

2 Kings Devotionals

2 KINGS DEVOTIONALS Our Daily Bread

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- [2 Kings Devotionals - Today in the Word](#)

2 Kings 2:9-14

STEP ASIDE GRACEFULLY

In the summer of 1993 the Atlanta Braves baseball team traded some of their minor league players for the All-Star first baseman of the San Diego Padres, Fred McGriff. He brought the Braves the firepower they needed to make a serious run for the pennant.

But what about the man McGriff replaced? Sid Bream, a believer in Christ, was the Braves regular first baseman. He had helped Atlanta get to the World Series in 1992, but with McGriff coming he was headed for the bench. "There's no doubt something like this hurts your pride and your ego," said Bream. "But the one thing I'm counting on is that there's something better ahead."

When we've done a job well for many years, it can be difficult to step aside for someone younger or better qualified. Elijah was in that kind of situation. His ministry was coming to an end. His attitude, however, revealed his trust in God. He said to Elisha, his successor, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?" (2 Kings 2:9)

Maybe the time has come for you to give up a position you've held for a long while. It could be at work or even in a ministry at church. Ask God for the grace to accept His plan for you. And then step aside gracefully. --D C Egnor

When God asks you to lay aside
Some cherished work you loved to do,
Accept His choice of someone else
And let Him give new work to you. --Fasick

There is no limit to the good we can do if we don't care who gets the credit.

2 Kings 3:1-12

Medal Of Honor

Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah. —2 Kings 3:11

For many years I wondered what Jehoram's servant meant when he said that Elisha "poured water on the hands of Elijah" (2 Ki. 3:11). I have learned that it was a way of saying that Elisha had been Elijah's servant. Before Elisha became God's spokesman, he had humbly served in Elijah's shadow.

In the Lord's work, rank or position is not nearly as important as being willing to serve wherever He places you, even if it's "pouring water."

I was reminded of this while viewing some slides of the Philippines. A park in Manila commemorates the men and women of the US Armed Forces who gave their lives there during World War II. Their names are inscribed on marble pillars. Those who won the Congressional Medal of Honor have a star by their names.

One entry is unusual. These words are engraved by the star: "Walter Peterson, Chief Water Bearer." I don't know who he was or what his duties were, but he served the troops and did his duty well enough to receive our country's highest award.

What about your job in the Lord's service? Does it seem insignificant, with no public attention? No matter. Do it well. Someday the Lord Himself will award you His "Medal of Honor." —D C Egnor

All service rendered to the Lord
Is sure to gain His rich reward;

If we but work with motives pure,
Our weakest efforts will endure. —DJD

There is no such thing as insignificant service for Christ.

[How Can I Find Satisfaction In My Work?](#)

[Is There Life After Death?](#)

[10 Reasons To Believe In Life After Death](#)

2 Kings 4:38-44 More Than Enough

August 23, 2001 — by David H. Roper

[God] is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. —Ephesians 3:20

Bible in a Year:

Psalms 113-115; 1 Corinthians 6

It was an unexpected provision in a time of need. The prophet Elisha, like others in Israel, was hard-pressed by the famine. But the prophet determined that he must share with other needy Israelites the 20 loaves of barley bread he had just received (2 Kings 4:42-44). Elisha's servant questioned the wisdom of setting the food before 100 hungry men, for there was not enough to go around.

Nevertheless, Elisha issued a command to feed his fellow prophets, adding a promise that this scanty provision would be enough: "Thus says the Lord: 'They shall eat and have some left over'" (v.43).

True to God's word, when Elisha's servant set the loaves before the people, "they ate and had some left over" (v.44). There was enough—and more than enough. A similar thing happened when Jesus fed 5,000 with 5 barley loaves and 2 small fish (John 6:1-14). These examples suggest the principle: When God gives, He is able to give more than enough.

When we sense that God is asking us to serve Him in a new or unfamiliar way, we should never say no simply because we feel inadequate. "We have only a few loaves," we may say. But the Lord replies, "Trust Me. They are more than enough."

What matter though our loaves be few?

Alike the little and the much

When He shall add to what we have

His multiplying touch. —Flint

We always have enough when God is our supply.

2 Kings 5:1-3, 9-14 Speak Up!

If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy. —2 Kings 5:3

If you're like most people, you think that when God does something important, He uses important people to get it done—people like John Stott, Billy Graham, or Joni Eareckson Tada. The rest of us just fill space until Jesus comes. But that's not true.

Most often in Scripture, we see that God uses ordinary folk to get things done. Just take a look at the unlikely prophets of the Old Testament and the disciples of the New Testament.

The girl in 2 Kings 5 was just an ordinary servant. Yet she bravely suggested that Naaman go to the prophet of Israel for healing. What sounds like a simple request was actually a bold suggestion. For Naaman to go to Israel, it would mean turning his back on the local pagan gods, inviting criticism from his countrymen for putting the military might of his nation at risk.

This nameless servant could have paid a steep price for making a suggestion like that, but she knew where the true source of healing was. Because of her deep concern for Naaman's well-being, she courageously put herself at risk to direct him to that source—the one and only living God.

Like this young servant girl, let's be willing to be used by God to guide family and friends to the true source of hope and healing.

God can take a lowly vessel,

Shape it with His mighty hand,

Fill it with a matchless treasure,

Make it serve a purpose grand. —Bosch

God is looking for ordinary people to do extraordinary work.

2 Kings 5:1-15 Remember John

Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel. —2 Kings 5:15

John is a humble, uneducated man. Yet God used him to start the peace process in Mozambique. His name is not mentioned in any official documents; all he did was arrange a meeting between two of his acquaintances— Kenyan Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat and a Mozambican. But that introduction set in motion the events that led to a peace treaty after a 10-year civil war.

From that experience, Ambassador Kiplagat learned the importance of respecting everyone. “You never dismiss people because they are not educated, because they are white, because they are black, because they are women, because they are old or young. Every encounter is sacred, and we need to value that encounter,” the ambassador said. “You never know what word might be there for you.”

The Bible confirms that this is true. Naaman was a great man in Syria when he got the dreaded disease of leprosy. A servant girl whom he had captured from Israel told Naaman’s wife that the prophet Elisha could heal him. Because Naaman was willing to listen to this lowly servant girl, his life was spared and he came to know the one true God (2 Kings 5:15).

God often speaks through those to whom few are willing to listen. To hear God, be sure to listen to the humble.

God often uses lowly things

His purpose to fulfill,

Because it takes a humble heart

To carry out His will. —D. De Haan

God uses ordinary people to carry out His extraordinary plan.

2 Kings 5:1-15 In Every Bad Experience

Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel. —2 Kings 5:15

When I rear-ended a truck with my nearly new car, positive thoughts did not immediately come to mind. I was thinking primarily of the cost, the inconvenience, and the injury to my ego. But I did find some hope in this thought, which I often share with other writers: “In every bad experience, there’s a good illustration.”

Finding the good can be a challenge, but Scripture confirms that God uses bad circumstances for good purposes.

In 2 Kings 5, we find two people who had bad things happen to them. First is a young girl from Israel who was taken captive by the Syrian army. Second is Naaman, the commander of the army, who had leprosy. Even though the girl had good reason to desire bad things for her captors, she offered help instead. Israel’s prophet Elisha, she said, could heal Naaman. Eager to be cured, Naaman went to Israel. However, he was reluctant to follow Elisha’s humiliating directions. When he finally did, he was healed, which caused him to proclaim that Israel’s God is the only God (v.15).

God used two bad things—a kidnapping and a deadly disease—to change Israel’s enemy into a friend. Even when we don’t know why something bad has happened, we know that God has the power to use it for good.

