was asking. So instead of going to Nineveh, he went the opposite way: he travelled to Joppa and boarded a ship to Tarshish.

God was patient with Jonah, even though Jonah was running away from Him. God wanted to show him that He *could* save people, even in the worst circumstances. While Jonah was traveling in the ship, a huge storm came over the sea. Everyone was terrified. They did all they could to save the ship, but it wasn’t working. The people inside the ship were idol worshipers who didn’t know God, and they

prayed to their idols, but the storm wouldn't stop. Then they found Jonah: he was sleeping in a corner of the ship. The captain woke him up and said, "Why are you sleeping?! Pray to your God, so that we don't die!"

The storm wouldn't stop, so they said, "Maybe one of us angered our gods. Let's cast lots and see who it is." They cast lots, and it fell upon Jonah. Now they all looked at Jonah and asked him, "Where do you come from? What job do you do?" Jonah told them the truth: "I'm a Hebrew. I worship the God of heaven, but right now I'm running away from Him." All the men were worried. "What shall we do?" they asked Jonah. He answered, "Just throw me into the sea, and it will calm down. This storm is my fault."

Whose idea was it that Jonah should be thrown into the sea? It was Jonah's idea, not God's. Jonah had judged himself.

The men didn't want to throw Jonah into the sea. They didn't want to kill him. They rowed and rowed as long as they could to bring the ship to land, but they finally realized they could not save the ship, and the people in it, unless they threw Jonah into the sea. They prayed to Jehovah, Jonah's God, and said, "Please don't punish us for throwing this man into the sea!" Then they cast Jonah into the water, and the storm suddenly stopped and the sea was calm. The men were amazed. They worshiped Jonah's God right there. God was able to use this bad situation to help these men get to know Him. He also used this situation to show Jonah that even heathen men were kind; these men had felt bad about throwing him into the sea. Their hearts *could* be open to learning about the true God.

God also showed Jonah His love and care, because as soon as Jonah fell into the water, a huge fish came and swallowed him. Jonah

was in that fish for three days and three nights. God kept him safe that way, and Jonah had time to think and pray. He was sorry for what he had done, and he asked God to forgive him. He trusted that God would save him. After three days and three nights, the fish vomited him out onto dry land.

Now God invited Jonah once more, “Go and preach to the people of Nineveh.” This time, Jonah did not run away. He went straight to Nineveh. He spoke loudly to the people, announcing, “In forty days, Nineveh will be destroyed!” From street to street, he gave his message, and to his surprise, the people listened. They repented. Even the king of Nineveh repented. The people fasted and wore sackcloth. Their king got up from his throne and sat in ashes instead. Not even the animals were given food or water during this time. “Maybe God will have mercy on us and let us live,” they said.

God saw, God heard, and God had mercy on Nineveh. He did not allow destruction to come to this city. This idol-worshipping city was able to experience God’s love and care.

Jonah should have been glad that the people had accepted his message and that the city was saved, but instead, he was upset. “The people will say I’m a false prophet, because my warnings didn’t come true,” he thought. Also, he really didn’t like the people of Nineveh, and he had hoped that God would not save them. He said to God angrily, “You are merciful and kind – that’s why I fled to Tarshish!” Jonah was glad that God had been merciful to *him* in the sea, but he did not want that same mercy for the Ninevites! The whole thing made him so angry that he even prayed, “Just let me die!”

But God did not let Jonah die. He was patient and loving with Jonah. Kindly, God asked, “Jonah, is it right for you to be angry?”

Jonah didn't answer. He went outside the city, built a little booth, and watched what would happen to the city. God quietly made a gourd grow quickly over Jonah's booth, so that Jonah could have shade and protection from the hot sun. Jonah was glad for the plant; it brought him comfort. Remember when Elijah had also been upset and wanted to die?¹⁹ God had given him rest, food and drink; He had comforted him, before trying to speak to him and reason with him again. Now God was doing the same for moody Jonah: He was comforting him by giving him shade. Would Jonah now be open to listening to God?

Jonah spent the night under that booth. The next morning, something unpleasant happened: a worm ate the plant, and it dried up. Now Jonah had no comfortable shade. The sun was hot, and the wind was uncomfortable. Jonah was so hot that he fainted. "I just want to die!" he thought angrily.

Now God spoke to Jonah, and said, "Jonah, you're so upset about this plant – but you didn't plant it or care for it; it just appeared and lived for one day. If you're this upset about a plant, how do you think I feel about the 120,000 people of Nineveh, and their animals?" God cared and worried about all these idol-worshiping people who didn't know any better. Weren't these people more valuable than a plant? And weren't these people just as valuable and loved as Jonah?

God searched for the people of Nineveh just as much as He searched for Jonah's people. Centuries later, Jesus spoke about the people of Nineveh. He said, "They heard Jonah's warning and repented." What a difference between their attitude and the attitude of the Jewish leaders, who had the Scriptures, but did not repent. The

¹⁹ See story 18 in this book, "God Comforts Elijah".

Jews even had *Jesus*, and most did not accept Him! What more could God have done for them?

God searches for us, too, just like He tried to reach these people. He is merciful and loving to all people and longs for each of us to hear Him and trust Him. Will you accept His messages for you, and His invitation to follow Him?

36. The Last Prophets to Israel

For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, seek me, and ye shall live. Amos 5:4 (KJV)



Amos, Hosea | Prophets and Kings Chapter 23

Israel had left God. The kings of Israel were idol worshipers, and one after the other, they did evil after evil. God kept trying to reach them, as long as there was hope. If Israel didn't change, then God would have to allow them to continue without Him, and without His protection. This would be terrible for them! God sent two men to warn them of what was about to happen. These men were Amos and Hosea.

Amos was a herdsman. He faithfully took care of animals and picked fruit in his farm. Then one day, God asked this faithful, hardworking man to be a different kind of herdsman: a shepherd of His people. Amos began to preach God's message to Israel, warning, "There will be a disaster! You will be taken captive! Repent and turn to God!" He kept warning Israel and the nations around them of the things that might happen. Among the visions that Amos received, he saw that a plague of locusts might come, then he saw that a big fire might come. He prayed earnestly, "Please, Lord, forgive! Don't let this happen!" God heard Amos' prayer, and assured him, "This won't happen." How God longed for more of His people to pray! He would

have wanted to stop all of the terrible things that were going to happen to Israel.

Sadly, most of the Israelites ignored Amos. There was a man who especially hated him: Amaziah, the idolatrous priest in Bethel. He was priest of one of the golden calves that Jeroboam had built so many years before. He went to the king and said, “O King, Amos is speaking against you!” He also told Amos, “Go and prophesy in Judah. We don’t want you here.” But Amos did not stop prophesying. “God asked me to give this message, when I was just a herdsman,” he replied. His message was unpleasant to the Israelites because they refused to change. He kept telling them that there was hope, that God wanted to restore them, but they refused to hear.

Hosea was another prophet who prophesied of the dangers that Israel was in. But he not only spoke about it; his life was an example of how God felt for His people. You see, Hosea had a wife who made him very sad. Her name was Gomer. Hosea loved her very much, but she was unfaithful to him. She would leave him to be with other men. She had three children, but no one really knew whether the last two children were Hosea’s, or whether they had a different father. Most men would have left Gomer because she was so unfaithful, but Hosea did not. When she left home, he would look for her. One day he found her in the marketplace, where she was selling herself because she had run out of money. He paid the money for her and brought her home, when most men would have just left her there. He forgave her. He raised all of her children as if they were his. Hosea did not want to leave her; she was his wife, and he loved her. Nothing could change that. He kept hoping that she would repent and that she would finally be faithful to him, and meanwhile, he always treated her with love and gentleness.

This is exactly how God felt about His people, Israel. He loved and cared for them like a good husband loves and cares for his wife, and He was willing to forgive them for being unfaithful to Him. He felt sad when He saw them suffer, just like Hosea felt sad when he found his wife selling herself in such a shameful way. Hosea loved and forgave His wife, just like God loves and forgives us when we do wrong.

“Repent and turn to God!” Hosea kept telling the people, while he longed for his own wife to repent and turn to him. “God wants to save you from the disasters that will come if you leave His hedge of protection!” He pleaded with the people, while he longed to save his wife from being hurt by other men, and from the embarrassment that she felt after being unfaithful. Would Israel repent? Would Gomer, Hosea’s wife, repent?

Sadly, Israel did not repent. Only a few people remained faithful to God, while most of Israel, including its leaders, turned to idol worship and refused to hear the warnings of God’s prophets. The good news is that Gomer, Hosea’s wife, did repent. She finally understood how precious her husband’s love was, and she did not want to reject and hurt him anymore. Hosea’s marriage with Gomer was healed and restored. God longed for His relationship with Israel to be restored, too. “There is hope; God wants to heal you,” Hosea said to Israel. But very few listened.

God could not do very much for the people after they rejected the last messages of love that He sent through Amos and Hosea. We can read the books of Amos and Hosea today. Their messages are for us, too. God has given us so many reassurances of His love and care for us, and warnings of what sin will do to us if we choose sin rather

than being under God's protection. Let's thank God for His love, care, and patience towards us!

37. The Last Kings of Israel

**O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help.
I will be thy king: where is any other that may save thee in all thy cities?
and thy judges of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes?
Hosea 13:9-10 (KJV)**

 *2 Kings 14:23-29; 15:8-12; 15:13-31; 17:1-4. | Prophets and Kings Chapter 23*

The last kings of Israel were all wicked. They could have been lights to the world, but they all rejected the God of light. They also rejected the prophets that God sent to help them. They became kings by killing and doing evil. They caused the rest of the people to worship idols and leave God. God finally gave them what they wanted: He had to withdraw His presence from them – and if God’s presence wasn’t with them, His protection wasn’t there, either. And for a while, it didn’t seem that bad; not all the bad things fell on them suddenly, because God withdrew slowly, out of mercy to them.

King Jeroboam II of Israel reigned for forty-one long years, but he was a wicked king. He did not listen to the warnings of prophets Elisha, Hosea or Amos. Amos gave him messages that were especially for him, but he did not hear. He allowed his idolatrous priest to send him away. God helped Jeroboam II win important battles and even sent prophet Jonah to encourage him before one of the battles, but he

was not grateful, and he did not turn to God. He died without ever having given his heart to God.

Jeroboam's son Zechariah became king in his place. He reigned only six months because he was so wicked. How did he die so soon? A man called Shallum killed him and became king in his place. Shallum became king by killing, and he died in the same way. He was only king for one month, and a man called Menahem killed him and became king in his place.

Menahem was a terribly cruel king, and he reigned for ten years. While he was king, the Assyrians came to attack Israel. Menahem charged all the people taxes of silver so that he could pay it all to the king of Assyria. This way, the Assyrians let the Israelites live in their own homes and in their own lands, at least for a while. Menahem should have been grateful to God that he and his people were still allowed to live in Israel, and were not taken captive to other lands. He should have noticed that God was being merciful to them right then, and he could have repented, but he didn't.

When Menahem died, his son Pekahiah became king of Israel. Pekahiah was very evil, and he only reigned for two years. One of his captains, Pekah, killed him and became king in his place. Pekah reigned for twenty years, but all that time he was just as evil as all the kings before him. During the time of Pekah, the Assyrians came in and took several people captive. Did the king repent? Did the Israelites repent? No, they didn't. They could have asked God to help them, but they didn't. They continued worshiping their useless idols.

Pekah also died like several of the kings before him: a man called Hoshea killed him and became king in his place. But Hoshea hardly had any power; Israel was already weak after the Assyrians had taken their captives. Hoshea was evil, and God could no longer protect him

or his kingdom. The Assyrians came and made Hoshea pay taxes to them. But then Hoshea stopped paying them. He also sent a message to the Pharaoh of Egypt and said to him: “Please help me against the Assyrians!” This made the Assyrians very angry. It also made God sad. He longed to help Israel, but the king of Israel had chosen to ask Egypt for help instead! With this final clear rejection from the king of Israel, God had to let the Assyrians do what they wanted. They took King Hoshea and put him in prison, then they captured all of Israel. The Kingdom of Israel had come to a sad end.

The last kings of Israel could have helped to bring the people back to God, but they did the opposite. God had wanted to be the King of Israel, but the people had chosen men instead, and these men had failed them. God still wants to be the King in each of our hearts. He wants to give us His Spirit to guide us constantly and give us peace. Don’t be like the people of Israel, who chose men to be their kings. Don’t be like their kings, who rejected God. Will you let God be your King?

38. Israel is Taken Captive

Israel hath cast off the thing that is good: the enemy shall pursue him.

Hosea 8:3 (KJV)

 *2 Kings 17; 18:9-12 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 23*

The kings of Israel had rejected God. They had refused to listen to His invitations, His counsel and His warnings. They had ignored the prophets that God had sent them, and they had chosen to do their own will. They had preferred to ask for the help of other heathen kings, and of their idols, rather than asking God for help. God finally had to give them what they wanted: He had to withdraw and not intervene in their lives anymore. He watched with a broken heart as the disasters began to fall upon Israel.

Hoshea was the last king of Israel. The Assyrians came and invaded Israel, and for a while they let the Israelites stay in their homes and in their land, as long as King Hoshea agreed to pay taxes each year. But after some time, Hoshea didn't want to pay the Assyrians anymore. He wanted freedom, and instead of asking God for counsel, he sent a message to the Egyptian Pharaoh for help. When the Assyrians found out about this, they were very angry.

Now the Assyrians were not willing to be kind to Israel anymore. The king of Assyria brought his army to Samaria, the capital of Israel, and surrounded it. For three years, Samaria was surrounded by the Assyrian army. This is called a "siege". When a city is sieged, no one can go in or out of the city freely. Food cannot be brought into the city, either. The people in Samaria eventually ran out of food.

Eventually, they even ran out of water. After three years of this siege, Samaria gave in to the Assyrian army. The Assyrians took the people of Samaria away to other places. The Israelites were now captive; they were prisoners and could no longer live in their homes or in their land, and King Hoshea was put in prison.

This is called “the scattering” of Israel; they were scattered all over the Assyrian kingdom. God had warned them that this would happen if they left Him and chose idols. The idols could not protect them; only God could. God’s heart was breaking as He let them have what they had chosen.

The king of Assyria brought people from other nations to live in Samaria and the cities around it, and these people started living there instead of the Israelites. They thought they would be safe in this land, but soon lions came and killed several of the people. God had protected the Israelites from the wild animals that could hurt them, but these new people who had moved in were not interested at all in God nor in His protection, so nothing stopped the lions from attacking them²⁰.

These people spoke to the king of Assyria and said to him, “We don’t know the ways of the God of this land. Now He has sent lions among us to kill us.” Had God sent the lions to hurt these people? No, He hadn’t! But this was what they thought. The king said, “Send one of the captive priests back to that land, so that he can teach them about the God of that land.” Soon one of the priests who had been carried away from Israel was brought back, and he began to teach the people about God and His ways. Now these people had a chance to

²⁰ 2 Kings 17:25 says that the Lord “sent the lions among them”. In the Bible, often when it says that God did something, it means that He permitted it; He did not stop it from happening. He didn’t directly send the lions, but He did not protect the people from them because of their choices.

learn about the God of life. For a time, they respected God, but sadly, they never completely left their idols. Eventually they stopped worshiping God altogether and turned completely to idol worship. How sad that they did not use the opportunity God gave them to come to Him!

God still wanted the Israelites to be lights for Him among the heathen nations. Since they had failed to do this in their own land, as a nation, God allowed them to be scattered across the Assyrian empire. There were a few Israelites who were still faithful to God and who did not worship idols. God would use these few brave, faithful people to share the truth about God and His character among the heathen Assyrians. God could still turn this very sad situation into a blessing for those who were willing to follow and worship Him.

It was not God's plan, nor God's will, for Israel to be taken captive. But He had to give them what they had chosen. They had "cast off what is good", and now their enemies had power over them. How sad that the people had lost their land and the blessings God had longed to give them! Yet there was still hope; God would still work through the few who were faithful to Him.

Israel had "cast off what is good", but we don't need to make the same bad decisions that they did. God is offering us His Spirit – He is offering all that is good; He wants to give us life, peace and a beautiful character like His. Will you accept what God is offering you?

39. Three Good Kings of Judah

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.
Colossians 3:2 (KJV)



*2 Chronicles 25; 26; 27; 2 Kings 14:1-22; 15:1-7, 32-38. | Prophets and Kings
Chapter 25*

The last few kings of Israel were all wicked. But while these kings reigned, the Kingdom of Judah still had some good kings. This is why the Kingdom of Judah was not taken captive together with the kingdom of Israel.

One of these good kings was Amaziah. He was the son of King Joash. King Joash was the little boy who had started off being a good king, but who later turned away from God. When Amaziah became king, he killed the servants who had killed his father, but at least he let their families live, because Moses had written that “the children shall not die because of the sins of their fathers.” Just like his father, Amaziah tried to follow God, but he didn’t do it wholeheartedly.

Before Israel was taken captive by Assyria, Amaziah started forming a huge army, and he wanted men from the kingdom of Israel to join him. He even paid large amounts of silver to Israel for their army. As he was doing this, a prophet came to him and warned him, “Don’t have men from Israel in your army; God is not with Israel. If you do this, you will lose the battle.” Amaziah asked, “What about all

the silver I paid to Israel for these men?” The prophet answered, “God can give you much more than this silver.”

Amaziah believed the prophet. He decided to send the Israelite soldiers home and fight without them. The soldiers should have gone home peacefully, but they didn’t. They were angry because they had hoped to receive plunder from battle, as well as their payment. So while King Amaziah and his army went to fight against Edom, the angry Israelite soldiers attacked several cities of Judah and took plunder from those cities.

God was with Amaziah and helped him win against Edom, but then Amaziah did something terrible: he brought the idols of Edom into Judah, and began to worship them. He should have worshiped God and thanked Him for His protection, but he was ignoring God and worshiping the very idols that had not protected the Edomites! Another prophet came to King Amaziah and asked, “Why are you worshiping these idols? They couldn’t even protect the people of Edom!” Amaziah did not want to listen to the prophet anymore. He threatened to kill him if he continued speaking. The prophet warned, “You will be destroyed because you have not listened to this counsel.” Amaziah’s choices were going to hurt him. If only he had listened to this warning and repented!

Now Amaziah wanted to fight against Israel. He was angry that the Israelite soldiers had attacked his cities. He sent a message to the king of Israel, King Jehoash (Joash) grandson of Jehu. The King of Israel didn’t want to fight, and tried to convince Amaziah not to: “You’ve gained victory over the Edomites. Just enjoy peace at home. Your kingdom might suffer if you fight against us.” But Amaziah insisted, so both the army of Judah and the army of Israel met to fight. God was not with Amaziah this time, and Judah lost terribly.

