



DIVIDED KINGDOM 3
Lesson 9 - 2 Kings 5 - 13

What happened before?

The Kingdom of Israel was divided into two parts—Judah in the South and Israel in the North. The wicked kings led the people of God deeper and deeper into sin.

Even though things were bad, God was still at work. Through His prophet, Elijah, God prophesied that Jezebel and Ahab would die because of their sins. Ahab was killed in battle against the Syrians. Jezebel's time would soon come.

The great prophet Elijah was taken into heaven and Elisha took his place. These prophets rebuked the nation for their sins, but the people would not listen.

BIBLE STORY:

Naaman was the commander of the great army of the Syrians. He was highly respected by the king of Syria. The Lord had given the Syrians great victories under Naaman's leadership. But Naaman had a terrible skin disease called leprosy. There was no cure for this disease. One who has leprosy is called a leper.

In Naaman's house there lived a young Israelite girl. She had been taken from Israel and carried to Syria as a slave. She was a servant to Naaman's wife. When she heard of Naaman's disease, she told her mistress that there was a prophet in Israel who could cure him. When Naaman heard this, he asked permission of the Syrian king to go to Israel. The king was eager to help Naaman. He wrote a letter to the king of Israel and sent Naaman to him instead of the prophet. He sent with Naaman, a rich present of silver and gold and ten changes of clothes.

The king of Israel was upset. "Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man sends a man to me to heal him of his leprosy?" He thought the king of Syria was trying to make trouble between the two countries. Elisha sent word to the king to send Naaman to him. He wanted to show Naaman that he was a prophet who could heal him through the power of the God of Israel.

When Naaman arrived at Elisha's door, Elisha sent a servant to tell him to go dip seven times in the Jordan River and he would be cured. Naaman was angry. He expected Elisha to see him, pray to God and then heal him. He also did not understand why he should dip in the muddy Jordan when there were better rivers in his own city, Damascus, so Naaman went away in great anger.

After he had gone a little way, his servant asked Naaman, "If the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you have done it? If

so, then why not do this simple thing?" Naaman realized the servant was right and turned and went to the Jordan where he dipped seven times just as the man of God had told him. His flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was cleansed of his leprosy. Naaman hurried back to Elisha's house and offered gifts of silver, gold and clothes to Elisha, but Elisha refused the gifts. Elisha continued to work miracles in Israel to show that God was still active in dealing with His people.

Israel and the Syrians were almost constant enemies during the early years of the divided kingdom. The king of Syria, Ben-Hadad, planned to attack Israel, but God revealed the plan to Elisha. Then Elisha sent word to Jehoram, the king of Israel, and warned him about the Syrian plan. When the king of Syria learned that Elisha was spoiling his plans, he gathered together a great army of soldiers, horses and chariots and attempted to kill Elisha. They surrounded the city of Dothan at night; when Elisha's servant went out early in the morning, he saw them camped around the town. The servant was afraid, but Elisha said. "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Elisha prayed that God would show the servant who was going to help them. The Lord allowed the servant to see that on the mountain, were horses and chariots of fire surrounding Elisha, protecting him. Elisha prayed again and asked that Ben-Hadad's army be struck with blindness. God caused them to be blinded just as Elisha had asked.

Sometime later, Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, gathered up his army and surrounded Samaria. Of course, the Syrian army would not allow the people to go out of the city to bring in more food, so when all the food in the city was gone, there was a great famine there. When the king of Israel saw how bad the famine was, he was deeply grieved. He blamed Elisha and vowed to kill him that day. Elisha, however, said that by the next day there would be plenty of food that could be bought at a low price.

The Lord caused the Syrians to hear noises like a great army with horses and chariots approaching. They thought the king of Israel had hired the armies of the Egyptians and the Hittites to attack them. The Syrians left the camp and fled for their lives, leaving behind everything they had—including large amounts of food. As the Lord had predicted, there was plenty of food on that day and it was sold at a cheap price. Once more, God took care of His people.

Elisha continued to be God's spokesman and to work miracles before the people of Israel. In spite of this, most of the kings of Israel and Judah were evil and disobedient. Such kings as Jehoram and Ahaziah in the South, and Jehoram, the son of Ahab, in the North were wicked men who did not serve the Lord. One exception to this was Jehu.