His purposes will ripen fast,

Unfolding every hour;

The bad may have a bitter taste

But sweet will be the flower. —Cowper

God is the master of turning burdens into blessings.

2 Kings 5:9-14 Refusing Help

The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all. —1 Corinthians 12:7

In 1869, John Roebling dreamed of building a massive bridge over the East River from Brooklyn to Manhattan. Unfortunately, at the outset of the project, his foot was crushed in an accident. In the recovery process, Roebling insisted he knew best and took charge of his own medical care. After refusing help, he began to show signs of tetanus. Before long, Roebling's jaw had locked into a permanent smile. Seizures and dementia plagued him until his death weeks later.

The Bible records a story about an independent person who balked at the help offered him. Naaman, a great warrior of Syria, suffered from leprosy. He sought out the prophet Elisha for healing but had preconceived ideas about how the healing should take place. So when Elisha sent his messenger to tell him to dip in the Jordan River seven times, Naaman was enraged. But Naaman's own servants gave wise advice: "If the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it?" (2 Kings 5:13). And so Naaman followed the prophet's simple instructions, and his leprosy was cured.

God gives us gifts to aid each other (1 Cor. 12:7). But self-sufficiency shuts the door on much-needed help. Let's be open to the helping hand He provides.

The Lord extends His gracious hand

To those in desperate need,

He lifts them up, He helps them stand

Through caring saints and loving deed. —D. De Haan

The first step in getting help is humility.

2 Kings 5:15-27 Looting The Camp

Did not my heart go with you ... ? Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing? —2 Kings 5:26

While visiting a US Civil War battlefield in Virginia, I was struck by a story about an army unit that arrived too late for a major battle. The troops had stopped to loot a camp abandoned by their enemy. By taking what they felt they needed, they could not accomplish their mission.

That seems to describe the failure of the prophet Elisha's servant Gehazi, who sought money and clothing from Naaman, a Syrian military commander (2 Kings 5:20-25). Elisha told Naaman how to be cured of his leprosy, but he refused any gift or payment from him (v.16). Gehazi, however, decided to get something for himself (v.20). In a stinging rebuke, Elisha said to Gehazi: "Is it time to receive money and to receive clothing ... ? Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and your descendants forever" (vv.26-27).

The desire for personal gain can be a snare in our service for the Lord. It may be the subtle lure of recognition or the fatal attraction of financial reward. Any motive that changes our focus from giving to God to getting from Him poses a real spiritual danger.

Greed makes us believe that we deserve what we desire. That leads us down the wrong road. May God give us the wisdom to avoid the sin of Gehazi.

God's riches fill up our supply,

Whatever we may need,

So we can then be generous,

And not controlled by greed. —Sper

Live to give.

2 Kings 5:1-15 My Way

Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel. —2 Kings 5:15

Two small boys were playing a complicated game with sticks and string. After a few minutes the older boy turned to his friend and said crossly, "You're not doing it properly. This is my game, and we play it my way. You can't play anymore!" The desire to have things our own way starts young!

Naaman was a person who was accustomed to having things his way. He was commander of the army of the king of Syria. But

Naaman also had an incurable disease. One day his wife's servant girl, who had been captured from the land of Israel, suggested that he seek healing from Elisha, the prophet of God. Naaman was desperate enough to do this, but he wanted the prophet to come to him. He expected to be treated with great ceremony and respect. So when Elisha simply sent a message that he should bathe seven times in the Jordan River, Naaman was furious! He refused (2 Kings 5:10-12). Only when he finally humbled himself and did it God's way was he cured (2Ki 5:13-14).

We've probably all had times when we've said "I'll do it my way" to God. But His way is always the best way. So let's ask God to give us humble hearts that willingly choose His way, not our own.

Father, forgive me for my pride and for so often thinking I know best. Give me a humble heart that is willing to follow Your way in everything.

Humility is to make a right estimate of one's self. Charles Spurgeon

2 Kings 5:1-15 Better Than Before

[Naaman's] flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child. —2 Kings 5:14

As infants, my children had nearly perfect skin. Their flesh was soft—they had no dry elbows or rough patches on their feet. Smooth and new, it contrasted with mine, which was marked by years of various scars and callouses.

As a mighty warrior and the commander of the Syrian army, Naaman may have had scuffed skin and battle scars, but he also had a serious skin disease—leprosy. When a servant suggested that the prophet Elisha could heal him, Naaman visited him. He followed Elisha's instructions, and his diseased flesh became "like the flesh of a little child" (2 Kings 5:14). This cure left Naaman better off both physically and spiritually. After being healed, he proclaimed, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel" (v.15). Through this miraculous experience, he learned that there is only one true God (1 Cor. 8:6).

Like Naaman, we can learn important lessons about God as a result of our life experiences. Receiving a blessing may show us about His mercy and goodness (Matt. 7:11). Surviving or enduring a trial may help us see God's sufficiency and care. Growing in knowledge of Him (2 Peter 3:18) will always leave us better off spiritually than we were before.

Father, help me to learn more about You

as I travel through this world. Let this

knowledge inspire fresh praise in my heart

and a desire to become more like You.

Lessons about God are embedded in life experiences.

INSIGHT: Naaman's journey of faith started with humility. It was only when he listened to his young slave girl (2 Kings 5:2-4), followed the instructions of Elisha's servant and his own servants, and humbled himself by washing in the Jordan River that he received healing (2Ki 5:8-14).

2 Kings 5:1-3,9-15 Out Of Options?

Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel. —2 Kings 5:15

As ancient Syria's mightiest military commander, General Naaman had all the benefits the empire could offer: influence, affluence, and power. All, that is, except for health! Naaman was a leper (2 Kings 5:1-3).

In contrast, the servant girl in the general's household had no options or power at all. As a captive from an army raid, she had been forced into a lifetime of slavery (v.2). But she did not permit herself to be overcome by despair and bitterness. Rather, she rose above her no-option estate to serve wholeheartedly the best interests of her master.

This servant girl didn't see her master's leprosy as God's punishment but as an opportunity to point Naaman to God's prophet in Samaria (v.3). Her recommendation led to Naaman's complete healing. He declared, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel" (v.15).

Today, many people have abundant options. Others, however, have their choices curtailed by poverty, poor health, or other adverse circumstances. When a crisis comes, even their limited options evaporate.

Yet one choice always remains. Like Naaman's servant girl, we can still choose to serve God and point others to Him—regardless of our limited circumstances.

'Tis mine to choose if self shall die

And never rise again;

'Tis mine to yield the throne to Christ

And bid Him rule and reign. —Christiansen

Facing an impossibility gives us the opportunity to trust God.

2 Kings 5

2 Kings 5:1-15 A Person Of Influence

July 30, 2013 — by David C. McCasland

She said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy." —2 Kings 5:3

If you Google "person of influence," the search will take you to various lists of "the most influential people in the world." These lists usually include political leaders; business entrepreneurs and athletes; along with people in science, the arts, and entertainment. You will not find the names of cooks and cleaners who work for them. Yet those in so-called lowly positions often influence the people they serve.

The story of Naaman, a high-ranking military commander, includes two kings and a prophet of God (2 Kings 5:1-15). Yet it was the servants in the background whose words led to Naaman being cured of leprosy, a career-ending, life-changing disease. A young servant girl taken captive from Israel told Naaman's wife that a prophet in Samaria could heal him (vv.2-3). When Elisha's instructions to bathe in the Jordan River angered Naaman, his servants urged him to follow the prophet's orders. The result was Naaman's restoration to health and his declaration, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel" (v.15).

What a beautiful picture of our role as followers of Jesus Christ! We are called to be people of influence—the Lord's servants who point others to the One whose touch can change their lives.