The king of Israel broke part of the wall of Jerusalem, and his army took many valuable things from the temple and from the king's palace.

After that, Amaziah had a weak kingdom. His people did not trust him anymore. He found out that some of his men wanted to kill him, so he fled to the town of Lachish. But the men found him there and killed him. How different his reign would have been if he had been willing to listen to God!

After Amaziah, his son Uzziah (also called Azariah) became king of Judah. Uzziah was only sixteen years old when he became king. He did what was right. He followed the advice of a prophet called Zechariah (this is not the same Zechariah who wrote the book of the Bible). Because of his righteousness, God was with him when he went to battle against his enemies. Some of the nations around him paid him taxes. He also built strong towers, fortified city walls, dug wells in the desert, had a large number of animals, and formed a huge army. His kingdom was strong.

Sadly, all this strength made King Uzziah proud. One day he decided, "I will worship the Lord, but I will burn incense in the Holy Place myself. Why should only the priests do it?" This was completely against God's instructions; only the priests were allowed to enter the Holy Place; only the priests could burn incense.

The king went into the temple. Priest Azariah, together with eighty other priests, tried to politely but firmly stop the king. "You shouldn't do this; God chose the men from Aaron's family to burn incense. You need to leave this room," they pleaded. But Uzziah refused to leave. He held up a censer in his hand and insisted on burning incense himself. He looked at the priests angrily. Suddenly, the priests noticed that the king had leprosy on his forehead. Quickly,

they sent the king away from the temple. King Uzziah was suddenly humbled. He let them send him away, because he knew that lepers were not allowed in the temple. King Uzziah lived the rest of his life in a separate house, away from people. He never recovered from his leprosy. We do not know whether he asked God for forgiveness and healing. This is another sad ending to a story that could have been so different!

As soon as King Uzziah became a leper, his son Jotham began ruling for him. When Uzziah died, Jotham became the official king of Judah. Jotham was a good king, and he did what was right. He never worshiped idols, but he did not do much to help the people leave their idols and return to God.

King Jotham fixed the walls of Jerusalem that had been broken in battle several years before. He built cities, towers, castles, and even a temple gate. The Ammonites paid him expensive taxes because he beat them in battle. During his reign, Judah enjoyed mostly peace and prosperity. King Jotham ended his reign well. He is one of the few kings who was faithful to God his whole life.

Amaziah, Uzziah and Jotham were mostly good kings – or at least, not completely evil kings. These kings helped Judah to keep God’s protection. Yet how much more could God have done for Judah if each of these kings had followed God completely? Amaziah started off well, but turned to idols later. Uzziah worshiped God and was not an idol worshiper, but his pride turned him into a leper. Only Jotham was faithful his whole life. Why did some of these kings get distracted by things that turned them away from God? They did not “set their affections” on the things of heaven, but rather, focused on earthly things. This is what drove them away from God during the last part of their lives.

Do you wish to be close to God your whole life? Set your affections, or your thoughts, on the things of heaven. Don't focus on earthly things that pull us away from God. Ask Him to fill your mind with His words and His truth, so that you will not be distracted by worthless, earthly things.

40. God Calls Isaiah

**And he laid it [the hot coal] upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thy iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.
Isaiah 6:7 (KJV)**



Isaiah 6 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 25, 26

During the reign of King Uzziah of Judah, God chose a man called Isaiah to be His prophet. Isaiah came from the royal family of Judah. Would the kings of Judah, and the people of Judah, listen to his message? While Hosea and Amos were warning Israel of their danger, Isaiah was doing the same thing in Judah.

A few years after Isaiah began giving his messages, the kingdom of Israel ended. The Assyrians came to Samaria, the capital of Israel, took the ten tribes captive and scattered them all over the Assyrian kingdom. If the people of Judah didn't turn to God soon, the same thing was going to happen to them, too. Isaiah warned and warned them. With every warning, he also reminded them how much God loved them and longed to save them.

Isaiah was worried about the people. They were far from God, and had no interest in learning about Him. They were mean and selfish and hurt others. When God called him, he wondered, "Should I tell them? Will they listen? Won't they just reject what I tell them?"

As Isaiah was thinking this, he was standing at the gate of the temple. Suddenly, he saw a vision: God's Son was sitting on a throne in the Most Holy Place, high and lifted up. The train of His glory filled

the temple. Above the throne he saw seraphim angels. Each of these angels had six wings: one set of wings covered their faces, another set of wings covered their feet, and with the last set of wings, they could fly. They cried out, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the earth is full of His glory!” Why did they cry out the word “holy” three times? Because in the ancient Hebrew language, when someone repeated a word like “holy” three times, it meant “really, really holy”. The angels were saying that God is the holiest of all. And because His Son was on the throne in the vision, God’s Son is just as holy as His Father.

As they sung their praises, the doorposts shook, and the temple was filled with smoke. When Isaiah saw this, he felt his sinfulness more deeply than ever before. Here he was, looking at the holy Son of God, while he was so sinful. He cried out, “Oh, no! I will be destroyed, because every word I say is sinful, and I live among people who say sinful things, and now my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.”

As soon as he said this, one of the seraphim flew to him to comfort him. The seraph used tongs to pick up a hot coal from the altar. Then he put the hot coal on Isaiah’s mouth, and said, “This has touched your lips. Your sin is taken away from you; you are forgiven.”

Then Isaiah heard the Lord asking, “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” Instantly, Isaiah answered, “Here I am; send me.”

The seraph told him that most of the people would reject his message, but he should preach it anyway. The people would be taken captive, and Judah and its cities would be destroyed, because they were going to reject God’s warnings. This sounded terrible! But God also let Isaiah know that there was hope. The angel said, “A remnant will return; a few of the people will eventually come back.” Isaiah’s

message was important because it would at least help those few people who were still willing to worship God and hear His words.

Isaiah was now ready to share the message that God was giving him. He was sure that God loved him and forgave him, and that He is merciful and compassionate to all people. After this vision, Isaiah was certain that God would give him His Spirit to give His message to the people. This vision gave him the strength to be a prophet for sixty years. During these sixty years, most people rejected what he had to say. But he said it anyway, because God was with him.

“God can heal your sinful heart!” he would tell the people, “He wants to free you from sin! You can’t heal yourself, but He can and He wants to! He wants to help you even though you don’t deserve it!”

Even though most of the people rejected his message, there were a few who heard and accepted it. These few people were strengthened and encouraged. When Judah was taken captive, these few faithful people were able to continue worshiping God and sharing His truth in the heathen countries where they were taken.

We are sinful, but God wants to heal us. This healing will come if we admit our sinfulness and accept God’s forgiveness. He cannot heal us if we don’t want Him to. God wants to comfort us and use us for His work, so we can help others get to know Him, too. When God asks, “Who shall I send?” will you answer, “Here I am, send me”?

41. The Vineyard and the Knowledge of the Lord

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the seas.

Isaiah 11:9 (KJV)



Isaiah 5; 4:2; 11; 53; 58

God gave Isaiah beautiful messages for His people. One of these was the poem of the vineyard and the wild grapes. In this poem, God said to Isaiah, “My Son had a vineyard in a fruitful hill. He prepared the soil, planted the best vines, and built a fence around it to protect it. He also built a tower and a winepress there, so He could be ready when the grapes ripened. The vineyard should have produced the sweetest, juiciest grapes! But in spite of all His love and care, the vineyard produced wild grapes – grapes that could not be eaten.”

What a big disappointment! After all that care, how could the vineyard produce such bad fruit? Then God said, “Now the fence that protected the vineyard will be taken away, and wild animals will eat the vines and trample on them. No one will care for these plants anymore, so thorns will grow over them. Not even rain will fall upon the vineyard anymore!”

Isaiah explained, “The vineyard is Israel and Judah. God looked for good fruit there, He looked for righteousness, but He found

wickedness instead.” Now, because of Israel and Judah’s wickedness, the land would soon be empty.

Why did Israel and Judah produce such bad fruit, such wickedness? Because they were not connected to God’s Son. Isaiah explained, “God’s Son is the Branch of Jesse and the Root of Jesse.” Jesse was King David’s father, and God’s Son would be born from David’s family. God’s Son is like a perfect root, a perfect branch, and if we are connected to Him, we will produce good fruit. If we are not connected, we will produce sour grapes.

What is the fruit, or the character of Jesus, like? It is completely selfless and focused on doing good to others. Isaiah said, “God’s Son will come to earth and suffer for us. Men will reject Him and hate Him, but He will still carry our sins and our sadness. He will do this so that we can be healed. He will die like a criminal even though He will never be violent, and He will always tell the truth.” This is the character of Jesus, and the gentle character that He wants to give to us, His followers, so that we will show love and kindness to others even when they are mistreating us.

How different the character of Jesus is from the leaders of Israel! Isaiah wrote sadly that the leaders were selfish and untruthful. They ignored God’s ways. Those who were religious didn’t care about God at all; they only cared about looking good in front of others. They fasted (went without food for long periods of time) as if that would make them holy, but Isaiah said, “When you fast, you only please yourself. You still treat your servants badly. You fight with others during your fast. But the true fast that God wants is for you to live without selfishness; to humble yourself, to give food, clothes and shelter to those who need it, then God will heal you, guide you and protect you. You will be like a light in the darkness.” Isaiah also said,

“Respect the Sabbath and focus on God; He will reward you.” If only the people followed this advice! They would have had a close relationship with God and found so much peace!

Knowing God deeply is everything. It is life! God’s presence is what will make heaven and the new earth such a wonderful place. Isaiah wrote: “The wolf and the lamb will live together. The leopard will lie down with the baby goat, and so will a calf with a young lion. And a little child will lead them. Small children will play with snakes, and it won’t be dangerous!” Isaiah wrote with wonder: “They will not hurt or destroy at all, because the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord.”

These are just a few of the beautiful messages that Isaiah shared with God’s people. We can find many more in his book. God shared these messages because He longed for His people to know Him, so that the earth could be “filled with the knowledge of the Lord.” What happens when people know God deeply? They produce the fruit of good character, and they keep His laws because they love Him and His ways. What a wonderful place the new earth will be, filled with people who know the Lord and love Him!

Do you want to know God? Ask Him to give you more of His knowledge, and for His Spirit to produce good fruit in you.

42. King Ahaz and His Idols

But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. Psalm 86:15 (KJV)



2 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 28, Isaiah 7, 8. | Prophets and Kings chapter 27

King Ahaz was one of the most wicked kings that Judah ever had. How could this be? His father, King Jotham, had been a good king, faithful to God. His son Hezekiah, who became king after him, was also a wonderful, faithful king. But Ahaz was not.

Ahaz became king when he was twenty years old. From the beginning of his reign, he worshiped idols and turned away from God. He was so deeply into idol worship that he even did one of the most horrible things that were ever done in heathen worship: he burnt some of his own children as offerings to his idols! God had asked His people to never, ever do such a terrible thing. He had told them that the Canaanites burnt their children as sacrifices, and this was one of the reasons why they were being driven away from their land. What made this king want to do such a horrible thing?

King Ahaz did these terrible things because he was desperate. He noticed that his kingdom was weak, and the nations around him were attacking him. And where did he think he could find protection? From heathen idols! How could he think this way? His nation had the

God of Heaven, yet he ignored Him. God kept trying to reach King Ahaz throughout his life, but this stubborn king refused God's help.

One time, two nations attacked Judah, one after the other. First the Syrians attacked and took captives. Then King Pekah, one of the last kings of Israel, attacked Judah, and he took 200,000 captives. Even little children were taken captive! How could the Israelites do this to Judah?

As the Israelite soldiers were bringing their captives to Samaria, a prophet called Oded came and said to the king of Israel, "God delivered Judah into your hands because of their sins. Now you have all these captives and you're planning to make them your slaves. But don't forget that *you* have also sinned against God. It would be better if you let these people return home. God does not approve of you keeping them."

Four of the leaders of Israel were listening carefully to the prophet, and they knew that he was right. "Don't keep these captives," they urged the king, "We have already sinned against God; let's not sin even more." They prepared to help all the captives return home: they fed them and made sure they all had clothes and shoes to wear. Then they set them free. The Israelites even noticed that some of the people were weak, so they gave these people donkeys to ride home on. How wonderful that the captives from Judah were sent home! King Ahaz should have seen this as an act of mercy from God, but he didn't seem to notice it. He continued worshiping his idols.

Soon the kingdom of Judah was attacked again – this time by the Edomites and Philistines. King Ahaz could have asked God for help, but instead he asked his enemy, the king of Assyria, to help him. He sent expensive gifts to him as payment. The king of Assyria only

helped Judah a little bit, then he stopped helping. Yet he still expected King Ahaz to send him expensive payments.

Ahaz and his kingdom were in big danger now. Syria and Israel were angry because he had asked Assyria for help. Since they were enemies with Assyria, now they were enemies with King Ahaz, too.

Ahaz did not think of asking God for help, but God offered it anyway. He sent Prophet Isaiah and his son Shear-Jashub to speak to him. “Don’t be afraid of Syria and Israel! Don’t depend on Assyria for help,” Isaiah urged. But King Ahaz didn’t say anything. He wanted to ignore what Isaiah was saying.

Isaiah insisted, “Ask God for a sign! If God fulfills this sign, will you trust Him?” King Ahaz didn’t want to trust God. Stubbornly, he said, “I will not ask; I will not tempt God.” How could it be that he didn’t want to even *try* to trust God? But even after this, God did not give up on Ahaz. He sent a message through Isaiah, saying, “Here’s a sign: A virgin woman will have a son. This son will choose good, and reject evil. Also, before this child learns how to refuse evil and choose the good, the kings of Syria and Israel, who are disturbing you, will not exist anymore.”

God was telling King Ahaz, “My Son Jesus will be born, and He will choose what is right. Even if you refuse to work with me now, my Son will still come, and there will still be salvation for those who accept it.” He was also promising to help him against his enemies. Would King Ahaz accept God’s offer?

Then God sent one more sign through Isaiah. He said that Isaiah’s wife would soon have a baby boy. “Before this little boy learns to say ‘Father’ or ‘Mother’, the king of Assyria will take the riches of Syria and Israel.” When Isaiah’s little boy was born,

everyone knew that the signs that God had given would come true. Would King Ahaz believe now? Would he turn to God?

No, King Ahaz did not. Instead, he started worshiping another idol - one from Syria. Syria had just lost a big battle against Assyria, so King Ahaz knew that this idol hadn't kept Syria safe. Why did he think that it would keep Judah safe? Wouldn't God protect him better?

Then things got even worse: King Ahaz still wanted to pay Assyria for protection, so he cut up some of the most valuable vessels of the temple and gave the metals to the king of Assyria. Then he shut the gate of the temple so no one could worship there. He built altars and shrines all over his kingdom for the worship of idols. Ahaz completely rejected God and wanted nothing to do with Him.

There was nothing else that God could do for him after that. King Ahaz lived for a little longer, then died. The people of Judah didn't even bury him in the special place where kings were buried, because he had been such a bad king.

How patiently God had tried to reach King Ahaz all his life! He offered help and even gave signs to help him believe. He was merciful. But none of this softened the heart of this wicked king. God is just as loving, patient and merciful with each of us. Will you accept His love and care for you? Will you let Him guide you and be your God?

43. Prophet Micah

Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me. Micah 7:7 (KJV)



At around the same time that God called Isaiah, He also called a man called Micah. While Isaiah came from the royal family, Micah came from a family in the countryside, near a town called Moresheth. Even though Micah and Isaiah came from very different families, God used them both to do an important work for their people.

Micah began to warn the people that the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah were in danger. “Assyria will attack! They will take captives from Israel!” he warned. He also wrote: “Babylon will come to Jerusalem, too, and cause even more harm.” Why would all of this happen? Micah explained that Israel and Judah had turned away from God. The leaders treated their people unfairly and became rich by cheating on poor people. Micah said, “The leaders are so unfair, that it’s as if they are eating the people!” The priests taught whatever the people liked to hear, even if it wasn’t true. The prophets said whatever would bring them money, even if it was all lies. “God is with us,” said the false prophets. But this was not true. God was withdrawing His protection from Israel, because the leaders and the people had rejected God’s laws.

God pleaded with the people, “What wrong have I done to you? I took you out of Egypt and freed you from slavery.” God had only

done good things for them, but they had chosen to leave Him and ignore His voice. The people had even begun to think, “God asks too much from me. How many sheep should I offer Him? How much oil is enough? Should I sacrifice my own children? Does God want that?” God had never asked for any of that. Micah wrote: “God asks you to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him.” If we stay close to God, He will do the rest for us. He is not waiting for us to give expensive offerings to deserve His love.

Micah said, “God will remove your horses, chariots, strongholds, and any witchcraft and idols.” All these things were keeping the people away from God. When Assyria and Babylon attacked them, these things would be taken away. Only God would remain with them, if they accepted Him.

Again, Micah looked at what was happening in Israel and Judah, and he wrote sadly: “There is so much evil that it is as if all the fruits have been gathered, and there is nothing left in the fields. There are no good people left in the land.” In fact, the situation was so bad that Micah wrote: “No one can trust their friends, children disrespect their parents, and family members become enemies.” Israel and Judah’s only hope was in God. Would they turn to Him?

God still wanted to bless Israel and Judah. Micah wrote that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, a small town in Judah. God was still willing to send His Son to them. Would they realize how much He loved them? Micah insisted, “God forgives, He delights in mercy. He will send all our sins into the depths of the sea.” What beautiful truths Micah wrote about God’s character!

What Micah wrote about Israel and Judah was not pleasant. But when God gives warnings, He also offers hope and comfort. Micah wrote God’s beautiful promise: “I will gather my people, like a

shepherd gathers his sheep. I will bring them to good pastures and become their king again.” Micah also said, “Even though the temple will end up destroyed, one day God will rebuild it. People from many nations will come to the temple and ask God to teach them His ways, and they will live in peace and be prosperous.” Micah wrote that Jerusalem would be rebuilt after the captivity. But he also wrote about an even better moment: the Second Coming of Jesus and the kingdom He will establish. God’s children from all nations will then be gathered, and we will live in peace, with Jesus as our King.

Micah’s message wasn’t in vain. King Hezekiah (son of King Ahaz) paid attention to Micah’s prophecies and did all he could to help Judah return to God. Because the king listened to Micah, God was able to protect Judah for a little bit longer. If only all the kings had respected God’s prophets, then Jerusalem would never have been destroyed!