Jehu was anointed king over Israel for the purpose of striking down the house of Ahab. God was determined to avenge the blood of the prophets who had been killed by Ahab and Jezebel. Their son, Jehoram was king of Israel at this time. He was in Jezreel when the king of Judah, Ahaziah, came to visit him. When Jehu saw Jehoram, he pulled his bow and shot him. He told the soldiers to throw his body in the field that belonged to Naboth. Naboth was the man who had been murdered by Jezebel for his vineyard. When Ahaziah saw what happened, he fled in his chariot, but Jehu pursued him and ordered him killed also.

When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it and put paint on her eyes, adorned her head and looked out the window. Then, as Jehu entered at the gate, she asked him if he had come in peace. Jehu looked up at the window, and said, "Who is on my side? Who?" So two or three of her own servants looked out at him. Then he said, "Throw her down." So they threw her down and the horses trampled her underfoot. All the words of the Lord were fulfilled concerning the death of Jezebel.

Jehu's vengeance continued. All of the 70 sons of Ahab were put to death in Samaria. The entire wicked house of Ahab was destroyed. The Lord had told Elijah that Ahab's family must be destroyed because of their terrible sins. It all came to pass just as the Lord had said.

Jehu had a plan to destroy all the prophets and priests of Baal. He ordered all who worshipped Baal to come because he had a great sacrifice to make to Baal. (He was not really going to sacrifice to Baal, but was setting a trap for those who worshipped him.) He told them that those who did not come would not live. The temple was filled with people. After Jehu checked to see that there were no servants of the Lord there, but only the worshippers of Baal, he placed 80 men outside the temple so none could escape. He then ordered the guards and captains to go in and kill them. They broke down the sacred pillars of Baal and brought them out and burned them. Jehu destroyed Baal from Israel, but he did not overturn the worship of the golden calves that were at Dan and Bethel.

Our lesson thus far has been about what was happening in the Northern Kingdom, Israel. We will now turn our attention to things that were happening in the Southern Kingdom of Judah at that same time.

Jehu had killed Ahaziah. Ahaziah's mother was Athaliah. When she saw that her son was dead, she wanted to be queen. She was the daughter of the wicked king Ahab of Israel and was just as wicked as her father. She wanted to be queen so badly that she killed all her grandsons except one—Joash, who was just a baby. Joash was not killed because his aunt hid him. By killing those who were the rightful heirs to the throne, she made herself queen in Judah.

Athaliah did not know that Joash was still alive. Joash was kept

hidden for six years, then a good priest named Jehoiada took charge of the boy and made him king. He called together those who were loyal to the rightful king of Judah. They had a great ceremony in the temple and placed the crown upon the seven-year-old boy, Joash, and proclaimed him to be king. Athaliah was put to death.

Joash did not destroy all the places where idols were worshipped. But he did repair Solomon's temple and the true worship was restored. Joash was very successful as a king as long as he had Jehoiada as a counselor to advise and guide him.

Jehoiada grew old and died at the age of 130 years. After his death, the idol-worshippers flattered King Joash and persuaded him to become an idol-worshiper. The Lord sent His prophet, Zechariah, Jehoiada's son, to warn the people. He said, "Because you have forsaken the Lord, He has also forsaken you." King Joash became angry and ordered that Zechariah be stoned to death in the temple. What an insult to God! His prophet's blood was shed by the king's command in the court of His house of worship! What an insult to Jehoiada! Jehoiada had risked his own life to protect Joash and now, Joash was responsible for the death of Jehoiada's son!

Trouble began within the year. A small army of Syrians came against Judah and destroyed many princes and officers. In battle, the Syrians left Joash severely wounded. While he was on his bed, two of his servants killed him. What a miserable ending for a man who could have been a great king. In the end, Joash failed as king.

The great prophet Elisha was also nearing the end of his life. Even though the northern kings continued in their wicked ways, Elisha's last prophecy was that the Syrians would be defeated by Joash (a king in the north with the same name as the king in the south). In spite of Israel's failings, God was still working out His plan and preserved Israel. "But the Lord was gracious to them, had compassion on them, and regarded them, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not yet destroy them or cast them from His presence" (2 Kings 13:24).