Lord, I would like to live a life of influence like

Naaman's servant girl—to be brave and bold

to touch the lives of others by pointing them

to You. Fill me, Holy Spirit, with Your power.

Christ sends us out to bring others in.

2 Kings 6:1-7

The Little Things Too

My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. --Philippians 4:19

Pastor Harold Springstead was driving along, on his way to preach at a little country church, when he felt a sudden vibration. A tire had gone flat. As the 78-year-old pastor maneuvered his car to a stop, a trucker pulled up behind him. A young man jumped out, assessed the situation, and cheerfully changed the tire. Pastor Springstead got to the service in plenty of time, and it was not until later that he realized his car didn't even have a jack!

It was a minor problem. He was a retired faithful servant of God. It was a tiny congregation. We might think God would be too busy with larger and more important needs than to be concerned about a flat tire. But His promise to provide for the needs of His people covers little things as well as big ones.

The same God who helped Elisha retrieve the borrowed ax head (2 Ki. 6:5-7), who supplied food for a faithful widow (1 Ki 17:8-16), and who provided wine at a small-town wedding (Jn 2:1-10) meets our needs as well.

Think back over the past few days. Has the Lord taken care of some minor needs in your life? Has He solved some nagging problem? Thank Him! As today unfolds, remember that He provides the little things too. --D C Egner

If God sees the sparrow's fall,

Paints the lilies, short and tall,
Gives the skies their azure hue,
Will He not then care for you? --Anon.
Nothing is too great for God to accomplish,
nothing to small for His attention.

2 Kings 6:1-7 The Small Stuff

Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. —1 Peter 5:7

The tree-cutting was going well when one of the workers broke his borrowed ax, and the iron head fell into the river (2 Kings 6:4-5).

"Where did it fall?" the prophet Elisha asked (v.6). When the man showed him the place, Elisha threw a stick into the water and "made the iron float" (v.6). "Pick it up for yourself," he said. So the man "reached out his hand and took it" (v.7).

This miracle illustrates a simple but profound truth: God cares about the small stuff of life—lost ax heads, lost coins, lost keys, lost files, lost contact lenses—the little things that cause us to fret and worry. He does not always restore what was lost (for reasons of His own), but He understands our loss and comforts us in our distress.

I recall the times when my grandchildren were grieving over some small loss, and my heart was touched with their grief. The broken or mislaid thing had no meaning for me, but it wasn't trifling to them. It mattered to me because it mattered to them, and my grandchildren matter to me.

And so it is with our heavenly Father. Our small worries mean everything to Him because we mean everything to Him. We can cast all our care on Him because He cares about us (1 Peter 5:7). —DHR

Jesus shares your worries and cares

You'll never be left all alone,

For He stands beside you to comfort and guide you,

He always looks out for His own. —Brandt

God cares about our cares because He cares about us.

2 Kings 6:8-17 Why Am I Afraid?

Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. —2 Kings 6:16

Columnist George Cantor told how he dealt with a childhood fear. Almost every night he would wake up in the darkness and imagine scary creatures lurking outside his room. Often he would be too scared to go back to sleep. Sometimes he would go and lie down by his parents' bedroom door, figuring that as long as he was near them, nothing would hurt him.

That child's need for some physical evidence of his parents' presence reminds me of the young servant of Elisha. He woke up early one morning and found that the Syrian army had surrounded the city. Alarmed and afraid, he cried out to Elisha, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" (2 Kings 6:15). After Elisha prayed, the Lord opened the young servant's eyes. What he saw must have filled him with awe and wonder. The Bible says that "the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha" (v.17). The Lord's army was there to protect them.

We too at times long for God to give us some kind of reassurance that He is near, and sometimes He does. But that's the exception. He wants us to learn to trust His promise that He is with us. No matter how frightening the situation, God's people always have more on their side than the enemy has on his.

At times our fears may loom so large

We long for proof that God is near;

It's then our Father says to us,

"Have faith, My child, and do not fear." —D. De Haan

Faith knows that God is working behind the scenes.

2Kings 6:15-23 Hidden Mysteries

Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. —2 Kings 6:16

Most of what goes on in the universe we never see. Many things are too small or move too fast or even too slow for us to see. Using modern technology, however, filmmaker Louis Schwartzberg is able to show stunning video images of some of those things—a caterpillar's mouth, the eye of a fruit fly, the growth of a mushroom.

Our limited ability to see the awesome and intricate detail of things in the physical world reminds us that our ability to see and understand what's happening in the spiritual realm is equally limited. God is at work all around us doing things more wonderful than we can imagine. But our spiritual vision is limited and we cannot see them. The prophet Elisha, however, actually got to see the supernatural work that God was doing. God also opened the eyes of his fearful colleague so he too could see the heavenly army sent to fight on their behalf (2 Kings 6:17).

Fear makes us feel weak and helpless and causes us to think we are alone in the world. But God has assured us that His Spirit in us is greater than any worldly power (1 John 4:4).

Whenever we become discouraged by the evil we can see, we need to think instead about the good work God is doing that we cannot see.

Lord, I'm tempted to fear what I cannot understand or control. But my security rests in You and not in what happens to me or around me. Help me to rest in Your unfailing love.

Eyes of faith see God at work in everything.

2 Kings 6:8-17The Armies Of God

February 7, 2011 — by David H. Roper

He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. —Psalm 91:11

When our granddaughter Julia was very small, we took her on a driving trip over an Idaho mountain road. Afterward, she and her Nana were having a conversation about the "adventure." "I don't worry because I think Papa has a guardian angel," Nana said. "I think he must have a team of guardian angels!" Julia replied.

The mission of angels is to protect and serve the children of God (Heb. 1:13-14). The psalmist said, "The chariots of God are ... thousands of thousands; the Lord is among them" (Ps. 68:17). God is the "Lord of hosts," which means "armies." The angels are the Lord's army.

In 2 Kings we read about Elisha and his servant who were surrounded by the Syrian army. Elisha's servant cried out, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" Elisha replied, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he saw that "the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around" (6:15-17). The Lord's army was at hand!

Even though we cannot see them with our natural eyes, we can rest in the confidence that the Lord of Hosts is constantly watching over us and He has an invisible army at His bidding to send where He pleases.

What ready help the Father gives

To struggling saints below!

He sends His heavenly ministers

To thwart our ancient foe. —D. De Haan

The angels of God protect the people of God as they do the work of God.

2 Kings 6:8-17

WHY AM I AFRAID?

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At times our fears may loom so large,
We long for proof that God is near;
It's then our Father says to us,
"Have faith, My child, and do not fear." --DJD

Faith sees things that are out of sight.

2 Kings 6:8-23

We Are Not Alone

Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. --2 Kings 6:16

In the New York City subway, two youths robbed a well-dressed man who appeared to be asleep in his seat. Suddenly the whole car came alive! The victim turned out to be a decoy, and the passengers who jumped up from their seats were police officers. With lightning speed they converged on the young pair and made the arrest. These officers were "unseen" at first, but they provided ample security for riders on that subway car.

We get a similar picture of protection in 2 Kings 6. In a manner more dramatic than what happened on that subway, Elisha's servant saw why his master could be so confident in the face of what seemed to be impending disaster. We read that when "the Lord opened the eyes of the young man," he saw an amazing sight (v.17). God had arrayed an invisible army "of horses and chariots of fire" all around Elisha, ready to protect the Israelites from the Syrian army.

As God's children, we can trust Him to defend us as we do His will. Even when the battle seems too great and it appears that we face defeat, we must still trust the Lord. We can be encouraged by remembering Elisha's message to his servant: "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them" (v.16). We are not alone! --M R De Haan II

I have promised you My presence
With you everywhere you go;
I will never, never leave you
As you travel here below. --Rose

We may face situations beyond our reserves but never beyond God's resources.