What beautiful promises God gives us through Micah! They are just as encouraging to us now, just before the Second Coming, as they were to the people of Judah in those days. Are you willing to “look unto the Lord”? Do you believe that “He will hear you”? Let Him know this today.

44. The Temple Is Reopened

He [Hezekiah] trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord had commanded Moses. 2 Kings 18:5-6 (KJV)



2 Kings 18:1-8; 2 Chronicles 29, 30, 31. | Prophets and Kings Chapter 28

After wicked King Ahaz died, his son Hezekiah, who was twenty-five years old, became king of Judah. Hezekiah was completely different from his father; he loved God and followed Him with his whole heart.

Hezekiah knew that his kingdom was weak. Some of his people had already been taken captive. He wanted to bring the people back to God. “I will open the temple that my father shut down,” he decided. He repaired the broken doors. He brought in the priests and Levites, and said to them, “Sanctify yourselves, and purify this temple. Our fathers did what was wrong. They closed up the temple, and no one could come and worship God here. And now look at all the terrible things that are happening to Israel and Judah! I would like to make a covenant with the Lord. Priests and Levites, God has chosen you to do this work today.”

The priests and Levites obeyed the king. They cleaned up the temple. They even found idols that King Ahaz had left there, and they

got rid of them. They found all the utensils and put them where they belonged. When the temple was ready, they went and told the king.

The next day, King Hezekiah rose up early and went to the temple with the rulers of the city. They offered sacrifices to ask God to forgive Judah, then they offered sacrifices for Israel, even though none of the leaders of Israel were there with them. Then the temple musicians played and sang praises to God. The music continued, and trumpets sounded, while the animals were being offered on the altar.

The people watched silently as all of this was happening. When this was finished, the king and everyone with him bowed down and worshiped. Then King Hezekiah invited the people to bring their offerings and sacrifices. The people were overjoyed! Suddenly, thousands of people began to bring in their sacrifices. There were so many of them, that there weren't enough priests to do all the work! You see, some of the priests had not sanctified themselves, so they could not help with the sacrifices. Now these priests were ashamed because the Levites who had sanctified themselves properly had to come in and help in their place.

Hezekiah was full of joy. His father, Ahaz, had shut the temple, but now the temple was open again, and the people could worship the true God once more. He decided to organize a huge Passover feast to celebrate, and he invited everyone in his kingdom to come. But he didn't stop there – he also sent invitations to all the ten tribes of Israel. He didn't want to leave them out, even though he was not their king.

The messengers traveled all over Judah and Israel, sharing King Hezekiah's invitation to come and celebrate the Passover. The people of Judah accepted this plan, but sadly, most of Israel made fun of the messengers and rejected Hezekiah's invitation. There were just a few

from Israel who did accept, and they joyfully made the journey to Jerusalem in time for the feast.

The Passover was celebrated one month later than the usual date because there was so much to do to prepare. But God accepted this celebration, and the people joined in with much joy. On Passover day, even more of the Priests and Levites came and sanctified themselves. These priests and Levites were ashamed because they had not taken King Hezekiah seriously before, but now they wanted to join in the celebration and help. Their help was needed, because there were so many people coming in and bringing their offerings and sacrifices to God!

Several of the people who came from Israel didn't even know how to celebrate properly. They didn't understand that they had to purify themselves before eating the Passover lamb or the unleavened bread. The Levites helped these people as much as they could, and King Hezekiah prayed, "Lord, please forgive them. They are seeking you. They didn't know any better." God heard Hezekiah's prayer and accepted each of the worshipers.

For seven days, the people enjoyed a wonderful feast. When the seven days of the feast were over, the people didn't want to leave. "Let's keep this feast for seven more days!" they all decided. Hezekiah was happy for this decision. He donated one thousand bullocks and ten thousand sheep so that everyone, even the poorest of the people, would have the animals they needed for their sacrifices. The last time the people had celebrated such a big Passover had been when King Solomon was alive.

After the Passover, King Hezekiah and those who were with him did even more to bring the people to God. They broke all the idols, shrines and altars in his kingdom. They even broke down the bronze

serpent that Moses had made in the desert, because sadly, the people had begun to worship this snake instead of God! After this, everyone returned home in peace.

Now that the people had returned to God, they began to bring their tithes into the temple. For so long, the priests and Levites had not received tithes. Now there was so much coming in, that they could not use it all, and it started to pile up in the temple. King Hezekiah noticed this, and he ordered, “Prepare chambers in the Temple for storing the tithes.” Soon, all the tithes were organized neatly, ready to be used when needed.

King Hezekiah had done his best to bring the people back to God. God could now begin to bless the kingdom of Judah again. Hezekiah’s kingdom became stronger after he restored the temple and he and his people began worshiping God again. God longs for each of us to come to Him and trust Him just like Hezekiah did. Will you come to Him today? He is waiting to bless you and help you.

45. The Clock Turned Back

Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful.

Psalm 116:5 (KJV)



2 Kings 20; 2 Chronicles 32:24-33; Isaiah 38, 39 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 29

King Hezekiah was a good king. He had been faithful to God all his life, and had brought the people of Judah back to God. One day, King Hezekiah got sick. He called doctors to help him, but none of them could heal him. Prophet Isaiah then came to see him. He said to Hezekiah, “The Lord says you should set all your things in order, because soon you will die.”

King Hezekiah didn’t want to die. He prayed and begged God to let him live longer. “I have followed you all my life and done what is right,” he said, as he cried and cried to God. Isaiah left the king’s presence and began walking away. Just as he reached the middle court, God said to Isaiah, “Turn back and speak to the king again.” God had a new message for Hezekiah, and Isaiah gladly shared it: “God has heard your prayers and seen your tears. He will heal you, and you will live for fifteen more years.” God also let him know how to treat his illness: “Place a lump of figs on your diseased part.”

King Hezekiah asked, “What will be the sign that God will heal me?” Hezekiah shouldn’t have needed a sign. Weren’t Isaiah’s words enough? Yet God was patient and compassionate with King Hezekiah. Isaiah responded, “You can choose: the shadow on the sundial will

either move forward ten degrees, or it will move backwards ten degrees.” Hezekiah thought, “It would be much harder for the shadow to move back than to move forward. I will ask for it to move back.” God kindly did this miracle for King Hezekiah, to give him the assurance that he would get better.

Hezekiah was right: it was impossible for the shadow on a sundial to move back. No one had ever seen this happen. It could only happen if God did it. That day, the shadows on all the sundials moved back ten degrees. Some wise men in Babylon noticed this. “How did this happen?” they asked. Soon they heard, “It’s because King Hezekiah from Judah was sick. His God promised that He would heal him. As a sign, He made the shadow go back ten degrees.” The Babylonians were amazed. Only a great and powerful God could do such a thing!

The king of Babylon heard the whole story. He decided to send some of his officers to give King Hezekiah a gift and a letter. “I want to congratulate him for getting well again. Also, please find out more about this God that can do such wonders,” he commanded.

What a wonderful opportunity this was for King Hezekiah to share the truth about God with the Babylonian officers! But sadly, he didn’t do this. Instead of telling them about the wonderful God that had healed him and done a miracle by turning back the sun, he began to show them how rich he was, and what a rich kingdom he had. Hezekiah had all these riches because God had blessed him, so he should have praised God in front of his visitors. Instead, he took them to his treasure room and showed them all his precious things, gold, silver, spices, ointment, armor and expensive things.

When the Babylonian visitors left Judah and returned home, they weren’t thinking about the wonderful God that Judah had. They were

thinking, “All those riches! Our king needs to know about them. Those riches should belong to Babylon!” They even knew exactly where all these precious things were kept. What a big mistake Hezekiah had made!

Prophet Isaiah came to King Hezekiah and said, “This was not good. Now these men will tell their king about the treasures in Jerusalem. They will plan to come and get them. They will take all these treasures, and your children, to Babylon.”

King Hezekiah knew that Isaiah was right. He realized God had let this happen to show him the pride that was in his heart, and the danger he was in. He accepted what Isaiah told him, and he repented and humbled himself. Because of that, God didn’t let those bad things happen to Judah while he was still alive.

God had done wonderful things for Hezekiah. In His love and mercy, He had healed him and given him more years of life. Hezekiah should have focused on that rather than on showing off his riches. What has God done for you? Do you think about it? Do you tell others what God has done for you? If we focus on God and on His kindness towards us, and stop focusing on ourselves, others will get to know Him. Ask God to help you focus on Him and His goodness towards you.

46. Saved from Assyria

Now therefore, our Lord God, I [Hezekiah] beseech thee, save thou us out of his [Assyria's] hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the Lord God, even thou only. 2 Kings 19:19 (KJV)



2 Kings 18:13-37; 19; 2 Chronicles 32:1-23; Isaiah 10:5-34; 36; 37. | Prophets and Kings Chapter 30

King Hezekiah was worried. The Assyrian army was causing a lot of trouble to his kingdom! “Israel has already been taken captive by them,” thought King Hezekiah, “And now, the Assyrians have captured some of the fenced cities of Judah! I need to get my cities back!”

To get his cities back, King Hezekiah agreed to pay the king of Assyria. He had to remove gold from the pillars and doors of the temple just so he could gather enough for the payment! For some time, this seemed to work; the Assyrians left Judah alone.

But peace with the Assyrians didn't last forever. Do you remember that King Hezekiah got sick, and God promised to heal him and gave him a sign? Well, after Hezekiah was healed, the Assyrian army returned and surrounded Jerusalem.

This time, King Hezekiah didn't look for a way to pay the Assyrians; he decided to trust God fully. He encouraged his people, and said, “Don't be afraid; God is with us and He will fight our battles!”

Hezekiah had done all he could to protect Jerusalem. He'd built a higher and thicker wall; he'd stored food, water and plenty of

weapons and shields. He had even cut out the sources of water that were outside the city, to make it harder for the Assyrian soldiers to find water. There wasn't anything more that Hezekiah could do, except trust in God's protection. He was sure that, even though the Kingdom of Israel had already disappeared, God would still protect the Kingdom of Judah.

King Hezekiah's officers went outside the gate to speak with the Assyrian officers. The Assyrians began to say terrible things: "Surrender now! Your God can't save you. Look at all the other nations – their gods didn't save them, either! And look at what happened to Samaria! Didn't Samaria worship the same God as you?" They said terrible things about Jehovah, Judah's God. They had no respect for Him at all. How sad this was! Israel and Judah had been unfaithful to God for so long, that by now none of the heathen nations respected Him.

The Assyrian officials said all these things loudly, and in Hebrew. King Hezekiah's men felt bad. They knew that the Hebrew soldiers that stood on the wall could hear the terrible things that the Assyrians were saying, and they would be discouraged. They didn't want the people of Judah to lose their faith in God.

"Please, sirs," they begged the Assyrian officers, "let's continue this conversation in the Syrian language. We don't want the guards on the walls to hear." But the Assyrians didn't care; they wanted the people of Jerusalem to lose faith and be afraid. They continued speaking in Hebrew, even louder than before, "Don't listen to your king when he tells you that your God can save you; he's lying. Not even Samaria was delivered, and they worshiped the same God as you! The Assyrians are stronger than any nation!"

None of the Jews on the wall said anything; King Hezekiah had commanded them not to answer the Assyrians. But they felt terrible. How could the Assyrians say such bad things about their God? The Jewish officers were so upset that they tore their clothes. King Hezekiah took off his rich clothes and put on sackcloth instead. Then he went to the temple, and he asked Prophet Isaiah to meet him there and pray with him.

Both Isaiah and King Hezekiah cried and prayed to God. Then Isaiah told the king, “God says, don’t be afraid of what the officers of Assyria said against me. Their king will return to his own country, and He will later be killed by the sword in his own land.”

Then a letter arrived from the king of Assyria. In the letter, this king repeated the same terrible things about God that his officers had said. “Your God won’t deliver you,” he mocked. When Hezekiah read the letter, he decided to trust in God. He returned to the temple and spread out the letter, to show it to God. “Please help us, Lord,” he prayed, “The gods that the Assyrians destroyed were not real gods; they were just idols of wood and stone that men created. Please save us, Lord, so that all the nations can know that you still live and reign, and that you are the only God!”

Isaiah came and said to the king, “God has heard your prayer. Now tell the king of Assyria, ‘You have spoken against the Lord, and you want to ruin the land of His people. The Lord will put a hook on your nose and a bridle in your lips, and you will return where you came from.’” Hooks and bridles were used on animals to drive them; these animals could not choose where to go. The same would happen to the king of Assyria; he could not just do whatever he wanted; God was in control.

Isaiah also said to King Hezekiah, “The Assyrians have already ruined a lot of the land of Judah. But you will be able to eat for two years from crops that will grow by themselves. By the third year, you will be able to grow your own crops again. And Jerusalem will be safe; the Assyrians will return home.”

That night, 185,000 Assyrian soldiers died in their camp. How did this happen? The Bible says that the angel of God “went out” of the camp. The Bible also says that the angel “smote” the Assyrian army. We know that God’s angels don’t kill; they want to protect us! But this time, the angel had to leave the Assyrian camp, and no longer protected them. Without this protection, something happened that killed all these soldiers²¹. The king of Assyria was on his way to Jerusalem to fight, but when he found out that 185,000 of his men had died, he returned home in shame and fear. A short time later, his own sons killed him while he was worshiping one of his idols! His idols did not protect him as much as he had boasted, after all.

Hezekiah’s prayer had been answered! Jerusalem was safe again! The people in Jerusalem rejoiced and thanked God. They gathered at the temple to worship and praise Him for saving them. Now all the nations around Judah were sure that God was powerful and that it was not wise to speak badly about Him. God had been glorified because of the faith of the people of Jerusalem. Would you like to have this faith that helps others to see how wonderful God is? Ask God for this faith. Ask God for Him to be glorified in your life.

²¹ Flavius Josephus was a Jewish man who lived during the time of the Apostles. He is not one of the authors of the Bible, but he carefully wrote the history of the Jewish people. He writes that these Assyrian soldiers were killed by a plague. The Bible doesn’t tell us this, but it is a possibility that, because the soldiers were unprotected, they caught a plague and died.

47. Two Different Leaders

A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit. Proverbs 29:23 (KJV)

 *Isaiah 22:15-25; 2 Kings 18:17-37*

The Assyrian army had already conquered Israel, then they had tried to conquer Jerusalem. Thankfully, King Hezekiah had turned to God for help, and God saved Judah from being conquered by the Assyrians.

All this time, Isaiah had been warning the leaders about their danger. Most of the leaders of Judah were selfish and cared only about getting rich. It didn't matter to them how they got rich; they did all they could to get whatever they wanted. They were cruel and unfair to those who worked for them, and many of the poor became even poorer during that time.

God gave Isaiah a special message about two of the officers of Judah. These men were Shebna and Eliakim, and both of them worked in the palace of King Hezekiah. These were the men who spoke with the Assyrian officers during the time that the Assyrian army surrounded Jerusalem²².

Shebna was the scribe for King Hezekiah and Eliakim was the palace administrator. They were the ones who heard the Assyrian officers saying terrible things about God. They felt so sad and upset when they heard the Assyrian officers, that they tore their clothes and went to tell King Hezekiah what the Assyrians had said.

²² See the previous story.

It was also Shebna and Eliakim who had begged the Assyrians, “Please don’t speak these things in Hebrew! We don’t want our people to hear this!” They did all they could to avoid worrying the people inside the city. They helped to keep calm and order in Jerusalem when everyone was worried and uncertain.

But even though these two men worked together, one of them was not right with God. God sent him a message through Isaiah, warning him of the danger he was in.

The man in danger was Shebna. He had an important position in the kingdom of Judah. He was the palace treasurer and scribe, one of the most respected leaders. But this honor wasn’t enough for him; he wanted more. The Bible doesn’t tell us anything about his parents, so he probably came from a family that wasn’t well known in Judah. He wanted that to change. He wanted his name to be well known, and for people to remember him as a rich and important man.

When Shebna was in charge of King Hezekiah’s palace, the kingdom of Judah was in terrible danger. Shebna should have been thinking about how to help the people and protect the kingdom. But instead, he was thinking about how to look wealthy and important. He decided to buy a tomb for himself and his family. In those days, tombs were caves with huge stones as doors. Rich people would pay to have their tombs carved out of rocky mountainsides. These rocky tombs were expensive because it was such hard work to carve them. Shebna’s family probably did not have a tomb like this, so he wanted to make sure that he owned one. He even carved a sign to place on the door of the tomb, so that everyone who passed by would know that Shebna owned it.

By making this tomb, Shebna was showing that he was proud and selfish. He cared more about making himself look good than about the

needs of the people. Instead of looking to God for help and for wisdom, he looked to his wealth to feel better. Instead of thinking of his kingdom and how he could help his people, he thought of how to make his own life better.

Isaiah told Shebna, “You will end up being taken captive. Also, you will not be the palace treasurer anymore. Eliakim will take your place. Eliakim will become like a father to the people. They will be able to depend on him.” Right then, the people of Judah needed a leader who was willing to be like a father to them, guiding and protecting them. Shebna had not been doing this.

We don’t know how Shebna reacted when Isaiah gave him this message from God. Most probably, he did not repent, because the Bible doesn’t tell us about it. How different could things have been if he had decided to ask for forgiveness, and had changed his ways? How many people could have been blessed by him if he had stopped being prideful and selfish? The people would have loved and remembered him!

We don’t know when Eliakim replaced Shebna, or how Shebna stopped working at the palace. We don’t know when Shebna was taken captive, or if his family ever used the expensive tomb that he bought. We do know that God tried to warn Shebna of his danger, to help him. We also know that Judah needed leaders who could be humble and trustworthy. Shebna could have been among those faithful leaders, but he chose his pride instead.

Pride keeps us away from God. Proud people cannot be used by God for His work, because they are not willing to hear His voice and follow His instructions. God had big plans for both Shebna and Eliakim, but only one of these men was willing to be humble enough to hear Him and be used by Him. God has big plans for you, too. He

wants to work through you. Are you willing to be used by Him? Ask Him to help you to not be prideful, but to depend on Him always.

48. The Most Wicked King of Judah

**Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity,
and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage?
He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy.
He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities.
You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.
Micah 7:18-19 (NKJV)**



2 Kings 21:1-18; 2 Chronicles 33:1-20 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 32

King Hezekiah had been a good, faithful king, even though his father, Ahaz, had been a terribly wicked king before him. We could say that Ahaz was one of the most evil kings of Judah, so it was comforting when his son, Hezekiah, turned out to be a good king. When Hezekiah died, his son Manasseh became the next king. Do you think Manasseh did what was right, or did he do what was evil? Sadly, Manasseh turned out to be a wicked king. In fact, he was the most wicked king that Judah ever had. He could have followed his father's example and done what was right, but instead, he chose to do just the opposite.

Manasseh began to reign, together with his father, when he was only twelve years old. For around ten years, he reigned together with his father. This should have helped him become a good king, but instead, after his father died, Manasseh began to undo all the good things that his father had done. He rebuilt the shrines and high places

that Hezekiah had destroyed, and he brought in idols. He even put heathen idols right inside the temple and built altars for them! He also did the most terrible thing an idol worshiper could do: he passed his own children through the fire – he offered his own child to be burned as an offering to an idol! And as Manasseh did these things, he led the people of Judah into doing the same thing. He led Judah so deeply into idol worship, that the Bible says that they were doing “worse than the heathen” – even worse than the Canaanite nations that had been destroyed when the Israelites came into the land.

There were people who were worried when they saw what their king was doing. They appealed to him to stop, and to turn back to God. They warned him that Judah would be in danger. Isaiah was one of those people. The king did not want to hear any of them, so he had them killed, even Prophet Isaiah. Many good and innocent people died because King Manasseh did not want to hear them speaking against what he was doing.

God warned Manasseh of his danger, but Manasseh would not hear. Finally, God had to let him make his own choices. Manasseh was not protected by God anymore, and one day, the Assyrians came and took him captive to Babylon.

Now Manasseh was a prisoner in a faraway land. He knew that God had tried to warn him about this. He realized that he had made a huge mistake. He humbled himself and began to pray to God. He repented and asked God to forgive him. God heard his prayers, and even though Manasseh had done so many terrible things, God forgave him. He even made it possible for Manasseh to return to Jerusalem and become king again. God is so kind, loving and patient that He accepted the repentance of the most wicked king of Judah. He accepts our repentance, too.

Now that Manasseh was back in Jerusalem, there was a big change. He worshiped God only. He fixed the city walls that the Assyrians had broken. He removed all the idols and heathen altars from the temple and from Jerusalem, and started the temple services again, so that the people could worship God. Sadly, much damage had been done already, and not everyone returned to God. So many years of idol worship had ruined the kingdom. God would be able to save each person who chose to follow Him, but there was very little He could do to save the kingdom of Judah. It was only a matter of time before Judah would be taken captive.

God loved the people of Judah. He loved King Manasseh. He did all He could to reach them. Those who turned to Him and repented were forgiven. Even King Manasseh, the most wicked king of Judah, was forgiven. How comforting it is to know that God is waiting and willing to receive us and forgive us, no matter what we have done! He is longing to heal us and help us. Will you come to Him?

49. King Josiah Hears the Scriptures

**My son, attend to my words;
incline thine ear unto my sayings.
Let them not depart from thine eyes;
keep them in the midst of thine heart.
Proverbs 4:20-21 (KJV)**



*2 Kings 21:19-26; 22; 2 Chronicles 33:21-25; 34:1-28. | Prophets and Kings
Chapter 32, 33*

The kingdom of Israel no longer existed; they had been taken captive to different parts of Assyria. Now, only the kingdom of Judah was left. Some of the kings of Judah had been good, but others had been evil. If Judah didn't turn to God completely, it would be in danger. God always tried to reach each king, but of course, each king had to choose whether he would listen to God or not.

We read the story of Manasseh, the worst king of Judah. He repented in the end, but by then, most of the people of Judah had left God and turned to idols. The next king was Manasseh's son, Amon. He was just as evil as his father had been. He worshiped the same idols his father had worshiped, and he completely ignored God. But Amon did not last long; he only reigned for two years. One day, his own servants got tired of him and killed him. But the people of Judah

were not happy about this; they killed the men who had killed King Amon, and they made his son, Josiah, the new king.

Josiah became king of Judah when he was only eight years old. From a very young age, Josiah wanted to follow God. During his time, several prophets gave messages to the people. Prophets Habakkuk, Zephaniah and Jeremiah warned the people of the danger that Judah was in. They also assured them that God offered hope, if only they would trust Him.

King Josiah had not been taught to believe in God, but he was open to the Spirit of God. It's possible that he heard these prophets and took them seriously. When he was sixteen years old, he gave his heart to God and promised to serve Him. When he was twenty years old, he began to get rid of the idols in his kingdom. He even went into the land of Israel, where just a few Israelites remained, and got rid of the idols there, too.

On the eighteenth year of his reign, when he was twenty-six years old, he gave orders for the temple to be repaired. For so many years, the temple had been neglected. Immediately this task began. As the men were working on fixing the temple, Hilkiah the High Priest found something that was precious, hidden in one of the rooms: the rolls of Scripture! These rolls had been lost for many years; no one had known where they were. Someone had probably hidden them from King Manasseh many years before, to protect them. Hilkiah the High Priest gave the rolls to Shaphan, the scribe. Shaphan read the Scriptures with great interest, and he told King Josiah what they had found.

“Read them to me,” commanded King Josiah. God had instructed that the Scriptures should be read out loud to the people every year, but for several years, no one had done this. Most people didn't even

know what the Scriptures said anymore. King Josiah didn't know what they said, either. He listened with great interest as Shaphan read them aloud to him.

As Josiah heard the Scriptures, he felt a deep sadness. God had warned the people of their danger, and they hadn't listened. God had already told them, clearly, what they needed, and what His will was, but the people had ignored Him. Again and again, the Scriptures said, "Choose the way of life! You will be a blessing to all nations!" The Scriptures also said, "God wants to save you and forgive you! Trust Him!"

King Josiah rent his clothes and cried with sorrow: "Our fathers have rejected the words of God. Look! Some of the bad things that God warned about are already happening!" With great sadness, King Josiah began to pray, asking God to forgive him and his people. Was there still time to save the nation? The people were so deeply into idol worship! Would they turn to God?

King Josiah decided to ask for advice from Huldah, a prophetess who lived near the temple. He sent his closest advisors with a message that said, "We have just found the Scriptures. Our fathers have not kept these words. Ask the Lord, is there any way to save Judah from ruin?"

Prophetess Huldah sent back a sad message: "Jerusalem will be ruined. By now it's too late to stop this, even if the people humble themselves now before God." God knew that the people would not truly repent; only a few would turn to Him with their whole hearts. Most of the people would just turn back to their idols as soon as they stopped being afraid of danger.

But God wanted to comfort King Josiah. Huldah said, "God says, I have heard you, seen your tears and how you humbled yourself.

This destruction will not happen while you're alive. You will die in peace, and will not see Jerusalem destroyed."

This news was heartbreaking to Josiah. How he longed for Judah to turn to God again! Even though there was very little hope for his nation, he would do whatever he could to bring the people back to God.

King Josiah had not grown up with the Scriptures, but when he found them, he treasured them and took their words seriously. God has given us the Scriptures, too – they are full of advice for helping us make good decisions. What a blessing it is to have the Scriptures and to be able to read them and learn from them! Will you thank God today for giving you His Word, the Bible? Do you take it seriously, like King Josiah did?

50. King Josiah Shares the Scriptures

And like unto him [Josiah] was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him. 2 Kings 23:25 (KJV)



1 Kings 13:2; 2 Kings 23:1-30; 2 Chronicles 34: 29-33; 35. | Prophets and Kings Chapter 33

Josiah was king of Judah. His father had been terribly evil, but King Josiah decided to give his heart to God. He got rid of the heathen idols in his kingdom, and he repaired the broken temple so that the people could worship God again. As the temple was being repaired, the high priest found something precious: the Scriptures! For many years, no one had read them or heard them. Most people had forgotten what the Scriptures said.

King Josiah listened to the words of Scripture for the first time. He was heartbroken that his nation had rejected these words. And look at the results of rejecting those words! The Kingdom of Israel had ended, and now, the Kingdom of Judah would soon end, too. Prophetess Huldah had said to Josiah, “It’s too late; Jerusalem will be destroyed. But because you have humbled yourself before God, this will not happen while you’re alive.”

Even though the nation would eventually be destroyed, there was still a lot that could be done to save as many of the people as

possible. King Josiah invited all the leaders and the people to gather at the court of the temple. They needed to hear the Scriptures, too. When everyone was gathered, King Josiah himself read the Scriptures out loud to the people. As he read, all the people could notice that his heart was breaking. Their hearts were moved as they listened to the words of Scripture, and as they heard and saw the deep sadness of their king.

After reading, King Josiah made a covenant with God to follow Him and keep His commandments, and invited the people to join him. They agreed and promised to keep the covenant. The people still didn't understand that what God really wanted was for them to just hear His voice and not reject Him, and He would help them keep all His commandments. They could not keep the commandments themselves. But at least they were trying to come back to Him, and this was good.

After this, Josiah broke every idol that still remained in his kingdom. There were even bowls for the worship of Baal inside the temple; Josiah removed these bowls and burnt them. Then he killed the false priests, and got rid of the mediums in his kingdom. When he had done this in his own kingdom, he didn't stop there: he crossed over to the land of Israel, which did not have a king anymore, and he went to Bethel. Bethel is where King Jeroboam, many years before, had placed a golden calf for the Israelites to worship. King Josiah found this idol and destroyed it. 300 years earlier, a prophet had said, "Someone from the family of David, called Josiah, will destroy this altar." King Josiah was gladly fulfilling this prophecy now!²³

²³ See story 11 in this book, "A Withered Hand, a Lion, and a Donkey."

Then Josiah held a huge, unforgettable Passover feast. He and the elders donated thousands of animals, so that everyone would have what they needed for their sacrifices. It was the biggest Passover that had been celebrated since the time of Prophet Samuel.

Everything that King Josiah did, helped some people to leave their idols and return to God, but it was not enough for the people as a nation to come back to God. The evil from the kings before him had been too great. The people followed God only as long as Josiah was alive, but after that, most of them went back to their old ways.

King Josiah followed God wholeheartedly his whole life. The Bible only mentions one mistake of his just before he died. Josiah decided to fight against Necho, the Pharaoh of Egypt. But Necho sent him a message with a warning: “I don’t want to fight against you, Josiah; I’m here to fight against another nation. God sent me here; He is with me. Don’t go against God, or He will destroy you.” What a strange message from a heathen king! God used this king to warn Josiah not to fight. It was not God’s plan for King Josiah to fight this battle, so God’s protection would not be with him. Sadly, King Josiah went to battle anyway, and he was killed. In spite of this, Josiah is remembered as a good king who followed God with all his heart. He was loved by his people, and when he died, they missed him very much.

King Josiah is remembered as one of the best kings of Judah. He was able to do so much to help his people turn to God. You, too, can choose to give you heart to God just like King Josiah did. God can use you to influence others to leave their idols and turn to God, too. Will you give your heart to Him?

51. Messages of Comfort

**Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him;
But the just shall live by his faith. Habakkuk 2:4 (NKJV)**



Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah

When Josiah was king, and even afterwards when Josiah's son Jehoiakim was king, God sent men with messages of warning, hope and comfort to Judah. Among these men were Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah. Would the people of Judah listen and accept these messages?

Nahum means “comforter”. How much God longed to comfort His people! Israel had already been taken captive, and the same would soon happen to Judah. There was still yet another group of people who were in deep trouble: the Ninevites from Assyria. Around 140 years before, Prophet Jonah had visited Nineveh, and they had repented and turned to God. But now, all these years later, the people had forgotten God. They had returned to their evil ways, and now they were even more cruel than before. They had made the people of Judah suffer from their terrible cruelty. God sadly warned through Nahum, “Nineveh will come to an end.” God knew that Nineveh would not change, but at least the people of Judah could feel some comfort knowing that their cruel Ninevite enemies would soon stop attacking them.

Habakkuk means “embrace”, or “hug”. Through Habakkuk, God wanted to hug and comfort his people. So much evil was happening; the leaders of Judah were wicked and unfair. In a vision, Habakkuk

asked God, “How long will this evil continue?” It seemed as if God was doing nothing to stop the wickedness in Judah. But God was doing something: He answered Habakkuk, “Babylon will soon become a strong nation. Because of Judah’s wickedness, Babylon will take them captive.”

What? An evil nation like Babylon was going to overcome Judah? Is that how Judah’s evil would end? How could that be? Habakkuk couldn’t understand why God would allow His people to be taken captive by a heathen nation like Babylon. It didn’t seem fair! “Why, Lord?” he asked.

It is ok to ask God difficult questions about the things that we don’t understand. He is patient with us, and does not get angry with our questions. God gently answered Habakkuk, “The righteous man shall live by faith.” God was asking Habakkuk, and the rest of His followers, to have faith and believe that He was doing what was best, even though it was difficult to understand. God also knew that Habakkuk needed comfort after hearing such a hard message. He assured Habakkuk, “Babylon will not be a world power forever. Another nation will overcome Babylon later on.” An evil nation like Babylon would not have endless power.

As Habakkuk talked with God, he was comforted. Now he knew that he didn’t need to know all the answers, as long as he had faith in God’s love and goodness. “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God!” he realized with joy. It felt good to know that God was in control of all that was happening, and that evil won’t last forever. He gladly praised God: “I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation; He is my strength!”

“Write down this vision,” God instructed Habakkuk. Now, in the book of Habakkuk, we can read this conversation between him and

God. We can see that God cares about what is happening to us, and that we can have faith that He is in control of it all.

Another prophet of that time was Zephaniah. He was one of King Hezekiah's descendants, so he was a close relative of the king of Judah, just like Isaiah had been. Would the king listen to his own relative? Zephaniah means "The Lord has protected." God wanted to protect Judah through Zephaniah's messages. Would they listen?

Zephaniah warned, "Judah will fall!" He also said, "The other nations will fall, too!" There was so much wickedness in all these nations! As for Judah, their priests and leaders were so evil that God couldn't even recognize them as His people anymore. "The leaders are like roaring lions. The judges are like deceitful wolves! The prophets teach lies and the priests have polluted the sanctuary and broken the law," wrote Zephaniah. It seemed like there was no hope for God's people.

But God comforted His followers through Zephaniah with beautiful promises of the return to Jerusalem, as well as promises of the Second Coming of Jesus. "God will gather all the nations," Zephaniah wrote, "There will be a remnant who will trust in the Lord, even though they seem poor and weak. God will bring them back and take away their captivity."

For the few people who were still faithful to God, the messages of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah were comforting. God cared for them and would work things out for their good. All they needed to do was to have faith in Him. The messages from these prophets are for us, too. Do we live by faith? Do we trust that God wants what is best for us, even when we don't understand why He allows certain things to happen? Ask Him to give you more faith in Him today.

52. Obadiah and Joel

Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. Joel 2:23 (KJV)

 *Obadiah, Joel*

God's people were going farther and farther from God. They were in danger, because by leaving God, they were leaving His hedge of protection. God loved them so much that He sent prophets to warn them of their danger, and to invite them to return to Him. Two of the prophets that God called were Joel and Obadiah. No one knows exactly when these men lived, but it could have been close to the time when the kingdom of Judah ended, or maybe earlier.

The name Obadiah means “servant of the Lord”. We don't know much more about this man's life, but we can be glad that he wrote his book. Did you know that Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament? This book has warnings from God to Edom. The Edomites came from Esau, and they lived next to Israel. They could have been friends with the Israelites, since their ancestors, Jacob and Esau, had been twins. But instead, the Edomites were cruel to the Israelites. God knew that in a few years, Judah would be taken captive by Babylon, and He warned them, through Obadiah, that Edom would use this as an excuse to plunder their cities. They would help the Babylonians to catch any Hebrews who tried to escape. Edom was not going to

defend them when they were in trouble. Israel and Judah were not doing right, but Edom was not doing the right thing, either, and in His love, God warned them of this.

Obadiah prophesied, “Edom is prideful, and this will make them fall.” The Edomites lived in a strong city carved out of rocks on the mountainside,²⁴ and this made them feel strong and powerful. But Edom was not the only prideful nation; just before the Second Coming of Jesus, the nations of the world will also be full of pride. Obadiah explained that all these prideful nations will not inherit the earth; the land will be given to God’s people only.

It was difficult for the people to hear that all these terrible things were going to happen. But God also wanted to give the people hope through Obadiah’s message. He assured them that there was hope if they turned to God. When their captivity ended, they would return to the land. And if they lost the land again because they were unfaithful, God assured them that when Jesus returns for us and restores the earth, we will inherit the land, this time forever.

Meanwhile, Prophet Joel also had a message from God for the people. Joel means “Jehovah is God.” The leaders of Israel and Judah needed to remember who God was; they had forgotten Him. “They are like drunk men, and don’t realize their danger,” wrote Joel. Drunk people don’t understand what’s going on around them; they cannot think clearly. Joel’s very name, “Jehovah is God”, should have woken up these leaders from their drunken state. Would they start remembering that “Jehovah is God”?

²⁴ This city is Petra. A few hundred years later, a group of people called the Nabateans built the beautiful houses carved out of the rocky mountainside, which are so famous today. But the Edomites had lived and built something there first.

During the time of Joel, a huge plague of locusts came and attacked the land. It was the biggest plague the people had seen in a very long time. The locusts ate all the green plants, and when they had eaten that up, they began to eat the barks of trees. The land looked dry and sad.

Joel warned that, just like the locusts were destroying their crops, their own people would be destroyed in a terrible war. “A nation will come. It will be like an army of locusts, and it will have teeth like a lion,” Joel wrote. Of course, enemy soldiers don’t have teeth like lions; but these enemy soldiers would be just as strong as if they had lion teeth. And it would be impossible to stop them, just like it’s impossible to stop an army of locusts.

After this, there was a drought. The crops of wheat were destroyed. The sweet fruit that the people enjoyed, like grapes, pomegranates, dates, and apples did not grow, because the plants had withered away. Then there were fires. These fires burnt up the fields that the Israelites had planted, and they also burnt up the pastures of the wilderness. The cows, sheep, and all their other animals suffered from lack of food and water.

Joel urged the leaders to gather the people and pray together. “If you turn to Him, He will remove the army from the land, and He will send you food. The nations around you will see what God will do for you. The crops will grow again, and so will the fruit trees. The animals will have food again. God will bring back the captives,” he wrote. He also reminded them, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Would they call on Him?

Joel also wrote for those of us who are waiting for Jesus to come. He said, “There will be earthquakes. The sun will turn dark, the moon will turn red, and the stars will stop shining.”

All of this sounds terrible and scary! But Joel wrote, “Rejoice! God has sent the former rain; He will send the latter rain, too!” What did this mean? When crops are planted, they first need a “former rain” to begin to grow. Then they need a “latter rain” to finish growing and to produce fruit. Just like crops need a former rain and a latter rain, our hearts need this rain, too. When we first give our hearts to Jesus, we receive the “former rain”, and we begin to grow spiritually. Then, to produce the fruit of the Spirit, we need the “latter rain”. God has promised that He will soon send the final outpouring of the “latter rain”, which will complete our understanding, and which will produce the beautiful fruit of the Spirit, the character of Jesus, in our hearts.