[How Much Does God Control? Loving a God who is all-powerful and good](#)

[The Lord Is My Shepherd](#)

2 Kings 7:1-16

Good News Is For Sharing

We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent. --2 Kings 7:9

Four starving lepers, in quarantine outside Samaria, decided to surrender to the enemy soldiers who were besieging the city (2 Kings 7:3-4). But they found the Syrian camp empty of men and full of provisions, evidence of a terror-stricken flight. They ate to their fill and stashed away gold, silver, and clothing. But then feelings of guilt mixed with fear of punishment moved them to share the good news with the hungry people in Samaria.

Sharing helpful and encouraging information is something in which we usually find delight. We enjoy telling a person who is ill about a doctor who successfully treated us for the same ailment. We eagerly let others know about a mechanic we have found who is

skilled and honest. Many of us, though, are less eager to share the best news in all the world with others--that Christ can satisfy their spiritual hunger. But Jesus commanded us to do so (Mt. 28:19; Acts 1:8), and He will hold us accountable for our obedience to Him when we stand before Him (2 Cor. 5:10).

Although your first motivation to tell the good news may be one of obligation, you'll soon discover the joy of sharing the gospel out of a heart of love. --H V Lugt

Have you heard the Master's call?
Will you go, forsaking all?
Millions still in sin and shame
Ne'er have heard the Savior's name. --Smith

Sharing the good news is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.

[How Can I Share My Faith Without An Argument?](#)

[How Can I Break The Silence? - Strategies for sharing faith in Christ](#)

2 Kings 7:3-9

The Ethics Of Good News

"We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent." 2 Kings 7:9

If a scientist discovered the cure for cancer, we would expect the discovery to be shared with the world. Basic ethics requires that good news not be kept secret.

When the king of Syria laid siege to the city of Samaria, the food supply was cut off. Four men with leprosy, deciding it would be preferable to die at the hands of the Syrians than to starve, went to surrender to the enemy. But when they came to the camp, they found it deserted. The army had fled in the night.

Food lay everywhere. The four men stuffed themselves, and they were tempted to remain silent about the good news. But then the memory of Samaria with its famished inhabitants came back to them. "We are not doing right," they told each other (2 Kings 7:9). So they became evangelists—bearers of good news. Ultimately, evangelism comes down to this: one starving person telling another starving person where to find food.

You and I have discovered that salvation is found in Jesus Christ. It is a breakdown of basic integrity to keep that truth to ourselves. If we have found the cure for a guilty conscience, if we have found the food of life, we are obligated to share it with others. —Haddon Robinson

If you've received God's great salvation,

Do not keep it to yourself;

The Bible tells where all may find it—

Do not leave it on the shelf. —Hess

Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.

2 Kings 7:1-11 Lesson From A Honey Bee

Let the redeemed of the Lord say so. —Psalm 107:2

Years ago I set out a honeycomb to feed some bees that had a hive a short distance away. To start the process I captured one bee in a cup, placed it over the honeycomb, and waited until the bee discovered the treasure. When it was filled and satisfied, it flew directly to the hive. After a moment the bee returned with a dozen others. These in turn brought many more, until finally a swarm of bees covered the comb and soon had carried all the honey into the hive.

What a lesson for us! Are we telling others about the One we have found? Christ has committed to us the proclamation of the "good news." Shall we who have found honey in the Rock—Christ Jesus—be less considerate of others than the bees are?

The four lepers who sat just outside the gate of Samaria, after they had found food in the tents of the Syrians who had fled in the night, passed on the good news. They said one to another, "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent... Let us go and tell the king's household" (2 Kings 7:9).

The child of God who knows the good tidings of the gospel does not do right if he fails to pass it on to others. Tell a hungry soul about Christ today.

Close to your door may be someone in sin,

O tell him the story true

Of Him who died his lost soul for to win—

O bring the one next to you! —Forsythe

Once you've tasted the Bread of Life, you'll want to share it.

2 Kings 7:3-11 Day Of Good News

We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent. —2 Kings 7:9

My Australian friend Graham wasn't born blind. He was blinded by a freak accident at age 9. Yet he never felt sorry for himself. Wherever he went, he shared what Jesus Christ meant to him. His last trip was to Thailand as a practicing physiotherapist. Besides using his professional skills there, he wanted to share the gospel of Christ.

The four lepers in 2 Kings 7 had some good news to share as well. They had stumbled into the Syrian camp and found it deserted. After helping themselves to the food and loot, they remembered the starving people of Samaria, shut in as a result of a Syrian siege. Their response was: "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, and we remain silent" (v.9). So they went and told their fellow Israelites about the provisions.

Despite their physical and social disadvantages, both Graham and the lepers thought about others. They were thankful for what they had found and considered it too good to keep to themselves.

Do you know someone who needs to know what Jesus has done? Don't make excuses for what you lack in abilities. Instead, share the good news of what the Lord has done for you, and your life will take on new purpose.

Help us, Lord, to be a lifeline

To a dying world today,

Bringing hope to hopeless people,

Telling them that Christ's the way. —Sper

When we are thankful for what we have, we want to share it with others.

2 Kings 10:18-31 Right War, Wrong Way

I will avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu. —Hosea 1:4

Jehu, Israel's colorful king during a time of rampant idolatry, was determined to rid his nation of Baal worship. This hideous form of paganism involved gross sensualism, moral degradation, and human sacrifice. Because Jehu successfully rooted out all Baal worship from the land, God told him that his descendants would occupy Israel's throne for four generations (2 Ki. 10:30).

But God was not fully pleased with Jehu. First, the king did not completely obey the Lord. He still permitted the idolatrous worship of the golden calves in Bethel and Dan (v.29). Second, the Lord was displeased with Jehu's inexcusable cruelty and treachery (vv.1-17). Years later, God declared through the prophet Hosea that He would "avenge the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu" and bring an end to the northern kingdom of Israel (Hos. 1:4).

A war is raging between the Lord's army and the organized hosts of Satan (Eph. 6:12). We are called to do spiritual battle on God's side. By all means, answer God's call to fight for truth and justice. But do so in ways that please the Lord and bring honor to Him. Don't be like Jehu, who fought the right war but in the wrong way. God wants more than good results; He wants children who love Him.

What misplaced zeal! To think we honor God

By working out His will with spear and sword;

What mystery! The Lamb who shall end war

Wants most to hear the words, "I love You, Lord." —Gustafson

Partial obedience is disobedience.

2 Kings 13:1-13 In Your Footsteps

Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. —1 Timothy 4:12

A father and son were walking along the beach. The boy was lagging behind and suddenly shouted, "Look, Daddy, I'm walking in your footsteps!" This prompted the man to think about his responsibility to provide spiritual leadership for his son.

Second Kings 13 records a sad period in the history of God's people. The kings of Israel were not obeying the Lord but were following in the footsteps of their evil fathers. The sinful practices of one generation were repeated by the next, and the blessing of the Lord was withheld from the nation.

Whether they are aware of it or not, parents set an example for their children. An unknown author wrote:

A careful man I ought to be;

A little fellow follows me.

I do not dare to go astray

For fear he'll go the selfsame way.

Not once can I escape his eyes;

Whate'er he sees me do he tries.

Like me he says he's going to be—

That little chap who follows me.

must remember as I go

Through summer sun and winter snow,

I'm molding for the years to be—

That little chap who follows me.

Parents, be careful where and how you walk! Someone's following in your footsteps!

A child may not inherit his parents' talents, but he will absorb their values!