How would the people respond to the messages of these prophets? They barely listened. The minds of the leaders of Israel were as if they were drunk; they paid no attention to the prophets. How will we respond to these prophets? The messages of Obadiah and Joel are for us, too. We can read their warnings and promises and believe them. We can ask God to pour down His latter rain on us, His Holy Spirit, so that our characters can become beautiful and pure like the character of Jesus. Will you ask God for the latter rain of His Spirit?

53. God Calls Jeremiah

**But God said to me [Jeremiah], Say not, I am a child;
for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee,
and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.
Jeremiah 1:7 (KJV)**

 *Jeremiah 1 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 34*

The Kingdom of Israel had already ended. The Kingdom of Judah still existed, but it was in great danger. God did all He could to warn Judah of its danger. He called prophets to give messages to the king and the people. One of the men that God chose was Jeremiah. He lived at around the same time as Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah.

Jeremiah had been trained from a very young age to work in the temple. Why? Because he was a Levite, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests. We don't know if his father, Hilkiah, was the same Hilkiah the high priest who found the lost Scripture rolls that King Josiah read, but he could have been. Or maybe his father was another priest called Hilkiah. God called Jeremiah to be His prophet during King Josiah's thirteenth year as king.

When Jeremiah was still young, he heard God's beautiful words to him, saying, "Before I formed you inside your mother's belly, I knew you. I sanctified you even before you were born, and I have chosen you to be a prophet to the nations."

Jeremiah felt that he was unworthy for such a high honor. "Oh, Lord, I'm just a child; I can't speak," he said. But the Lord assured

him, saying, “Don’t say ‘I am a child’. You will go to all those that I send you to, and you will speak whatever I command you. Don’t be afraid of their faces, because I am with you.”

Jeremiah didn’t need to worry about what to say, because God would guide him and give him the words. Now the Lord stretched out His hand and touched Jeremiah’s mouth. “Look, I have put my words in your mouth,” He assured Jeremiah. He also told Jeremiah that he would give messages not only to Judah, but to the other nations around them. God not only loved Judah; He loved each of the nations, and as long as they would listen, He would speak to them through Jeremiah.

Now the Lord showed Jeremiah the rod of an almond tree. The word “almond” in Hebrew is the same as the word “hasten” or “watch”. The Lord said, “I will hasten over my word, I will watch it, to fulfil it.” Now whenever Jeremiah saw an almond tree, he would remember the word “hasten”, which sounded exactly the same as “almond” in Hebrew. And he would be assured that he didn’t need to be afraid; God Himself would hasten to fulfil His word. Jeremiah only had to speak the words that God gave him to speak.

Then the Lord showed Jeremiah a boiling pot. This pot was tilted towards the north. The Lord said, “Disaster will come from the north, and will be poured out on those who live in the land. The kings from the northern kingdoms will come and set their thrones at the gates of Jerusalem. They will come to all of Judah. My people will receive their judgment for worshiping idols and for leaving me.”

This must have been very painful for God to say. He would soon give the people what they wanted, the judgment that they themselves had chosen. They were rejecting Him and His protection, and He knew that once they got what they wanted – a life without God –, they

would be attacked, hurt, killed or taken captive by other nations. If He warned them of the danger they were in, would they listen?

Again, the Lord encouraged Jeremiah, “Get ready! Tell them everything that I command you to say. Don’t be afraid of their faces. Today I have made you like a protected city, like an iron pillar, and like a bronze wall, so that you can stand against the whole land. The kings of Judah, the elders, the priests and the people will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, because I am with you, and I will deliver you.”

Jeremiah accepted God’s call to be His prophet. He believed God’s words and trusted in Him. For forty years, he gave messages to the people. He didn’t only write to kings of Judah; he also gave messages to the surrounding nations. He warned them all of their danger, but he also assured them of God’s love and the hope that He offered. None of them paid attention to what Jeremiah said to them. Jeremiah watched Jerusalem be destroyed and the people being taken captive. But through it all, God protected him just like He had promised.

Jeremiah was called when he was very young, and he accepted God’s call and trusted in Him. What will God call you to do? Will you trust Him? If God calls you, believe Him, and don’t be afraid that you’re too young. Ask Him today how you can get to know Him better and how you can help others to get to know Him, too.

54. The Sons of King Josiah

**O the hope of Israel, the saviour thereof in time of trouble,
why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land,
and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?
Jeremiah 14:8 (KJV)**

 *2 Kings 23:31-37; 24; 25:27-30; 2 Chronicles 36:1-10; Jeremiah 22: 1-13, 24-30; 52:31-34. | Prophets and Kings Chapters 34, 35*

The people loved King Josiah. When he died, they made his son, Jehoahaz, the new king. Sadly, Jehoahaz was not at all like his father. He was evil, just like his grandfather had been.

God sent Jeremiah to speak to King Jehoahaz in his palace. Jeremiah warned, “Treat your people kindly. Don’t take advantage of foreigners, orphans or widows. Do what is right. If you do this, God will protect you and your kingdom. But if you don’t, this land will end up desolate. All the nations around you will know that this happened because you left God and chose other idols instead.” Jeremiah continued: “The Lord says that you will be taken captive, and you will never return to Judah.”

Jehoahaz heard Jeremiah, but he paid no attention to the warnings. All too soon, God’s sad warnings came true. Jehoahaz didn’t last long on the throne: three months after he became king, the Pharaoh of Egypt, Necho, came to Judah. Necho had already killed

King Josiah in battle, so it was very easy for him to do whatever he wanted in Judah. Necho decided that Jehoahaz should not be the king of Judah. He announced, “The new king of Judah will be Eliakim, Josiah’s other son. Eliakim will make sure to pay us the taxes we ask for. As for Jehoahaz, we will take him to Egypt.”

Now Jehoahaz was far away, in Egypt, and Eliakim was the new king. But the Pharaoh made even more changes. He said to the king of Judah, “Your name will no longer be Eliakim. Your new name is Jehoiakim.” By changing his name, he was showing that Egypt was master over the king of Judah. Jehoiakim was obedient to the Pharaoh of Egypt. He paid expensive taxes of gold and silver to the Pharaoh, but to be able to do this, he charged heavy taxes on his own people. It was a terrible situation to be in! Why didn’t he ask God for help? Hadn’t he learned anything from his father, the good King Josiah?

Then things got even worse: the Babylonians came and invaded Judah. They took captives, among them Daniel and his three friends²⁵. The Babylonians even took golden vessels and treasures from the temple in Jerusalem, and put them in their own heathen temples.

King Jehoiakim was evil, just like his brother Jehoahaz had been. God sent him message after message through Jeremiah, but he refused to change. Finally, Jeremiah told him, “The Lord says that your son after you will not be king for long. None of your children will continue on the throne.”

²⁵ We will see Daniel’s stories in the next book. He and his friends were captives and worked in the court of the king of Babylon.

Just as God had warned, Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin²⁶, was king for only 3 months and ten days. The Babylonians came and took him, his mother, his wives and his children to Babylon. They took all the officers of Judah and the strong soldiers, as well as one thousand craftsmen and smiths. Prophet Ezekiel²⁷ was among these captives. After this, only the poorest, weakest and least educated people remained in Judah. The Kingdom of Judah was now weak, poor and defenseless.

The King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar II, said, "The rest of the people can live in Judah. We will put another of Josiah's sons, Mattaniah, as king. He will be sure to do everything we tell him to do." Then the king of Babylon decided, "Your name will no longer be Mattaniah. It will be Zedekiah." By changing his name, the Babylonians were making sure that they were masters over the king of Judah. Zedekiah was the last king of Judah.

As for King Jehoiachin (Jehoiakim's son), he never returned to Judah. He was a prisoner in Babylon for the rest of his life. Yet God was still kind to him, even in Babylon. Jehoiachin was in prison for 37 years. Then Babylon got a new king called Evil-Merodach. This new king decided, "I will take Jehoiachin out of prison. He will wear nice clothes again, not prison clothes anymore, and he will eat the same food that I eat from now on." We don't know why the king of Babylon was suddenly so kind to Jehoiachin, but this should have made Jehoiachin grateful to God. He could have turned to God and shared the knowledge of God with the new king of Babylon. But sadly, even after all this kindness, Jehoiachin's heart did not change.

²⁶ Also called Jeconiah or Coniah.

²⁷ We will see stories of Prophet Ezekiel in the next book.

Four kings: three sons of Josiah, one grandson of Josiah. All of these kings received messages from God through Jeremiah, but they refused to listen. All of these kings were evil. God longed to reach them, help them and save them, but they did not want His presence in their lives; they treated Him like a stranger, like someone who didn't belong near them. Jeremiah said sadly, "Lord, you are the Hope of Israel, but they are treating you like a stranger, as if you don't live here!" With great sadness, God had to let them have their own way. They treated God like a foreigner, and in the end, they ended up being foreigners in other lands, and servants of foreign kings. Even their names were changed into a foreign language. How different the story could have been, if only they had believed in God's goodness, and had chosen to stay in His hedge of protection!

Today, we can choose whether we want God's Spirit to live in our hearts, or whether we will treat Him like a stranger. What will you choose? Will you let Him be your Hope and your Savior today?

55. The Clay Vessel

**But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay,
and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.
Isaiah 64:8 (KJV)**



*Jeremiah 14:12-14; 17:19-27; 18; 19; 20; 25. | Prophets and Kings Chapter
34, 35*

God called Jeremiah to be His prophet. For forty years, Jeremiah spoke and wrote God's messages to Judah. One day, God told him, "Stand at the gate of Jerusalem and speak to the people". Jeremiah did this. Loudly and earnestly, Jeremiah said, "Keep the Sabbath! Don't work and don't carry burdens on the Sabbath. God will bless you if you hear Him." He warned them that Judah was in danger for neglecting the Sabbath.

Why did the people need to keep the Sabbath? Because God wanted them to spend time with Him instead of worrying about their jobs or their businesses. Keeping the Sabbath would help them learn to trust that God would take care of all their needs. Imagine all the blessings they would receive if they kept the Sabbath! What a difference that would make in Judah!

Then the Lord said to Jeremiah, "Go to the potter's house. There is something I want to teach you there." Jeremiah found the potter at work. The potter was making a clay pot, but it didn't come out well. The potter undid the pot and made it again – and this time the pot was good.

The Lord said to Jeremiah, “Can’t I do with Israel just like the potter did? Israel is in my hands, just like the clay is in the potter’s hands. Will Israel repent? Can I remake it into something good again?”

Jeremiah told the people what God had said. They should have understood this parable, because many years before, Isaiah had said, “Lord, you are our Father and our Potter, we are the clay. All of us are the work of God’s hands.” Jeremiah pleaded with the people to repent. Sadly, the people refused to listen to him. They made fun of him and said bad things to him. This made Jeremiah really sad.

Now God would use another clay pot to give the people His message. This time, He told Jeremiah, “Get a clay bottle from a potter, and take it to the valley of the son of Hinnom.”

Jeremiah did this. The people watched to see what Jeremiah would do. He held up the bottle, and said, “Kings of Judah and people of Jerusalem, the Lord says that evil will come to this land because you have turned to idols and forsaken Him. This land will end up desolate!”

Then Jeremiah broke the bottle and said, “Just like this bottle is broken and cannot be fixed again, the people in this city will break. Even this city will be broken!” The people did not answer Jeremiah; everyone remained quiet.

After this, Jeremiah went to the court of the temple. He stood there and said out loud, “Come back to God! Repent of your evil ways!” What Jeremiah said disturbed many of the people there. One man was especially angry at Jeremiah. His name was Pashur, and he was the son of one of the important priests in the temple. Pashur used his power to hurt Jeremiah. He got Jeremiah beaten, then they put him in stocks until the next day. There was no reason to treat

Jeremiah like this, but Pashur just didn't like to hear Jeremiah's message.

When Jeremiah was set free, he said to Pashur, "Your name won't be Pashur anymore. It is 'Terror', because you will end up being a terror to yourself and your friends. You will see all your friends being killed by the sword, and you will be taken captive to Babylon, where you will die. You prophesied lies to your friends, but I'm telling you what will actually happen to all of you."

This was a warning to Pashur. Would he repent? Would he ask God to help him do things differently, so that he and his friends could be saved from all these terrible things? Sadly, he didn't repent; he didn't pay attention to what Jeremiah said. There were other people who heard what Jeremiah had just said to Pashur. They could have turned to God, but instead, they mocked Jeremiah because of what he had said.

This was the first time that Jeremiah was treated with cruelty. It made him very sad. Why were the people so stubborn? Why did they refuse to listen to God? Did they not care that they might end up breaking in pieces like the clay pot that Jeremiah had shown them? They did not want God to shape them like a potter molds a clay vessel to make it perfect. Yet Jeremiah trusted that God was with him, and that gave him the strength to continue even though it often seemed like he was alone.

Jesus is our Potter, and He wants to make us into strong, useful vessels. Paul says²⁸ that we are like clay vessels in which God puts His treasure, His knowledge and His Spirit. When God's children, who are simple human beings (just like simple clay pots) accept Jesus in

²⁸ 2 Corinthians 4:7

their lives, they are filled with a treasure so great, that everyone around them notices it. God longed to do this with Judah, and He longs to do it with us. God told Jeremiah that if His knowledge didn't fill the lives of the people, what was going to happen? "They will be like bottles filled with alcoholic wine." Their hearts would be filled with evil instead.

Jesus wants to be our Potter and fill us with His Spirit. Will you let Him be your Potter and mold you today? Will you let Him pour His Spirit and character into your life?

56. This Temple Will End up Like Shiloh

Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? Isaiah 66:1 (KJV)

 *Jeremiah 7; 25:8-11; 26 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 34*

Jeremiah had a message for the people of Judah. He traveled from town to town, giving this message. He would also go to the temple and speak out loud to all who would hear. “Repent! Turn to God! Leave your idols!” he urged the people, “God wants to heal you and save you! If you leave Him, you will end up captive in a foreign land. Judah will be captive in Babylon for seventy years, and this land will be desolate and empty all that time!”

This wasn’t the only time that Jeremiah spoke at the temple. Another day, the Lord said to Jeremiah, “Go to the temple gate, and speak my words to the people who have come there to worship.” Jeremiah stood at the gate and spoke loudly so all could hear, “Change your ways! Obey God’s commandments! Treat widows, orphans and foreigners kindly! Turn to God, and leave your idols!” Jeremiah also said, “If you don’t repent, this temple will end up like Shiloh!”

What was Shiloh? It was where Joshua and the Israelites had placed the Tabernacle and the ark when they first settled in Canaan²⁹.

²⁹ See Book 3, *The Conquest and the Judges*, story 8, “Dividing the Land”.

For 369 years, the ark had been in Shiloh. Then the Israelites took the ark to battle against the Philistines, and they lost it because the Philistines stole it.³⁰ Sixty years later, King David brought the ark to Jerusalem³¹. All those years, the Israelites had not had the ark in their place of worship. The ark represented God's presence, so when the ark disappeared from Shiloh, God's presence left Shiloh. When Jeremiah said, "This temple will end up like Shiloh!" the people understood that he meant, "God's presence will leave this temple." Of course, they did not like to hear this.

The people asked angrily, "Why are you saying that the temple will be like Shiloh? Why are you saying that this city will be empty with no one living here?" The priests, the false prophets, and the people all gathered around Jeremiah and threatened to kill him. The princes or leaders left the king's palace and came to see what was going on. The priests and false prophets said to them angrily, "Jeremiah should die! He has prophesied bad things against Jerusalem!"

But Jeremiah stood up and spoke bravely: "The Lord sent me to say these things. Repent and change your ways, obey God's voice, and He will not allow these bad things to happen. As for me, I'm in your hands and you can do whatever you want to me. But you should know that if you kill me, it will be a sin against you and this city."

How brave Jeremiah was! The people, even the princes, suddenly felt respect for him. The only ones who still wanted to kill Jeremiah were the priests and false prophets. The princes decided, "This man doesn't deserve to die. He has spoken to us in the name of the Lord."

³⁰ See Book 3, story 29, "The Philistines Take the Ark".

³¹ See Book 3, story 49, "Bringing the Ark to Jerusalem"

Then one of the elders said, “Remember Prophet Micah³²? He prophesied when Hezekiah was king. He also said that Jerusalem would be destroyed. But Hezekiah didn’t put him to death; He respected God, and God didn’t allow Jerusalem to be destroyed.”

The elder continued, “There was another prophet called Urijah. He also prophesied that Jerusalem and this land would end up destroyed. King Jehoiakim tried to put Urijah to death, but he fled into Egypt. So King Jehoiakim sent men to Egypt to find him. The men found him, brought him back to King Jehoiakim, and the king killed him.”

Everyone listened. Wasn’t it good that King Hezekiah had not put Micah to death? And as for Urijah, wouldn’t it have been better if King Jehoiakim had let him live? The elder’s words convinced everyone that they should let Jeremiah go free. Another man called Ahikam made sure that Jeremiah was not put to death. Ahikam was the son of Shaphan, the scribe who had read the Scriptures out loud to King Josiah. Shaphan’s family was loyal to God.

It is difficult to speak up when most people don’t want to hear, but there are always a few who receive the message and are blessed by it. It saddened Jeremiah when people mocked him and rejected God’s invitation of healing and salvation. But Jeremiah trusted in God, and God gave him the strength to continue speaking His words to the people.

As a nation, Judah would end up rejecting God, and His presence would have to leave their temple; God will not stay where He is not wanted. This is what Jeremiah was warning about. Today we don’t have a temple with an ark in it, but God says that our bodies are

³² This is the same prophet Micah who wrote the book of Micah in the Bible.

temples of the Holy Spirit. We can receive the Holy Spirit in our hearts and have God's presence with us. Will you let God give you His Spirit? Will you make room for Him? Don't let your heart end up like Shiloh, empty of God's presence.

57. A Bronze Wall

And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brasen wall: and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee and to deliver thee, saith the Lord.

Jeremiah 15:20 (KJV)



Jeremiah 11:18-23; 12:1-6; 14; 15; 16:1-9

God called Jeremiah for a work that was not easy. From the beginning of his work as a prophet, Jeremiah faced rejection and persecution. Through all his years working for God, he found strength in God's promise to be with him. Jeremiah also found strength in prayer. When he prayed, he would tell God exactly how he felt, even if his thoughts were sad or angry. Often, he asked, "Why are the wicked doing well? Why are they so happy?" He trusted God like a friend, and God would comfort him. Then God would change his heart and give him the right thoughts towards the men who hurt him.

During this time there was a big drought in Judah. For a long time, it didn't rain, the crops didn't grow, and there wasn't enough grass for all the animals. It became harder and harder to find water; even the richest families had a hard time finding water. The drought in the land revealed the drought that was in the hearts of the people: just like the land had no water, the people's hearts did not have the "living water", the Spirit of God. Would the people turn to God? Would they ask Him for His Spirit in their hearts, so that water could come to their land as well? Sadly, they didn't.

Jeremiah would warn them of their danger, but the people refused to listen. They preferred to listen to the false prophets. These evil prophets said lies that the people wanted to hear: “Don’t worry, no one will hurt you! There won’t be famine anymore! Peace will come to Judah!”

God told Jeremiah, “I did not send these men. What they are saying is not true; they are deceiving themselves and the people.” God also said, “These false prophets say that sword and famine will not hurt the land. But sword and famine are what will kill these men and the people who listen to them.” This worried Jeremiah. He prayed for all the people and asked God to forgive Judah. The Lord sadly told Jeremiah that it was too late. “Even if Moses and Samuel were here praying for the people, they would still not change,” God said with deep sadness.

It was hard enough to be rejected by the people of Judah, but Jeremiah faced an even harder challenge: the people in his own *town* rejected him. Jeremiah came from a town called Anathoth. The people of Anathoth should have been proud that God had chosen one of their young men to be His prophet. But instead, they made an evil plan: “Let’s kill him. We’ll get rid of him and his message! If he doesn’t stop prophesying in the name of the Lord, we will take his life.”

Jeremiah didn’t even suspect that his own people, those who had seen him grow up and who knew him well, would do this to him. He only found out because the Lord told him what was happening. The Lord also said sadly, “These people will end up badly. The young men will be killed with swords. Their sons and daughters will die from hunger.”

The saddest thing of all was that it wasn't just the people in Jeremiah's hometown that wanted to get rid of him; even his own *family* was against him! The Lord warned Jeremiah, "They are not honest with you. They have betrayed you and are against you. Don't trust them, even if they speak well of you."

Then the Lord told Jeremiah that he would never get married or have children. Terrible things were about to happen to Judah, and God let Jeremiah know, with sadness, that many of the women and children would die terrible deaths. Some would die from hunger, others would be killed by Babylonian soldiers, and the few that were left would end up being slaves in other lands. Jeremiah had enough to worry about as a prophet; it was better for him not to have a wife and children to worry about as well.

Jeremiah felt sad and discouraged that all his people, even his own family and townspeople, were plotting against him. He complained to God, "I am only causing trouble and arguments, even though I haven't been unfair to anyone!" He was so discouraged that he wished he hadn't been born, and he grumbled to God about it. He felt alone, and wondered whether God was really with him.

God heard Jeremiah patiently and comforted him. Then He said to Jeremiah, "You need to return to me, so I can heal you. Repent from thinking like this, so that you can continue being my mouth and giving my messages." God understood Jeremiah's pain, but He didn't want Jeremiah to focus on feeling sorry for himself; it was not good for him. If he continued feeling self-pity, he wouldn't be able to focus on God's work anymore. To comfort him, God reminded him of a promise He had made to Jeremiah long before: "I will make you like a strong bronze wall. The people will fight against you, but they won't

win. I am with you to save you and to deliver you.” Had Jeremiah already forgotten this promise?

Jeremiah wasn't alone! God was with him, and was offering all His strength and comfort! He felt strengthened and ready to continue sharing God's words with the people, even if they rejected him. He trusted that God would make him like a bronze wall, strong and steady even when he was attacked.

God wants to give us His strength, too, so that we can continue believing His truths even when others treat us badly. It is hard to stand for the truth when people make fun of us, reject us or hurt us, but God offers His strength so that we can stand firm. Ask God to make you as strong as a bronze wall, so that you can follow Him just like Jeremiah did.

58. The Faithful Rechabites

Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it [God's statutes and commandments]; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey. Deuteronomy 6:3 (KJV)

 *2 Kings 10: 15-17; Jeremiah 22:13-30; 35 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 35*

It was the time in which King Jehoiakim, son of King Josiah, was king of Judah. Jehoiakim heard Jeremiah's warnings to Judah, yet he didn't care. He had heard Jeremiah speaking when his father Josiah was alive. Then he heard Jeremiah speaking when his brother Jehoahaz was king, until he was taken captive to Egypt. Now that Jehoiakim was king, Jeremiah kept on speaking. Jehoiakim paid no attention.

King Jehoiakim should have been worried about his kingdom. He should have been turning to God and doing all he could to protect his land and his people. But instead, he started building a huge palace. He already had a palace; he didn't really need a new one. But he wanted a bigger and better one. He wanted to feel rich and powerful. To build this palace, he needed plenty of gold and silver. He didn't have all this gold and silver, so he began to cheat on the people and mistreat them, so that they had no choice but to give him their gold and silver.

Jeremiah came to King Jehoiakim and spoke to him sternly. “King Jehoiakim, this is not right! You’re building this palace by treating your people unfairly. Do you think that having a better house makes you a better king? Your father Josiah was a good king and treated people fairly. But as for you, the people won’t be sad when you die. You won’t even be buried where the other kings are buried!”

Jeremiah was not afraid to speak the truth. His words gave Jehoiakim a chance to think about what he was doing, and to repent. But sadly, Jehoiakim did not repent. He paid no attention to Jeremiah’s rebuke.

Most of the people of Judah also ignored Jeremiah’s messages, but there still were a few who listened and were faithful. There were families who still worshiped only God, and had no idols. Some of these people had already been taken captive by the king of Babylon, King Nebuchadnezzar. God used these people to share His truths in Babylon.

Not all the faithful people were taken to Babylon, though; some were still in Judah. Among these people, God had the Rechabites³³. The Rechabites were a family who worshiped God. Their ancestor, Jonadab the son of Rechab, had been faithful to God as best as he understood. He had helped King Jehu of Israel to destroy idols of Baal in Israel.

God instructed Jeremiah to bring the Rechabites into one of the rooms of the temple, and Jeremiah did this. He brought in pots full of wine, and cups for each of them. “Please have some wine,” he offered them. “Oh no, we will not drink any wine,” they answered politely. They explained, “Our father, Jonadab, instructed his family to not

³³ The Rechabites were descendants of the Kenites, a Midianite tribe who moved into Canaan with the Israelites. Moses’ father-in-law was a Kenite.

drink any wine. We don't plant vineyards, either. We don't build houses or plant fields."

There's nothing wrong with drinking non-alcoholic grape juice, building houses or planting fields. Their ancestor must have given them these instructions because they had other, more important work to do for God, and they needed to focus on this work.

They also told Jeremiah, "We have been instructed to live in tents and live as foreigners." By living in tents, they could move around easily and live wherever they felt guided by God to live. They could do God's work wherever they were called to go. "Right now we're in Jerusalem, because we want to be protected from the armies of Babylon and Syria," they explained.

Jeremiah compared the Rechabites with Judah. He said, "The Rechabites refused to drink the wine I offered them, because they were obedient to the instructions of their father Jonadab. But the people of Judah do not obey the commandments of their Father, God." He said to the people of Judah, "Your Father is asking you to come to Him, to leave your idols, to change your ways. He wants you to be able to live in this land forever. But you refuse to hear."

Jeremiah explained that the Rechabites would be blessed for their obedience. "There will always be a man from the family of Rechab who will stand before the Lord," he said, "But Judah will not be able to receive God's blessings." If only the people of Judah would trust God and follow His commands just like the Rechabites were following their father's instructions! If only God could bless Judah just like He was blessing the Rechabites! But how could He, if they kept rejecting Him? How could He give them something that they didn't want?

God wants to bless us, too. He wants us to hear His instructions and trust Him. Will you hear His voice today? Ask Him to help you

hear Him, to help you come closer to Him today, so that you can “stand before Him” forever, just like the faithful Rechabites did.

59. Jehoiakim Rejects God's Scrolls

**But he [Jesus] said, Yea rather,
blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.
Luke 11:28 (KJV)**

 *Jeremiah 36, 45; 2 Kings 24:1-7; 2 Chronicles 36:5-8. | Prophets and Kings
Chapter 35*

Jeremiah visited the different cities of Judah and gave the people God's message of warning and hope. Everyone in Judah had a chance to hear him. Sadly, most of the people ignored what he said to them. Only a few listened.

God didn't only want the people to hear His words; He also wanted them to be able to read them. He wanted His message to be written down so people could read it even when Jeremiah wasn't around to speak to them. He told Jeremiah, "Write down all the messages I've been giving you." God had been giving Jeremiah messages for almost twenty years already. There were messages for Judah as well as for other nations such as Babylon and Egypt. All of this needed to be written down.

Jeremiah called Baruch, his scribe, to help him. Jeremiah would tell Baruch what to write, and Baruch wrote it all down in a scroll. When the book was finished, Jeremiah wanted to share it with the people. He couldn't do this himself, because the officials had banned him from the temple. So Jeremiah said to Baruch, "Since I'm not

allowed in the temple, please go yourself, and read this book out loud to the people. Go on a day when they are fasting and coming to the temple. Maybe they will hear God's words and turn to Him."

Baruch went. He began to read the scroll out loud. Remember Shaphan, the scribe who had read the Scriptures to King Josiah? Well, his grandson³⁴ heard what Baruch was reading, and he thought it was so important that he went to tell the leaders of Judah about it so they could hear it, too. The leaders said, "Bring the scroll here." Baruch went to the room where the leaders were, and he began to read them the book.

The leaders listened carefully. The message worried them. "We need to tell the king these words," they said seriously. They also said to Baruch, "Go and hide yourself, and hide Jeremiah, so that no one knows where you are." If the king rejected the words, they wanted to protect Jeremiah and Baruch.

King Jehoiakim agreed to listen to the book. He asked his servant Jehudi to read it out loud to him. The king was in his winter palace, sitting next to a warm fire as he listened. Several of the leaders were with him. King Jehoiakim listened to the first part of the scroll, but he didn't like what he heard. He cut this section off with a knife and threw it into the fire. Then he asked to listen to the rest. As he listened to each portion, he cut it off and threw it into the fire. Three of the leaders begged him, "Please don't burn the book!"³⁵ But the king paid no attention. Piece by piece, he burned up the whole book. None of the other officials seemed to care that the king did this. Then King Jehoiakim commanded angrily, "Get Jeremiah and Baruch!"

³⁴ Shaphan's grandson was Micaiah son of Gemariah.

³⁵ These were Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah son of Shaphan.

What a good idea it had been to tell Baruch to hide himself and Jeremiah! No one knew where they were, and no one could find them.

Now the Lord spoke to Jeremiah again. “Jeremiah, take another roll and write in it everything you wrote in the first roll. King Jehoiakim has burnt it.” The Lord told Jeremiah to add this to the book: “You didn’t like reading that the King of Babylon will destroy this land, and you burned the book. Now, none of your sons will be king.” Jeremiah and Baruch began to write the book again. They wrote everything that had been written in the first book, and they added even more to it.

The king and most of his officers had read and heard Jeremiah’s words before burning the book in the fire. They could have seen this as an invitation from God to repent and turn to Him, but they didn’t. They were too proud to repent. They rejected God even more than before. How could God help a nation that did not want His help?

Baruch was sad about what was happening. But Jeremiah said to him, “Baruch, the Lord says to you, you think you are going through big trouble. But look at what the Lord is facing: He has to tear down what took Him hundreds of years to build. He has to pull up what He has planted.” God had built up Israel and cared for it, just like a man builds a special building or plants a beautiful garden. But they rejected Him and chose to live without Him. God was heartbroken because He would have to let them have their choice, but He knew that without His presence and protection, they would be destroyed, just like buildings are torn down or gardens are pulled up.

After this, things got worse and worse for King Jehoiakim. He was already a servant of King Nebuchadnezzar; he had to pay taxes to him. If Jehoiakim had continued to obey Nebuchadnezzar, then he

and the people of Judah would have been safe and at peace. But he was only obedient to Babylon for three years, then he broke his promise to Nebuchadnezzar and rebelled.

God could not protect Jehoiakim any longer. He was attacked by the Syrians and the Ammonites. Finally, the Babylonian army attacked, because Nebuchadnezzar was angry with Jehoiakim. They took Jehoiakim to Babylon as a prisoner. Nebuchadnezzar also took many of the gold vessels from the temple, and put them in the temple of his own god in Babylon.

King Jehoiakim died in Babylon. His own people didn't miss him because he had been such a bad king. The leaders of Babylon hated him because he had shown them that he could not be trusted. His son Jehoiachin was only king for two months before Nebuchadnezzar removed him, too. Just like Jeremiah had warned, none of Jehoiakim's sons became king after that.

God had given Jehoiakim every chance to turn to Him and repent. He had even sent him a book with His words! How sad that Jehoiakim rejected it all! God is also reaching us. He has given us His Word so that we can understand what He's really like, how much He loves us, and how He longs to heal us and save us. Will you hear His Word and accept it? Don't be like Jehoiakim, who refused to hear!

60. A Yoke for Judah

**The Lord God hath opened mine ear,
and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back.
Isaiah 50:5 (KJV)**



*2 Kings 24:17-20; 2 Chronicles 36:11-13; Jeremiah 27; 28; 29:1-10; 52:1-3. |
Prophets and Kings Chapter 36*

King Jehoiakim was not the king of Judah anymore; Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had taken him captive. Even Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin, had been taken prisoner. Nebuchadnezzar decided that Mattaniah, Jehoiakim's younger brother, would be king of Judah now. And he changed Mattaniah's name to Zedekiah. Zedekiah didn't know it yet, but he would become the last king of Judah.

Zedekiah became king when he was twenty-one years old, and he reigned for eleven years. He was not a good king. He could see that his kingdom was in deep trouble, but he did not turn to God. He had the Scriptures and all of God's warnings from Jeremiah, but he still wouldn't listen, because he didn't like what Jeremiah said to him.

At first, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon trusted King Zedekiah and let the people live in Judah. If Zedekiah had been obedient and respectful to Nebuchadnezzar, things would have gone well for his people. His good behavior could also have helped Nebuchadnezzar to know God. Jeremiah kept on saying, "God will not help you win against Babylon, but He will save your life if you obey them. Don't fight against them; if you do, you will die." He also

warned King Zedekiah, “Judah has been so wicked, that soon Jerusalem will be destroyed.”

This was not what King Zedekiah and the rest of Judah wanted to hear. They wanted to be rid of Babylon; they didn’t want to have to obey Nebuchadnezzar. While Jeremiah said these things, there were other men, false prophets, who were giving the opposite message. “The Lord will help us defeat the Babylonians!” they lied. Jeremiah urged the people, “Don’t believe these false prophets! Be obedient to Babylon. You will be servants of Babylon for seventy years. Accept this peacefully; don’t fight against it.”

One day, some messengers came to speak to King Zedekiah. These messengers were from Tyre, Moab, Edom and some other nations. These nations had a plan, and they wanted Zedekiah to join them. They explained, “We want to form a huge army so that we can fight against Babylon and win. Will you join us?”

It sounded very tempting, but Jeremiah advised King Zedekiah, “Don’t do it! Tell the kings of these countries that they shouldn’t do it, either.” To make his message clear, Jeremiah did something strange: he put a wooden yoke around his neck. With this yoke on, he said, “King Zedekiah, you should put a yoke around your neck, and send yokes to each of these kings. You all need to understand that Babylon will have power over all the nations, and they must all submit to Babylon. If you fight against Babylon, you will be destroyed. If you obey Babylon, you will be able to stay in your own lands. Don’t listen to the false prophets who tell you otherwise. This is what the Lord says.”

King Zedekiah and his officers listened, amazed. But the false prophets wouldn’t give up; they kept on trying to convince the people that Jeremiah was wrong. A false prophet called Hananiah

announced, “In two years, the Lord will bring back all the golden vessels that Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple!” This was so different from what Jeremiah had said! Jeremiah’s message had been, “There are still a few golden vessels left in the temple. Nebuchadnezzar will take them all to Babylon!”

Hananiah the false prophet continued saying, “The Lord will bring back King Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim, and He will bring back all the captives of Judah.” Jeremiah said, “We would all like the Lord to do that. We would like to see the golden vessels and the captives return to Judah. But remember, most prophets in the past had to prophesy about the bad things that were about to happen.”

Hananiah walked over to Jeremiah. Jeremiah was still wearing the yoke around his neck. Hananiah took the yoke off and broke it. Then he lied, “This is how the Lord will remove the yoke of Babylon from all the nations. In two years, we will all be free from Babylon.” Jeremiah decided not to insist anymore, because clearly, they did not want to listen. He left the room.

Then God sent Jeremiah with a new message for Hananiah. Jeremiah said, “Hananiah, you have broken the wooden yoke that I had around my neck. But now the nations will have yokes of iron, which are even worse than yokes of wood. All these nations will serve Babylon.” Jeremiah also warned Hananiah, “You have not been given a message from God; you have been speaking lies. Because you have taught the people to rebel against God, this year you will die.” God wanted to save Hananiah. He was warning him, “You are about to die! Come to me for help!” But Hananiah did not repent. And just as Jeremiah had prophesied, Hananiah died two months later.

The people preferred to listen to the false prophets rather than listen to Jeremiah, and this began to show in their behavior. They

were not peaceful. They did not accept the authority of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar began to suspect that King Zedekiah might not be loyal to him. He ordered Zedekiah to come to Babylon to see him.

When King Zedekiah met with King Nebuchadnezzar, he promised, “I will be loyal to you.” King Nebuchadnezzar wasn’t sure whether Zedekiah really meant it. He looked at Zedekiah seriously and said, “Promise me this in the name of the Lord God of Israel.” Nebuchadnezzar had been learning about God from Daniel and his friends, and he believed that God could help Zedekiah to keep his promise. He believed in God more than Zedekiah himself did!

What a big honor Zedekiah had! If only he had kept his promise! He could have been an example to King Nebuchadnezzar – an example of how a king should let God guide him in all his decisions. But sadly, Zedekiah didn’t keep his promise. It wasn’t long before Nebuchadnezzar realized that Zedekiah could not be trusted.

How sad that King Zedekiah, knowing all that he knew, chose to rebel against God and against the king of Babylon. How different the story of Judah would have been, if only they had listened to what God was saying to them! They listened to the counsel of false prophets and ignored the counsel of God through Jeremiah. What counsel are we listening to today? Do you accept God’s advice to you in His Word? Ask Him to open your ear today, and to help you to receive His Word and not reject it.