2 Kings 13:14-19 Zealous For God

Epaphras ... greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers ... I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you. — Colossians 4:12-13

We know little about Epaphras except that he was so concerned about the spiritual welfare of the people in Colosse that he is described as "laboring fervently ... in prayers" for them (Colossians 4:12). When I was a pastor, I saw this kind of enthusiasm in the way new converts prayed and witnessed. But all too often, many of them gradually lost their zeal.

I believe it was King Joash's lack of enthusiasm that made Elisha so angry (2 Kings 13). The monarch had obeyed the dying prophet's command to shoot an arrow toward the east. He had heard Elisha's promise that God would bring his nation complete deliverance from Syria. Joash had obeyed the command to strike the ground with a bundle of arrows, which he did three times. So why did the prophet angrily tell him he should have struck the ground five or six times?

I believe it was because he felt Joash was following his instructions in a half-hearted manner. The king should have been far more enthusiastic in his response to God's wonderful message of victory over Israel's enemies.

The king's nonchalance cost him dearly. He won an incomplete victory. I wonder how many spiritual victories we forfeit because of our lack of zeal.

Let us serve the Lord with gladness

And enthusiastic praise,
Telling all who do not know Him
Of His great and wondrous ways. —Sper
Godly zeal is love on fire.

2 Kings 14:3

He Did What Was Right

"And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like David. 2 Kings 14:3

When a person tries to justify his wrong behavior by pointing to the conduct of others, he isn't aiming high enough. This is also true if he patterns himself after someone who gives the Lord only partial obedience. A college student learned this lesson when he was reprimanded by the school president for misbehavior. The young fellow offered this lame excuse for his questionable conduct: "But, Sir, you'd find it difficult to locate 10 men in this school who wouldn't have done as I did if they had been in my circumstances." The president replied, "Has it ever occurred to you that you could have been one of those 10?"

Amaziah was a good king. He worshipped the true God and showed mercy to the children of some who had conspired against him. Apparently he set a good moral example. But he foolishly led his troops into a shameful defeat and was finally executed by a group of rebels. In 2 Kings 14:3, we are told why Amaziah did not experience the full blessing of the Lord. The text says, "And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, yet not like David." He followed the example of his father Joash and failed to put a stop to the semi-pagan worship conducted on hills throughout the land. He should have patterned himself after his forefather David. He simply didn't aim high enough.

2 Kings 16:7 Our Refuge And Strength

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. —Psalm 20:7

In August 2004, Hurricane Charley brought fierce destruction to areas of Florida. During the storm, 25-year-old Danny Williams went outside to seek protection in one of his favorite places, a shed under the protective branches of a banyan tree. But the tree fell on the shed and killed Williams. Sometimes, the places we look to for security can be the most dangerous.

The prophet Isaiah warned Judah's King Hezekiah of this truth. Hezekiah was a good king, but he repeated the sin of his father Ahaz by seeking security in an alliance with an alien power (2 Kings 16:7; Isa. 36:6). Instead, he should have been encouraging his people to trust in the Lord.

By seeking help from Egypt, Hezekiah showed that he had failed to learn from history. Egypt had been anything but an ally to Israel. Hezekiah had also forgotten Scripture. Amassing horses for cavalry units was against the divine constitution for the king (Deut. 17:16).

Ultimately, Hezekiah did seek help from the Lord (Isa. 37:1-6, 14-20). And God miraculously annihilated the invading Assyrians (vv. 36-38).

Judah made the mistake of valuing the strength of Egypt over the living God. May our trust always be in the name of the Lord our God (Ps. 20:7).

Trust in God and you will know

He can vanquish any foe;

Simply trust Him day by day,

He will be your strength and stay. —D. De Haan

No life is more secure than a life surrendered to God.

2 Kings 17:33 Him Only

We alone will build to the Lord God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us. —Ezra 4:3

A Christian youth organization in Singapore learned that the local horse-racing club wanted to donate a significant sum of money to its work. The gift would be helpful, but the organization had taken a position against gambling. Now it had to decide whether

accepting money from a racing club that derived its revenue from gambling would compromise its commitment to Christ.

Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the heads of the families of Israel faced a similar dilemma. They were being offered help to rebuild the temple by Assyrian settlers in the land who had intermarried with remnants of the tribes of Israel. Later known as Samaritans, these people were adversaries of Israel (Ezra 4:1). Zerubbabel's response was decisive: "We alone will build to the Lord God." Why such exclusivity? In 2 Kings 17:33, we learn that those who offered help "feared the Lord, yet served their own gods."

We need to be reminded often of the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). Although the Lord can use even unbelievers to accomplish His purposes, we are never to compromise our loyalty to Him. By our words and our actions we must show that we worship Him and Him only.

The dearest idol I have known,

Whate'er that idol be,

Help me to tear it from Thy throne

And worship only Thee. —Cowper

There are many ways to worship God, but only one God to worship.

2 Kings 18:4

The Brazen Serpent

Ancil Jenkins

The footnote in the New International Version at 2 Kings 18:4 is most interesting. When Hezekiah found the brazen serpent made by Moses in the wilderness still being worshipped, he destroyed it. The NIV says, "... he called it Nehushtan." The footnotes explain the meaning—"a serpent made of brass." One is made to wonder how such an idol could have existed so long. It would seem that in the reformation movements of one of the judges or kings, it would have been destroyed. My opinion is that it was not recognized as an idol and hence was preserved. Perhaps they justified it by not calling it an idol. Hezekiah, however, came and called it what it really was—a brass image of a snake. How often we justify sin by calling it a different name! Some call adultery, "a meaningful relationship." We excuse covetousness by calling it "prudence" or "economy." A life of sensual pleasure is "living with gusto." In answer to a critic, Abraham Lincoln asked, "How many legs does a cow have?" "Four," was the reply. "If you call her tail a leg, how many does she have?" asked Lincoln. "Five," was the answer. "No," Lincoln said, "Just calling a tail a leg, doesn't make it a leg." Have we made a similar mistake? Do we think that sin is not sin, just because we do not call it by its right name?

Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, Lord, are the only God.

2 Kings 18-19 - The Mighty Finns

It began as a distant, foreboding hum, then grew into an ominous, earth-rattling din. Soon hundreds of tanks and thousands of enemy infantrymen swarmed into view of the badly outnumbered soldiers in Finland. Assessing the murderous wave, an anonymous Finn lent some perspective. Courageously, he wondered aloud about the enemy: "Where will we find room to bury them all?"

Some 2,600 years before Finland showed such pluck in that World War II battle, an anxious Judean citizenry reacted quite differently to their own overwhelming situation. The Assyrian armies had trapped the people of Jerusalem inside its walls, where they faced the hopeless prospect of a starvation-inducing siege. Hezekiah nearly panicked. But then he prayed, "Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth" (Isa. 37:16).

Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord answered with strong words for Assyria's King Sennacherib. "Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes in pride? Against the Holy One of Israel!" (Isa. 37:23). Then God comforted Jerusalem. "I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant!" (Isa. 37:35). The Lord defeated Sennacherib and destroyed the Assyrian army (Isa. 37:36-38).

No matter what dangers loom on your horizon today, the God of Hezekiah and Isaiah still reigns. He longs to hear from each of us and show Himself powerful.

In what ways has God shown Himself strong in the past?

Share your story with others in the comments section below.

God is greater than our greatest problem.