61. Jeremiah's Object Lessons

And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart. Jeremiah 24:7 (KJV)

 *Jeremiah 4; 17:1,13; 13:1-11,23; 23; 24*

Jeremiah faithfully gave God's messages to the people. Most of them didn't listen, but Jeremiah continued speaking. If at least one person paid attention and repented, it would be worth it.

While Jeremiah gave his messages, the false prophets gave theirs. Jeremiah said, "These false messengers are like shepherds that are hurting their sheep! They are sending the sheep away instead of bringing them close and protecting them." Jeremiah continued, "God promises that He will gather all the scattered sheep that are left, and will bring them together. They will become strong again." Even after the people of Judah were scattered in different countries, God would bring them together once more. Jeremiah said, "God will give them new shepherds that will care for them properly." The best Shepherd of all would be God's Son, the Messiah. This was the most comforting hope of all.

One day, just after the Babylonians had taken King Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin and all the carpenters and smiths away from Jerusalem and into Babylon, God showed Jeremiah a vision. He saw

two baskets of figs in front of the Temple. One of the baskets had sweet, ripe figs which were good to eat. The other basket had bad figs that couldn't be eaten. The Lord told Jeremiah, "The good figs are like the faithful people of Judah who have been carried away captive. I will watch over them; even though they have been taken away, it will turn into something good. I will care for them, build them and plant them; I will not pluck them up. They will know me and follow me with their whole hearts, they will be my people and I will be their God." Then God said, "As for the bad figs, they are those who are still in this land, and who have fled to Egypt. They will be taken to other countries, but it will not be good for them. They will end up dying from the sword, famine and pestilence."

The good figs reminded Jeremiah that there were still many people who loved God and followed Him with all their heart; Jeremiah was not the only faithful one. God knew each of these people and carefully watched over them. Even in strange lands, they would be witnesses for Him. As for the unfaithful ones, there was not much that God could do for them; they had made their decision, and they refused to repent or change.

God said that the sins of the unfaithful of Judah were written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond; their sins were written on their hearts as if they were carved into stone. The people were so set in their sin, that it could not be erased anymore, just like words carved in stone could not be erased. Jeremiah said sadly, "These people have left the fountain of living waters!" God is like living waters, the source of life, and the people were rejecting Him. Their hearts were so hardened against God that He said, "Can an Ethiopian change the color of his skin? Can a leopard change his spots?" No,

none of these things can be changed. The people could have come to God for help to change, but they refused to do it.

Jeremiah also invited the people, “Plow the ground which is now hard; don’t plant where there are thorns.” This meant that when the people rejected the truth and chose evil, it was as if they were planting on bad soil. Nothing good could come out of that!

Jeremiah warned, “The lion will come out of the forest and hurt you!” Satan is often described as a lion. The people were completely unprotected from Satan’s attacks (the lion’s attacks), because of their own bad choices.³⁶

Then God instructed Jeremiah, “Put on a new linen loincloth, and do not put it in water.” Then He instructed, “Take the new linen loincloth that you’re wearing, and hide it in a hole by the Euphrates River.” Jeremiah did this. A few days later, God said, “Go and get your loincloth from its hiding place.” Jeremiah went and dug his loincloth out. The loincloth was completely ruined, of course.

God said, “This is what Judah will end up like. They have so much pride right now, but it will all be ruined, just like this loincloth. I kept Judah and Israel close to me, just like you wore the loincloth close to your body. But they refused to hear me.” Israel, away from God, was just as defenseless and useless as a loincloth hidden in a hole.

God gave Jeremiah illustrations of everyday objects, so that the people would constantly remember His words. Every day, they would see sheep, shepherds, figs and fountains. They would look at the forests and remember that there were lions and leopards hiding there.

³⁶ The kingdom of Babylon was also represented by a lion in Bible prophecy (Jeremiah 50:43-44; Daniel 7:4). The Babylonians also built monuments with winged lions. It makes sense that Jeremiah would also be saying “the lion will hurt you,” because Babylon would soon conquer Judah.

They would think about Jeremiah's words every time they plowed their fields. Whenever they got dressed, they would remember what God had said about the ruined loincloth. These reminders were constant invitations from God to turn to Him. How sad that most of them rejected what God was offering them!

God gives us invitations, too. He longs for us to come to Him. He longs to give us His Spirit. Don't be like the people of Judah who ignored God's many invitations to come to Him. Will you accept God's offer to you today?

62. Letters to the Exiles

**For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.
Jeremiah 29:11 (KJV)**

 *2 Chronicles 36:14-16; Ezekiel 8, Jeremiah 29. | Prophets and Kings Chapter 36*

The army of Babylon had already come twice to Judah, and taken captives. They took the most educated men and the best-skilled workers as captives to Babylon, to work for King Nebuchadnezzar. Among these captives were Daniel, his three friends, and Prophet Ezekiel.

Jeremiah wanted to encourage those who had been taken captive. Even as servants in a foreign land, they could be witnesses for God. God could turn their unpleasant situation into something good for them and for the Babylonians. Jeremiah found out that King Zedekiah was going to travel to Babylon to see Nebuchadnezzar³⁷, so he wrote a letter to the exiles and asked one of Zedekiah's men to take the letter for him.

In this letter, Jeremiah wrote, "The Lord says, you will be captive for seventy years, so settle down in the land where you are now. Build houses, plant gardens, and let your grown-up children get married and have children of their own. Live peacefully in the land where you've been taken. God has plans for you. He wants to do

³⁷ See story 60, "A Yoke for Judah", in this book.

good to you and give you peace. When the time comes, God will gather you and bring you back to Jerusalem.”

Jeremiah also wrote, “Those who are still in the city, the false prophets, are like bad figs that cannot be eaten. They will be destroyed by sword, famine and pestilence. They are evil, because they refused to listen to the messages God sent them through His prophets.”

Then Jeremiah warned the exiles about two false prophets called Ahab and Zedekiah³⁸. These two men prophesied lies. Jeremiah warned, “King Nebuchadnezzar will put these men to death.” They had probably encouraged the people to rebel against Babylon, and made King Nebuchadnezzar angry. God was telling the people, “Be peaceful. Serve the Babylonians now that you are captive.”

The exiles read Jeremiah’s letter. One of them, Shemaiah, didn’t like the letter at all. He was a false prophet. He wanted to stop Jeremiah from giving any more messages, so he quickly wrote a letter to Priest Zephaniah³⁹. In his letter, he asked this priest, and all the other priests, to stop Jeremiah from giving any more messages. He wrote, “Why haven’t you rebuked Jeremiah for writing such a message?”

Priest Zephaniah read the letter, then he showed it to Jeremiah. What could Jeremiah do? The Lord said to Jeremiah, “Write another letter to the captives. Tell them that I did not send Shemaiah to the people; he has prophesied lies, and he has caused the captives to believe in lies. He taught the people to rebel against me. Because of

³⁸ These were not the kings Ahab and Zedekiah, although they had the same names.

³⁹ Not the same Zephaniah as the prophet.

this, Shemaiah will not have any children. Also, he will not get to see the good things that I will do for my people when the time comes.”

God also told Jeremiah, “Write all the words I have spoken to you in a book.” In this book, Jeremiah wrote that the people would enter into captivity, but that eventually God would gather the captives and bring them back. He assured the people of God’s love and compassion. “There is hope in the end,” Jeremiah wrote. He wrote that God’s people would eventually enter into God’s covenant, the New Covenant – the covenant that God had always longed to enter into with His people, but which they had never fully accepted. In this covenant, God’s people would let God work through them. They would not stop Him by refusing His words. We are now at a time in history in which we are able to enter into this wonderful covenant with God! Would you like to?

There was another man who also wrote messages from God which were similar to what Jeremiah was saying. This man was Prophet Ezekiel. While Jeremiah wrote from Jerusalem, Ezekiel wrote from Babylon, where he was captive. Even as a captive, Ezekiel let God use him. He shared messages of comfort and hope from God to the other captives.

Ezekiel wrote, “It’s foolish for King Zedekiah to listen to the false prophets. The truth is that Jerusalem will be destroyed! The false prophets are lying when they say that Jerusalem will be safe!”

God showed Ezekiel visions of the evil things that the leaders of Judah were doing. Even inside the temple, the leaders were committing sins that were unthinkable. They had hidden idols inside the rooms of the temple and worshiped them. They even worshiped the sun! An angel showed these things to Ezekiel, and said, “Have you seen this? Look at the terrible things that they are doing! Look at

what the priests and the false prophets are doing in the temple! They are doing what the heathens do!” God could not be with Judah if their leaders did these things. Now there was nothing more God could do for them.

Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah understood that Judah would soon come to an end because the leaders had abandoned God. They had made fun of every warning from God’s prophets. They had said smugly, “Those things won’t happen for a very long time!” But Ezekiel insisted, “No; these things will happen very soon.”

God cared for His people, so He sent messages to them through His prophets. Those who received His words would find peace in whatever situation they were in. God cares about you, too. He wants to comfort and encourage you in whatever situation you’re facing. He warns you about the dangers you might be in. Will you accept His words? Will you believe that He has “thoughts of peace” towards you?

63. Freeing the Slaves

**Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is,
there is liberty.**

2 Corinthians 3:17 (KJV)



Jeremiah 34

The Babylonians grew tired of the rebellion of Judah. King Nebuchadnezzar had been gentle with King Zedekiah, but Zedekiah had not been grateful. Zedekiah had promised Nebuchadnezzar, “I will be loyal to you,” but he soon forgot that promise. He didn’t want to be Nebuchadnezzar’s servant anymore, so he decided to ask Egypt to help him fight against Babylon. Jeremiah had warned him, “Don’t rebel against Babylon; obey King Nebuchadnezzar.” But King Zedekiah didn’t care; he wanted to be free.

Nebuchadnezzar found out that Zedekiah had asked Egypt for help. He quickly sent his army to surround Jerusalem. He would not be kind to Judah anymore, because their king had not been honest with him.

King Zedekiah looked at the huge Babylonian army that surrounded Jerusalem. What could he do? He wanted to be free from Babylon! Suddenly he had an idea: “We will free our own slaves inside Jerusalem!” He announced, “All Hebrew slaves must be set free!” If he couldn’t free the whole city from Babylon, he could at least give a little bit of freedom to those who were slaves.

The leaders and the people agreed with King Zedekiah. They made a covenant among themselves: they would set their slaves free. To make this covenant, they did what the nations around them did: they killed a calf and cut it into two pieces. Then they walked between the two parts of the calf. By doing this, they were announcing: “I am making a promise. If I break my promise, I will end up dead just like this calf.” Do you remember another story in the Bible in which someone made a covenant by cutting animals in half? It was Abraham, when he made a covenant with God⁴⁰. God never asked people to make covenants this way; it was the custom of the heathen nations. But God took their covenant seriously. They had made a promise, and God expected them to keep it.

King Zedekiah and his leaders announced to all the Hebrew slaves in Jerusalem: “You are free. You don’t have to serve us anymore. You may go.” What a relief these slaves must have felt! The Babylonian army was still surrounding the city, but this little bit of freedom from their own Hebrew masters made them feel so much better.

It was easy for King Zedekiah and his men to set their slaves free while Babylon was surrounding them. They couldn’t go and work in their fields. They didn’t feel such a great loss when they freed their slaves, because there wasn’t so much work that they could do, anyway.

But suddenly, things changed. The people in Jerusalem received news that gave them hope: “The Egyptian army is coming! They will attack Babylon and help Jerusalem to be free!” Now they saw that the Babylonian army was leaving Jerusalem. They were going to meet up

⁴⁰ See Book 2, *The Books of Moses*, story 18 “A Man-Made Covenant”.

with the Egyptian army and fight against them. Suddenly Jerusalem was not surrounded by the Babylonian army anymore.

King Zedekiah and the people felt relieved. “Babylon has left Jerusalem! They won’t come back! Now we will be free!” They began to think of all the things they wanted to do now that they were free from Babylon. They could go back to their fields. They could work on their businesses again. Suddenly they thought of all the slaves they had freed. Now they wished they hadn’t let them go. “We will go back to our normal activities now that the Babylonian army has left. We need our slaves back!” they decided. They called all the slaves they had freed, and announced, “You now have to return to us. You have to obey us and work for us again.”

What kind of leaders were these? It had been their own decision to free their slaves – they had even entered into a covenant to do this! But now they were changing their minds. How sad and disappointed the slaves must have felt! There was nothing they could do; they were slaves again, whether they liked it or not. How unfair and selfish this was! The leaders longed for freedom from Babylon, but they could not even give freedom to their own people.

God was not pleased with what King Zedekiah and the leaders had done to the slaves. The Lord said to Jeremiah, “I have told the Israelites, since the time of Moses, that they should never make anyone be their slave for longer than six years. Every seventh year, slaves should be set free. But no one has obeyed this instruction. Zedekiah did the right thing when he freed the slaves. It is not good that they are forcing their slaves to work for them again.” God let them know what the natural consequences would be for them: “You will not have your freedom, either.” Also, hadn’t they promised that if they broke their word, they would end up like the calf they had

killed? God let them know that their lives were in danger: “You will end up being killed by your enemies, or by pestilence or famine.” Would they listen to God’s warning and repent? Would they set their slaves free again? Sadly, they didn’t. They could have done the right thing, but they refused.

God had never wanted the Israelites to have slaves. It was not His plan. But just like with so many other customs, the Israelites had insisted on doing what other nations did. God then gave them laws so that they would treat their slaves more kindly than other nations did. But the people had not listened.

King Zedekiah got his slaves back, but he had no peace. How could he have peace? He was not following any of God’s instructions! He called Jeremiah to come to speak with him. “Pray for our nation!” he begged. Jeremiah sadly said: “The Egyptians will return to their own land; they will lose this battle. The Babylonians will soon come back to Jerusalem, and they will destroy it.”

King Zedekiah longed for freedom – the freedom that he had now taken away from his slaves. If only he would turn to God, hear His voice and receive His Spirit, he would find the best kind of freedom – the freedom from sin and guilt. This is the freedom that God wants to give to each of us. Do you want this freedom? Ask God for His Spirit, and for help to hear His voice, so you can enjoy the freedom that He wants to give you.

64. Jeremiah in the Dungeons

And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death. Jeremiah 21:8 (KJV)



Jeremiah 21; 37; 38. | Prophets and Kings Chapter 36, 37

Now that the Babylonian army was not surrounding Jerusalem⁴¹, Jeremiah decided to leave the city for a few days. There were some things he needed to do outside the city, and he knew he would have to do them quickly, before the Babylonians returned. But just as he reached the city gate, one of the guards stopped him. The guard accused him, “You’re leaving us to join the Babylonians!” Jeremiah answered, “That’s not true; I’m not joining the Babylonians!” The guard didn’t listen. He took Jeremiah to the leaders of Judah.

The leaders were already angry with Jeremiah, so they used this as a chance to beat him and put him in prison, even though he hadn’t done anything wrong. They put him in a horrible dungeon that belonged to a man called Jonathan.

All too soon, the Babylonian army returned and surrounded Jerusalem. King Zedekiah was worried. He took Jeremiah out of the dungeon, brought him secretly into his palace and asked him anxiously, “Is there any message from the Lord?” He hoped that this time Jeremiah would give him some good news. But Jeremiah

⁴¹ See the previous story.

answered, “The Lord says that you will be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon.”

Then Jeremiah spoke to Zedekiah honestly: “What have I done to offend you and your officers? Why have you put me in prison? There have been false prophets who told you that you would win against Babylon. Do you remember how they died? Now, please, don’t send me back to Jonathan’s dungeon. I might die there.”

King Zedekiah liked Jeremiah and wanted to follow his advice, but he had a weak character. He was afraid his officers would mock him or be angry if he obeyed Jeremiah, so he only did what they wanted him to do. King Zedekiah should have let Jeremiah go free, but he was too afraid of his officers to do that. But at least he sent him to a better prison: the prison court. Here he was at least given food. Zedekiah commanded, “Give Jeremiah a piece of bread every day, until the bread in the city is finished.” That’s how bad things were in Jerusalem – they were running out of food, because the Babylonian army had completely surrounded them, and no food could be brought into the city.

Even from his prison, Jeremiah kept saying to the leaders, “Surrender to Babylon! Don’t fight against them, or you will be destroyed! God is now offering you the way of life: go to the Babylonians now and surrender to them, and you will live. Will you choose the way of life, or the way of death?”

The leaders didn’t like what Jeremiah was saying. They told the king, “He is speaking against our nation! Put him to death!” But was Jeremiah really speaking against Judah? No, he wasn’t. He was trying to save their lives! Weak King Zedekiah was afraid to defend Jeremiah, so he let the leaders put him in another dungeon, one that belonged to a man named Malchiah. This dungeon was even worse

than Jonathan's dungeon. It was so deep that they had to lower Jeremiah down in ropes. The bottom of the dungeon was just deep, wet mud. Jeremiah sank into the cold mud. He had no food or water inside this horrible place.

One of the king's servants was sad and worried when he heard that Jeremiah was in this deep, muddy pit. He was an Ethiopian eunuch called Ebed-Melech. He went to the king and begged, "Please take him out of there, or he will die!" King Zedekiah agreed. He said, "Take thirty men with you, and get Jeremiah out of the pit." Ebed-Melech quickly made ropes out of old rags. He lowered them to Jeremiah and called out, "Put these under your arms so we can pull you up!" What relief Jeremiah must have felt! Once he was out of the dungeon, King Zedekiah allowed him to go back to the prison court.

Then King Zedekiah brought Jeremiah secretly into his palace one more time. "What message does God have for Jerusalem?" he asked anxiously. Jeremiah answered seriously, "If I tell you, won't you put me to death? And will you follow my advice?" King Zedekiah promised him, "I will not put you to death, and I won't let the leaders do anything to you."

Jeremiah advised him, "If you go to the Babylonian leaders and surrender, then you will live, and Jerusalem won't be burnt down. But if you refuse to surrender, then this city will be burnt, and you will not escape." Judah was going to be taken captive by Babylon. But if King Zedekiah obeyed God this time, then their captivity was not going to be so terrible. There was still a chance for this king to hear God and do something for his people.

Zedekiah admitted to Jeremiah, "I'm afraid of what the people will do to me if I surrender." Jeremiah promised him, "They will not

do anything to you. Please, O King, obey the word of the Lord, and you will live!”

Zedekiah doubted. How embarrassing it would be to have to admit that he had made a mistake, and that he should have listened to God sooner! He felt he couldn’t change now. Jeremiah looked at him and began to cry. With tears falling, he begged the king, “Save yourself! Save your people! You will die, and Babylon will take all the treasures of Judah!”