INSIGHT: Isaiah 36–37 and a parallel account in 2 Kings 18–19 tell of the threat and siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians during the reign of Hezekiah. Having exiled the northern kingdom of Israel 10 years earlier (2 Kings 18:9-12), Assyria now turned its attention to Judah (2 Kings 18:13). Initially, Hezekiah tried to avert the invasion by agreeing to pay tribute (2 Kings 18:14-16), but Assyria was determined to attack Judah (2 Kings 18:17; Isa. 36:1). Hezekiah turned to God for help (Isa 37:14-20), and Isaiah prophesied the defeat of the Assyrians and promised protection and deliverance for Judah (2 Kings 18:21-37). Sim Kay Tee

2 Kings 18:3-4

When Good Turns Bad

He did what was right in the sight of the Lord,... and broke in pieces the bronze serpent. --2 Kings 18:3-4

People often find ways to turn something good into something bad. It even happens in churches. Perhaps a person at first lives by God's teachings but then lets power or fear change him into a source of trouble. Or maybe a church program that began with the right intentions gets sidetracked by the jealousy or anger or lack of wisdom of the people running the program. When these things happen, it takes someone with a heart for God, the courage of convictions, and wisdom from the Holy Spirit to confront the problem.

The people of Judah found out how true that was. In their case, the good-thing-turned-bad was the bronze serpent that Moses had fashioned years earlier to help the people during the Exodus. Back then, the serpent had represented the healing power of God, which was given to those who looked upon it (Nu 21:5-9).

But by Hezekiah's time, the bronze figure had become an object of worship. It took courage, wisdom, and a clear understanding of God's power for him to order the serpent destroyed and to restore proper worship (2 Kings 18:4).

When something good turns bad, it takes a spiritually strong person to tackle the problem. With God's help, are you willing to be that person? --J D Brannon

THINKING IT OVER

How are we to deal with sin in the lives of other Christians? (Mt 18:15-17).
What should be our attitude as we confront people who need to repent? (Gal 6:1).

If we don't expose sin, we encourage it.

[The Way Back \(contact them for password\)](#)

2 Kings 19:1-19

Facing Danger With Prayer

O Lord our God, I pray, save us ... that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the Lord God. —2 Kings 19:19

Trouble lay ahead for King Hezekiah of Judah. He had just received a menacing letter from Assyria's King Sennacherib. This marauding monarch had conquered many cities, and Jerusalem was next on his list. In his letter, Sennacherib mocked the God of Israel and threatened to destroy the holy city.

We read in 2 Kings 19 that Hezekiah went immediately up to the temple and spread the letter before the Lord. He acknowledged Him as the One who created all things (2 Kings 19:15). He told Him that Sennacherib had reproached the living God (v.16). Finally, He pleaded with God to deliver Judah so that all the nations of the world would know that He alone is God (2 Kings 19:19). Hezekiah's actions said, in effect, "Look, God! Read this! I need your help. Your honor is at stake!"

What an example of faith in a real God who is present and aware of our needs! Like Hezekiah, we at times face imminent danger from someone who wants to harm us. Or it may be some other kind of menacing situation. No matter what we ultimately do, our first response should be to tell God of the danger and praise Him for His greatness. Then we can trust Him for the kind of help that brings Him glory.

Facing danger? God honors Hezekiah-style prayers. —J D Brannon

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged—
Take it to the Lord in prayer. —Scriven

In the face of danger, face danger with prayer.

[Praying With Confidence](#)

2 Kings 19:10-19 Daddy!

September 18, 2011 — by Anne Cetas

Incline Your ear, O Lord, and hear; open Your eyes, O Lord, and see. —2 Kings 19:16

Twenty-month-old James was leading his family confidently through the hallways of their large church. His daddy kept an eye on him the whole time as James toddled his way through the crowd of “giants.” Suddenly the little boy panicked because he could not see his dad. He stopped, looked around, and started to cry, “Daddy, Daddy!” His dad quickly caught up with him and little James reached up his hand, which Daddy strongly clasped. Immediately James was at peace.

Second Kings tells the story of King Hezekiah who reached up to God for help (19:15). Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, had made threats against Hezekiah and the people of Judah, saying, “Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you ... You have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by utterly destroying them; and shall you be delivered?” (vv.10-11). King Hezekiah went to the Lord and prayed for deliverance so “that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the Lord God” (vv.14-19). In answer to his prayer, the angel of the Lord struck down the enemy, and Sennacherib withdrew (vv.20-36).

If you're in a situation where you need God's help, reach up your hand to Him in prayer. He has promised His comfort and help (2 Cor. 1:3-4; Heb. 4:16).

When serving the Lord and you lose your way,

Just hold out your hand and let Jesus lead;

He'll come to your aid, and you'll hear Him say,

I'll show you the way and meet every need. —Hess

God's dawn of deliverance often comes when the hour of trial is darkest.

2 Kings 19:9-19 ASAP

O Lord our God, I pray, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the Lord God, You alone. — 2 Kings 19:19

For most English-speaking people, the acronym ASAP means “As Soon As Possible” or immediately. But for the Christian it can also mean, “Always Say A Prayer.”

King Hezekiah was one of Judah's best kings. He restored the worship of God to his nation after his father Ahaz's evil reign (2 Kings 18:3-4). Yet when the Assyrian king attacked Judah, Hezekiah capitulated to the king and stripped off the gold from the temple in Jerusalem to placate him (vv.13-16).

That did not satisfy the Assyrian king, however, who returned to issue another threat. It was then that Hezekiah turned to the Lord. He prayed, “You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth... Save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the Lord God, You alone” (19:15-19). When Hezekiah prayed, God answered him in a remarkable way and delivered him from his enemies (vv.35-37).

You may be facing a problem that leaves you feeling helpless. It may be the loss of a job, a difficult family or work situation, or health struggles. We have a powerful God to whom we can bring our concerns. So before you do anything else, remember to ASAP—Always Say A Prayer.

Something happens when we pray:

Powers of evil lose their sway,

We gain strength, and fear gives way—

Therefore, let us pray. —Anon.

Prayer should be our first response rather than our last resort.

2 Kings 20:1-7 Doing Our Part

I have heard your prayer ... ; surely I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the Lord. —2 Kings 20:5

A runner at a school track meet crossed the finish line just ahead of his nearest rival. A bystander, noticing that the winner's lips were moving during the last couple of laps, wondered what he was saying. So he asked him about it. "I was praying," the runner answered. Pointing to his feet, he said, "I was saying, 'You pick 'em up, Lord, and I'll put 'em down.'" That athlete prayed for God's help, but he also did what he could to answer his own prayer.

When we ask God for help, we must be willing to do whatever we can, using whatever means He gives. When Hezekiah heard that he was going to die, he prayed for a miracle, and God promised to extend his life 15 years. Then Isaiah gave instructions to place a lump of figs on the troublesome boil (2 Kings 20:5-7). God did the healing, but He used human effort and natural means.

A couple of children were walking to school one morning when it suddenly dawned on them that unless they really hurried they were going to be late. One of them suggested that they stop and pray that they wouldn't be tardy. "No," the other replied, "let's pray while we run as fast as we can."

When we ask the Lord to do something, we must also be ready to do our part.

Points To Ponder

How does the truth of today's article apply to illness?

To receiving a job promotion? To social evils?

To final exams? To increasing faith?

Pray as if everything depends on God; work as if everything depends on you.

2 Kings 20:12-21 The Hidden Rattler

A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor. —Proverbs 29:23

When I was a boy, our family lived on a farm. One spring, we killed 13 rattlesnakes in a brief period of time.

A rattler can be easily destroyed if you know where it is and how far it can reach when it strikes. So my brothers and I never worried about the snakes we could see. We were genuinely concerned, however, about stepping on one whose presence we had not detected.

King Hezekiah was subtly "bitten" by a hidden temptation, not seduced by a gross and obvious evil. He allowed a measure of pride and self-reliance to blight his career. He should have put his full trust in the Lord for protection from his enemies, but instead he sought safety through an alliance with idolatrous men (2 Chronicles 32:25,31).