Zedekiah liked Jeremiah. But he was so weak in character that he rejected his advice. He said stubbornly, “Jeremiah, if you let anyone know that I spoke to you, you will die. You may only tell the leaders that you asked me not to send you back to Malchiah’s dungeon. Don’t tell them the rest of what you told me.”

If only King Zedekiah had been brave enough to obey God! His officers would have respected him, and he would have prevented so much suffering for Judah! But instead of choosing the way of life that God was offering him, he doubted and waited, until it was too late. God offers us the way of life, too. He wants us to avoid “the way of death”, because He wants to give us life, joy and peace. Do you accept God’s offer to you today?

65. A Prisoner Buys Land

Ah Lord God! Thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee.
Jeremiah 32:17 (KJV)

 *Jeremiah 32, 33 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 38*

Jeremiah was a prisoner in King Zedekiah's prison court. What had he done to end up there? He had told King Zedekiah, "Surrender to Babylon! You will not win if you fight against them. Save yourself and your people, and submit to Babylon!" God was using Jeremiah to give the king and the leaders of Judah this message, but this was not what they wanted to hear. Jeremiah's words made them angry, so they treated him really badly. And now he was in prison.

While Jeremiah was a prisoner in this court, he received a message from the Lord: "Your cousin Hanameel will come to see you. He wants to sell his field in Anathoth, and he will ask you if you want to buy it." Jeremiah's cousin needed the money, but he wanted the land to stay in the family, and he was hoping that Jeremiah would buy it.

This was a very bad time to buy land. Judah was about to be overcome by Babylon, and Jeremiah was saying, "Babylon will win. We will be servants of Babylon for seventy years. We will be taken to other lands for many years." It did not sound reasonable at all to buy land now! But Jeremiah knew that God wanted him to buy this land. Why? Because he had faith that, after seventy years, his family would

return to this land. He needed to show the people that, even though he believed that they would soon be captives, he also believed that one day God would bring them back. By buying the land, he was letting them know that there was hope, and that God would give the Hebrews their land again after seventy years.

Even though it seemed foolish, Jeremiah agreed to buy the field from his cousin. He asked some men to be witnesses while he bought the field. He wrote on two scrolls that he had bought the field. One of these scrolls remained open; the other one was sealed and kept in a safe place. This is how people bought land in those days. Then Jeremiah paid seventeen shekels of silver to his cousin Hanameel, and he asked his scribe, Baruch, to keep the scroll for him.

Now Jeremiah said to Baruch, to Hanameel and to the other men who were there as witnesses: “The Lord says to keep these scrolls in a clay vessel, so they will be safe. They will be kept there a long time. But the Lord also says that the day will come when people will own land and houses in Judah again.”

Even though God had instructed Jeremiah to buy the land, Jeremiah began to wonder if he had done the right thing. It seemed so strange to buy land that he would never use! He knew he would not be alive in seventy years, when his people returned to the land. Was it worth it to do this, just to encourage the people of Judah? Would God really bring His people back to the land in seventy years? It seemed like there were so few who were following God! But he didn’t give in to his doubts. Instead, he prayed and told God how he felt.

He prayed, “Lord, you have made heaven and earth. There is nothing too hard for you. You are kind and loving, and you allow every one to receive the consequences of their own choices. You did

so much for Israel, but they did not obey your voice. Now the Babylonians have surrounded us. You warned us that this would happen. Now you have told me to buy this land, even though the Babylonians will take this city.”

The Lord answered Jeremiah, “Is anything too hard for me? King Nebuchadnezzar will destroy Jerusalem because of the bad choices of the people of Israel and Judah. They have turned their backs to me, and have turned their faces from me. They have not listened to my teachings. They have chosen to worship idols in the most horrible way possible.” With these terrible choices, they completely drove God away from them.

Then God continued speaking, and this time He gave words of hope: “I will gather my people out of all the countries where they were taken, and I will bring them back. They will live here safely. They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will bring them all the good that I have promised them.”

Later God spoke to him again: “I will heal Judah and Israel. The captives will return. I will forgive their sins. All the nations on earth will hear what I have done for them. Now this land is empty, but it will be filled again with joyful people and with flocks of animals.”

God would turn Judah’s captivity into something good. He would still work through the captives who heard His voice. God had asked Jeremiah to buy this field, which he would never get to enjoy himself, just so that His people would be encouraged. Whenever the faithful ones remembered that Jeremiah had bought land, they could say, “Nothing is too hard for the Lord! He will restore us!”

Nothing is too hard for the Lord. Does it seem too hard for Him to change our hearts? Does it seem too hard for the gospel to be

preached all over the earth? He can make it possible. Ask Him to give you faith that He can do all that He intends to do through you.

66. Jerusalem is Destroyed

And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy. 2 Chronicles 36:15-16 (KJV)

 *2 Kings 25:1-21; 2 Chronicles 36:17-21; Jeremiah 39; 40:1-6; 52 | Prophets and Kings Chapter 37*

King Zedekiah sat, thinking and doubting. Jeremiah had said, “Surrender to the king of Babylon! Don’t fight against him!”⁴² Zedekiah believed Jeremiah, and in his heart, he wanted to follow Jeremiah’s advice. But fear stopped him. He was afraid that his officers would make fun of him. He was afraid that the people would stop respecting him for changing his mind. He was terrified of what would happen if he admitted, “I made a mistake. I should have surrendered to the army of Babylon long ago. I should have listened to Jeremiah sooner!”

As King Zedekiah doubted, he waited. But time was running out. Food was running out, too, because the Babylonian army had already been surrounding Jerusalem for eighteen months. Jeremiah looked at King Zedekiah and cried, tears rolling down his face. He pleaded,

⁴² See the previous story.

“Please, King Zedekiah, you can save your people from so much suffering! You can save your own life! Please surrender!”

All too soon, the Babylonian army entered Jerusalem. The soldiers had finally managed to break a section of the wall so they could come in. And when that happened, Zedekiah had no more time to follow God’s advice. All too soon, the Babylonian soldiers began to search for the Hebrew people inside the city and kill them with their swords.

The soldiers then found the few golden vessels that were still in the temple, and took them to Babylon, just as Jeremiah had warned. They also found all the treasures of the king and of the leaders and took these, too.

Then they broke the city walls completely. They went to Solomon’s beautiful temple and set fire to it, until it was destroyed. They also burnt down the rich palaces that were in Jerusalem. All the expensive buildings which had once made the Jews so proud were now gone.

A few stronger men managed to escape the city during the night. King Zedekiah was among them. But they weren’t free for long; the Babylonian soldiers caught them and took them to the king of Babylon. Zedekiah now had to face King Nebuchadnezzar one more time. Nebuchadnezzar had always been kind to him, but not anymore. Zedekiah had shown Nebuchadnezzar that he could not be trusted, so there was no more friendship between them. With horror, Zedekiah watched as the Babylonian soldiers killed his sons in front of him. Then they took out his eyes and left him blind. He had not wanted to see God’s truths through Jeremiah before; now he could not see anything at all. Then the soldiers put fetters on him and took him to Babylon. He remained a prisoner in Babylon until he died.

The Babylonians killed most of the people in Jerusalem. Those who were not killed were taken captive to Babylon, to become servants of King Nebuchadnezzar. As for the leaders of Israel, they were taken to Babylon first, then killed there as traitors. Only a few of the poor, uneducated people, who had nothing, were left in the land of Judah to grow whatever crops they could.

Jeremiah was in prison in Jerusalem while all this was happening, but God protected him. King Nebuchadnezzar commanded his soldiers, “Take Jeremiah, and treat him well. Do as he tells you.” How strange that Babylon, the enemy, was treating Jeremiah with kindness, when his own people had treated him with such cruelty! The king must have heard that Jeremiah had advised Zedekiah to surrender, so he treated him well.

Nebuchadnezzar decided, “Gedaliah will be governor over the people that remain in Judah.” Gedaliah was the grandson of Shaphan, the scribe who had read the Scriptures to King Josiah many years before⁴³. He was an honest man, and Nebuchadnezzar trusted him. He would be a good leader, and loyal to the Babylonians.

There was one more man who was kept safe during this terrible attack: it was Ebed-Melech, the Ethiopian eunuch who had taken Jeremiah out of Malchiah’s deep, muddy pit. Just before Jerusalem was attacked, God had given Jeremiah a message for Ebed-Melech: “You will see Jerusalem attacked and destroyed, but you will be safe. The Babylonians won’t kill you; your life will be your reward, because

⁴³ See story 59 in this book “Jehoiakim Rejects God’s Scrolls”, to see how Gedaliah’s relatives (Gemariah and Micaiah) begged king Jehoiakim to stop burning the scrolls that Jeremiah had written. Gemariah was Gedaliah’s uncle, and Micaiah was his cousin.

you have trusted in the Lord.” If only more of the leaders had been like Ebed-Melech, they would have lived, too!

The Babylonian soldiers found Jeremiah and put chains on him. They probably didn’t know who he was, and they chained him like they did everybody else, and they took him and many other people to a city called Ramah, in Judah. Here the Babylonian captain realized that Jeremiah was chained, when he was not supposed to be a prisoner. He quickly set Jeremiah free, saying, “You can decide where you want to go. If you come to Babylon with me, I’ll take care of you. If you want to stay here in Judah among the Jewish people who remain, you may. King Nebuchadnezzar has chosen Gedaliah to be their governor.” Then the captain gave Jeremiah some food and a gift, and let him go. Jeremiah chose to join Gedaliah and the Jewish people who were with him. Both Jeremiah and Gedaliah agreed that they had to obey the Babylonians now, and not rebel against them.

Gedaliah said to people of Judah who were left, “Don’t be afraid to be servants of the Babylonians. Live in the land, plant your crops, and be obedient to the king of Babylon, and all will be well with you.” This was all they could do; God had told them through Jeremiah that they had to submit to Babylon. Their time as a nation was over; the kingdom of Judah no longer existed.

For around 900 years, the Israelites had lived in this land. God had given them everything they needed, and every opportunity to live peaceful, prosperous lives. Sadly, they had rejected His words. Now everything was destroyed. Nothing was left of Jerusalem’s walls, buildings, palaces or temple. The land would be empty for seventy years, except for the few people who remained. The people had been so evil that they not only ruined their own lives, they had also been ruining the land. Now the land would rest; it would enjoy a Sabbath

of seventy years, to recover from all the evil that the Hebrews had done to it. Meanwhile, God would continue working through the captives who were still willing to hear His voice. He would not give up on His people. In seventy years, they would return, and He would start again. But for now, the land waited, empty.

God will try to reach us as long as there is hope, just like He reached out to the people of Israel and Judah. He loves us and will do all that is possible to save us. But in the end, the choice is ours, and He will respect it, just like He respected the choice of Judah to reject His guidance. Will we come into God's hedge of protection and let Him be our Father, our God and our Guide? Or will we reject His offer? What will you choose today?

Kings and Prophets of Israel and Judah

PROPHETS IN JUDAH	KINGDOM OF JUDAH	KINGDOM OF ISRAEL	PROPHETS IN ISRAEL
Samuel	Saul		
Nathan	David		
	Solomon		
Shemaiah	Rehoboam	Jeroboam I	Ahijah
Azariah		Nadab	Jehu
	Abijah/Abijam	Baasha	
Hanani		Elah	
	Asa	Zimri	Micaiah
		Omri	Elijah
	Jehoshaphat	Ahab	Elisha
		Ahaziah	
	Jehoram/Joram	Jehoram/Joram	
	Ahaziah	Jehu	Elisha
		Jehoahaz	
		Joash/Jehoash	
	Athaliah	Jeroboam II	Jonah
	Joash/Jehoash		Amos
	Amaziah		Hosea
		Zechariah	
	Uzziah/Azariah	Shallum	
Isaiah		Menahem	
Micah	Jotham	Pekahiah	
		Pekah	
	Ahaz	Hoshea	

**ASSYRIAN
CAPTIVITY**

Hezekiah

Manasseh

Amon

Josiah

Jehoahaz

Eliakim/Jehoiakim

Jeconiah/Coniah/Jehoiachin

Mattaniah/Zedekiah

Joel
Zephaniah
Habakkuk
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
Obadiah

BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

Daniel
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

Thematic Index

We have provided this index to help you reference specific stories. The numbers **refer to the stories (not page numbers)** within the book.

Abiathar (priest) 1	Babylon 51, 54, 43, 45, 48, 56, 59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66
Abijah (Abijam), king 12	Bandage over eyes 20
Abijah (young son of Jeroboam) 11	Baruch 59, 65
Adonijah 1	Bears 30
Ahab 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21	Beelzebub 23
Ahaz 42	Benaiah 1
Ahaziah (king) 22, 24, 27	Ben-Hadad 20, 33, 34
Ahijab (prophet) 6	Blind army 33
Almond 53	Broken altar 11
Amaziah (idolatrous priest) 36	Bronze wall 57
Amaziah (king) 39	Burning down the palace 13
Ammonites 23, 39, 59	Buying land 65
Amos 36, 37	Captives, setting free 42
Anathoth (town) 57	Captivity of Israel 38
Army, heavenly 33	Captivity of Judah 66
Arrows 34	Carmel, mount 16
Asa 12	Cave 19
Ashtoreth 13	Chariot of fire 25
Assyria 35,37, 38, 39, 42, 43, 46, 51	Chariot, guiding 18
Athaliah 22, 27, 28	Cherith 14
Axehead, floating 29	Chest 28
Azariah (priest) 39	Clay vessel 55
Azariah (prophet) 12	Clock 45
Baal 13, 16, 17	Coals, hot 40
Baasha 12, 13	

Coat in 12 pieces 6, 11	Habakkuk 51
Covenant by cutting animals 63	Hadad 6
Covenant, New 62	Hanani (prophet) 13
Daniel 54	Hananiah false prophet 60
Destruction of idol at Bethel 50	Hand, withered 11
Ditches, digging 26	Hazael 34
Division of the kingdom 9	Healing the waters 29
Donkey 11	Herdsmen 36
Drought 14, 52, 57	Hezekiah 44, 45, 46, 56
Dungeons 64	Hiding 100 prophets 14
Ebed-Melech 64, 66	Hilkiah, High Priest 49
Ecclesiastes 7	Hiram of Tyre 4, 5
Edomites 6, 26, 39, 42, 52, 60	Horeb 19
Elah 13	Hosea 36
Eliakim 47, 54	Hoshea 37, 38
Elijah 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 25, 27	Huldah 49
Elisha 25, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34	Insulting God (Assyrians) 46, 51
Ephraim, mountains 12	Isaiah 40, 41, 42, 45, 46
Ethiopia 12	Jehoahaz 34, 54
Ethiopian 61, 64, 66	Jehoash/Joash of Israel 34, 39
Ezekiel 54, 62	Jehoiachin 54
Feeding the Syrian army 33	Jehoiada (High Priest) 28
Feeding, miraculous 29	Jehoiakim 54, 56, 58, 59
Feet, disease, 12	Jehoram 22, 26, 27
Figs 45, 61, 62	Jehoshaphat 22, 23, 26
Fire 36	Jehosheba 27, 28
Fire, calling down 24	Jehu (prophet) 22
Fish 35	Jeremiah 53, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60,
Flour 15	61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66
Freedom for slaves 63	Jericho 29
Gedaliah 66	Jeroboam 6, 9, 11, 12
Gehazi 31, 32	Jeroboam II 37
Gilgal 29	Jezebel 13, 14, 18, 21
Golden calf 11, 12, 50	Joab 1
Gomer 36	Joash of Judah 28

Joel 52
 Jonah 35
 Josiah 49, 50
 Jotham 39
 Leopard spots 61
 Lepers 33
 Leprous king 39
 Letters 62
 Lion 11, 20, 38, 51, 52, 61
 Locusts 36, 52
 Loincloth 61
 Manasseh 48
 Mattaniah 54
 Menahem 37
 Micah (prophet) 43, 46
 Micaiah (prophet) 22
 Moabites 23, 24, 26, 34, 60
 Mocking youth 30
 Naaman 32
 Naboth 21
 Nadab 13
 Nahum 51
 Nebuchadnezzar 54, 60, 62, 63, 66
 Niniveh 35
 Obadiah (governor of Ahab's house) 14, 16
 Obadiah (prophet) 52
 Oil 15, 30
 Omri 13
 Pashur 55
 Passover 44, 50
 Pekah 37
 Pekahiah 37
 Pen of iron 61
 Pharaoh 1, 6, 10, 37, 38, 54
 Philistines 27, 31, 42, 56
 Plant 35
 Poisonous gourd 29
 Pot, boiling 53
 Potter 55
 Prophetess 49
 Queen of Sheba 3
 Rain, former and latter 52
 Raising from the dead 15, 31, 34
 Ravens 14
 Rechabites 58
 Red valley 26
 Rehoboam 9, 10
 Rezon of Syria 6
 Room for Elisha 31
 Salt 29
 Samaria, founding 13
 Sarepta 15
 Schools of the prophets 25, 29, 30
 Scripture rolls 49, 50
 Scrolls, burning 59
 Seraphim 40
 Shallum 37
 Shaphan (and family) 49, 56, 59, 66
 Shebna 47
 Shemaiah (false prophet) 62
 Shemaiah (prophet) 9, 10
 Shiloh 56
 Shimei 1
 Ships 22, 35
 Shulammite girl 8
 Shunnamite woman 31
 Siege of Samaria 33, 38
 Signs, God offered 42
 Singing army 23

Slave girl, Hebrew 32
Solomon 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
Still small voice 19
Syria 6, 12, 19, 20, 22, 28, 32, 33, 34,
42, 59
Temple building and dedication 4
Temple, evil happening inside 62
Temple, fixing 44
Tomb carved from stone 47
Urijah (prophet) 56
Uzziah 39
Vineyard 21, 41
Widow 15, 30
Wisdom 2, 3
Women, two 3
Yoke 60
Zadok 1
Zechariah (king) 37
Zechariah (son of High Priest) 28
Zedekiah 54, 60, 62, 63, 64, 66
Zephaniah (priest) 62
Zephaniah (prophet) 51
Zimri 13

The Prophets and **THE KINGS**

The Israelites now had a king. But this was not God's original plan for them. What would God do now? He didn't give up on them. He kept reaching out to them through their kings and prophets. Would His people open up to all the blessings He had in store for them?

Read on to find out how God reached out tirelessly to people who, mostly, refused to listen. See how, eventually, after God had constantly pleaded with them and they had clearly rejected Him, they ended up exiled into foreign lands. Would there still be hope for them after this?

In these stories, you will learn about a God who is only loving and compassionate. He is ready to reach out even to a stubborn people, seeking to help and restore them.