It's too bad that this otherwise good king marred his reign by this sin. We need to be on guard lest we allow pride to build up in our hearts until we, like Hezekiah, succumb to the wiles of the enemy. We may be prepared to stand against obvious invitations to sin that would besmirch our name, but we may not be ready for life's subtle temptations.

Beware of "hidden rattlers"—they're the most dangerous of all!

The devil has many enticements,

There's danger wherever you go;

But if you are tempted in weakness,

Ask God for more grace, and say, "No!" —Palmer

If you want to master temptation, let Christ master you.

2 Kings 22:1-20 'Hey, That's Me!'

When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, ... he tore his clothes. —2 Kings 22:11

A 5-year-old boy recognized himself on a TV show about missing children. He had thought he was where he was supposed to be. But when he saw himself on television, he realized that he was separated from the one to whom he rightfully belonged. He told his babysitter, who then called the authorities. Before long, he was in the arms of his mother.

This reminded me of King Josiah. He had assumed that he and his nation were spiritually where they were supposed to be. But when the long-lost Law of God was read, the king realized that he and his people had been disobedient to God and were separated from Him. Josiah tore his clothes (signifying his own repentance) and made a public covenant "to follow the Lord and to keep His

commandments" (2 Kings 23:3). As a result, the nation repented and returned to the God to whom they belonged.

It's easy to assume that everything is all right spiritually and that we are where we ought to be, when in fact we have sin in our lives. That's why we must read the Bible and study it as God's personal message to us. He gave it to us so that we could see ourselves reflected in it, recognize our sin, and confess, "Hey, that's me!" Then as we repent, we can be "reunited" with Him.

Lord, grant that we may hear You speak

As truth within Your Word we seek;

Reveal to us our every sin

And make us clean without, within. —DJD

We must adjust ourselves to the Bible—never the Bible to ourselves.

2 Kings 22:3-1 Out Of Obscurity

I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord. —2 Kings 22:8

In an old house close to a Civil War battleground in Virginia, workers are painstakingly restoring graffiti. Unsightly scribbling similar to what we scrub from public view is considered a clue to knowledge of the past. Workers are ecstatic when a new letter or word emerges from obscurity to provide information that has remained hidden for over 145 years.

The story brings to mind a scene in ancient Israel when Hilkiah the priest found the long lost book of the law in the temple of the Lord. The very words of God, entrusted to the nation of Israel, had been ignored, forgotten, and eventually lost. But King Josiah was determined to follow the Lord, so he instructed the priest to restore worship in the temple. In the process, the Law of Moses was discovered.

But an even greater discovery was yet to be made. Many years later, after meeting Jesus, Philip reported to his friend Nathanael: "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law" (John 1:45 NIV).

People today get excited about discovering the scribbles of Civil War soldiers. How much more exciting it is to discover the words of Almighty God expressed in the Word made flesh, Jesus the Messiah.

The treasures of the Word of God

Are great beyond compare;

But if we do not search them out,

We cannot use what's there. —Sper

The Bible is old, but its truths are always new.

2 Kings 22:8-13 The Lost Book

I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord. —2 Kings 22:8

Two US Senate staffers were cleaning out a storeroom underneath the Capitol when they spotted a partially opened door nearby. Curious, they stepped inside and found a small room jammed with dusty old brochures and payroll records. A leatherbound book with gold lettering caught their attention: Senators' Compensation and Mileage. It bore the dates 1790-1881.

What a find! It was a one-of-a-kind record of every dollar paid to senators during the Senate's first 90 years. Plus, the book contains the handwritten signatures of founding fathers Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. "The book speaks volumes," says historian Richard Baker. "There is nothing that comes remotely close to it in the archives of the Senate."

I imagine that Hilkiah the high priest felt even more excitement when he discovered the long-lost "Book of the Law" in some hidden cranny in the temple (2 Kings 22:8). King Josiah recognized its value and ordered it to be read aloud to all the people of Judah (23:1-2).

Maybe it has been a while since you've read portions of the Bible such as Leviticus, Zechariah, or Philemon. Dust them off and try reading them. They speak volumes—and their message may be just what you need.

I entered the world's great library doors;

I crossed their acres of polished floors;
I searched and searched their stacks and nooks,
And settled at last on the Book of books. —Anon.
The Bible is old, but its truths are always new.

2 Kings 22:11-23:3 Reformation

The king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the Lord ... And all the people took a stand for the covenant. —2 Kings 23:3
In May of 2001, English evangelist J. John spoke in Liverpool, England, on the eighth commandment: "You shall not steal" (Ex. 20:15; Deut. 5:19). The results of his preaching were dramatic.

People's hearts were changed. One author reports that large amounts of stolen goods were returned, including hotel towels, hospital crutches, library books, cash, and more. One man, who is now in the ministry, even returned towels he had taken from the Wimbledon tennis championships years ago when he worked there.

Something similar happened with King Josiah in the 18th year of his reign. Because of the long line of evil kings, the record of God's laws had been lost. So when Hilkiah found God's law and Shaphan read it to King Josiah, the king tore his clothes in grief and immediately began making religious reforms in his own life and throughout the nation. With just one reading of God's Word, he changed the course of the nation (2 Kings 22:8–23:25).

Today, many of us own Bibles, but are we changed by the truths found there? We are called to read, hear, and obey His Word. It should cause us, like Josiah, to take immediate action to bring our lives into harmony with God's desires.

Thinking It Over

Is it my habit to read God's Word every day?

How does awareness of sin break my heart,
as it did for King Josiah?

Open your Bible prayerfully; read it carefully; obey it joyfully.

2 Kings 25:1-21 The Worst Defeat

Because of the anger of the Lord this happened in Jerusalem and Judah. —2 Kings 24:20

There have been some horrendous defeats in sports history, but none more convincing than Cumberland's 222-0 loss to Georgia Tech in 1916. It was the worst college football defeat ever, and the young men of Cumberland must have been devastated.

Another kind of loss happened to the people of Jerusalem in 586 bc, and it was much worse than any sports defeat. Because of God's punishment for their sin of worshiping other gods, they were defeated by the Babylonian army (2 Kings 24:20).

Led by Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians laid siege to the Holy City and left it in ruins. They burned the majestic temple, the palace of the king, and the people's homes.

It was perhaps the worst defeat in the long, often tragic history of God's people. Their continued disobedience to Him had devastating consequences. Through it all, He urged them to repent and turn back to Him.

It's sobering to me to see how much the Lord longs for His people to live in a way that glorifies Him. I need to remind myself often of my duty to live as God wants me to live because of how much it means to Him.

Judah's worst loss can challenge us all to live in obedience to God.

O help me, Lord, to be afraid

Of disobeying You;

And may I bring You highest praise

In everything I do. —Sper

The more you love God, the more you hate sin.

2 KINGS

DEVOTIONALS

Today in the Word

2 Kings 1

"Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" - Jeremiah 23:29

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the ancient world, writing of any length was done not in books, but on scrolls, so authors limited their writing to the space available. If an author had more to say, a second scroll was used. As we begin our study this month of 2 Kings, it's important to remember that this is really a continuation of the Israelite history recorded in 1 Kings.

This book begins by recounting that Ahaziah now reigns. We know from 1 Kings 22:51-53 that Ahaziah "did evil in the eyes of the LORD"; he served Baal and provoked God to anger. Now in 2 Kings 1, Ahaziah has injured himself severely enough to wonder about his life. Instead of seeking God, he consults a foreign god. His request is a telling one. Now at the end of his life Ahaziah implies that either the God of Israel does not exist, or He is irrelevant to his needs!

Perhaps the most important in today's message is revealed in God's severe opposition to idolatrous disobedience. On three separate occasions God's message

to Ahaziah is repeated: "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub ... You will certainly die!" (vv. 3-4, 6, 16). In the end, God proved true and Ahaziah died "according to the word of the LORD that Elijah had spoken" (v. 17). On two other occasions, fire came down from heaven to consume the king's troops who arrogantly tried to seize Elijah and silence God's word. God reigns over Baal, and the fire underscores that message (vv. 9-12; see 1 Kings 18).

Yet there is another message here as well: an offer of mercy for those who will take it. Consider the third captain: he humbled himself, begged for mercy (vv. 13-15), and he was spared. God's message to Ahaziah may seem like a harsh rebuke of disobedience, but viewed another way, it was also an offer of hope. We can repent and turn back to God. He has not forgotten us and he calls us to obedience once again. If only Ahaziah would have heeded that word!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's passage reminds us of the seriousness of idolatry, but also of the offer of mercy in God's word. Have you, like Ahaziah, treated God as nonexistent or irrelevant in your own life? Find a moment today to reflect on the ways you may be turning from God to rely upon something else for comfort. Then take today's word as a challenge for repentance and an offer of mercy from a faithful God who does not give up on His people (even in their unfaithfulness).

2 Kings 2

2 Kings 2:1-11

TODAY IN THE WORD

C.S. Lewis, one of the most popular and influential Christian writers of this century, said: "[I regard George MacDonald] as my master. Indeed I fancy I have never written a book in which I did not quote from him."

In his lifetime, MacDonald wrote more than fifty books of fiction, poetry, sermons, essays and commentaries. Yet Lewis called his fiction "undistinguished, at times fumbling." Why would Lewis call such a man his "master"? One reason: "I know hardly any other writer who seems to be closer, or more continually close, to the Spirit of Christ Himself."

The mentor-disciple relationship can be a powerful, life-shaping influence; Lewis acknowledged that. Similarly, Elisha and the "school of the prophets" acknowledged the prophet Elijah as their spiritual teacher and role model.

A quick check of a Bible concordance will show you the influence Elijah's name still carried in the days of Jesus, for it appears often in the Gospels. He had become the prototype of the biblical prophet, the epitome of the prophetic office.

Through his obedience and boldness, Elijah turned the hearts of the Israelites back to the Lord. This powerful spokesman for God emerged from his wilderness hideaway to confront Ahab and Jezebel and to win a great victory of faith on Mount Carmel (1 Kings

18).

That victory was followed by a period of discouragement and fear, much like that experienced by John the Baptist (compared to Elijah by Jesus Himself in Matthew 11:14). But the overall record of Elijah shows a fearless man of God who blazed across the pages of the Bible.

The last day of Elijah's life was a fitting one for this towering figure. God had revealed His intention to take Elijah home that day. The ""company of the prophets"" (2 Kings 2:3), who were apprentice prophets or ""prophets-in-training,"" knew of his departure.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Elijah's story reminds us that a spiritual or an emotional high can be followed by a letdown.

This Christmas for you may be less dramatic than Elijah's victory on Mount Carmel, but the same principle applies. For many people, the celebration of Christmas is followed by a letdown. But that doesn't change the wonderful reality of Jesus' coming to be our Savior.

2 Kings 2

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever. - Isaiah 40:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

Throughout history, the transfer of leadership has been a tenuous moment. Even today, some nations around the world teeter on the brink of civil war when one leader dies and another comes to power. With such shifts in leadership often comes the question: What will the future hold?

A similar question underlies today's passage as we read about the end of the prophet Elijah's ministry in Israel. His impending end was seemingly known by all, and Scripture builds our suspense for ten verses before we learn his (and Israel's) fate. When Elijah was finally taken up in miraculous fashion, Elisha's words summarized the sentiment of the moment: "Where now is the LORD, the God of Elijah?" (v. 14). The answer is found in the details of the text.

Just as Elisha accompanied Elijah from Bethel to Jericho to the Jordan, so now starting in verse 14, Elisha retraced those steps, moving from the Jordan to Jericho to Bethel, performing notably miraculous actions. He parted the Jordan, healed deathly water, and cursed opponents of God. Where is God? He is right here, just as He had been for generations. Circumstances change and leaders come and go, but God and His powerful word remain the same.

Our passage illustrates God's enduring presence in a two-fold manner. First, we see God's restorative power (vv. 19-22). Through Elisha, God's grace healed the tainted waters of the cursed land (cf. Josh. 6:26). Just as Moses healed the bitter waters of Marah (cf. Ex. 15:22-26), so now God's restorative power continued. Isn't this the ultimate message of the gospel, that God can reverse a once cursed and fallen land and bring about blessing and life?

Second, we see God's power in judgment (vv. 23-25). As the youths of Bethel (a hot-bed of idolatry; see 1 Kings 12:25-33) maliciously rejected God and His prophet, the consequence were consistent with the warnings of judgment in Leviticus 26:21-22. God's powerful word brings either blessing or curse, depending on how we receive that word. The real question is not, Where is God?, but How will you respond to His enduring presence?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you ever wonder where God is as you consider the future? Do you doubt His presence, His power, and His care, wondering if He can ever restore the brokenness of your own life? Be encouraged by God's enduring power and presence in our lives. Perhaps you can make a list of the anxieties in your own life, then bring them before the Lord asking Him to instill you with confidence in His enduring word that can heal even those most broken aspects of our lives.

2 Kings 2:1-15

Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit. - 2 Kings 2:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1937, missionaries were forced to leave southern Ethiopia because of World War II. They had reached the remote area of Wolayto only in 1928. Nine years later, there were only 48 converts, and they experienced brutal persecution because of their faith. Tears flowed on both sides as the missionaries were evicted, but they called out to their Wolayto brothers and sisters, "We are leaving you, but God is not leaving you!"

One man, Wandaro, a fearless evangelist, was singled out for torture and imprisonment in an attempt to stop the spread of the gospel. Despite near fatal beatings, Wandaro survived and his example brought many to faith. Five years later, missionaries were allowed to return and were amazed to find nearly ten thousand new believers in Jesus, many of whom heard the gospel from Wandaro! They never could have imagined the work that God would accomplish through him.

Elisha also needed to be reminded that although his spiritual mentor Elijah was leaving him, God was not. That probably explains why he asked for a double portion of the Spirit that rested upon Elijah. Having seen Elijah's great works, humble Elisha knew that unless God was with him, it would be impossible to carry on the prophetic office. God answered his prayer and was powerfully with Elisha, who obediently picked up and wore Elijah's mantle.

The parting of the Jordan gave full confirmation of Elisha's office, especially to the fifty other prophets who looked on. The restoration of Jericho's water supply showed that Elisha would heal many. Elisha's response to the youths, who were a kind of street gang, showed that blatant disrespect for God and His servants could not be tolerated. Although their mauling seems severe, it was necessary to prevent many others from harm.

Although Elijah did great things, Elisha did even greater things. This anticipated John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the greater work of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:7).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

No one anticipated the works that the Spirit performed through Elisha, just as no one anticipated what God would do through the Ethiopian evangelist Wandaro. Yet both show how God uses His servants to reveal His truth.

When we feel intimidated by a challenge or call, we can remember that we do not undertake it in our own strength. We should never underestimate what our Lord can do through us by means of His Spirit!

2 Kings 3

2 Kings 3

But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. - 1 John 2:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

There was a young man who, once grown and out of the house, slowly drifted away from his parents' lives. Now fully on his own, the selfish man rarely called home or stopped by for visits, except on rare occasions: when he was short on money. Perfectly content to live most of his life on his own terms, a financial crisis would always bring him crawling back home begging for a parental bailout.

Joram behaved in a similar way in today's reading. As the king of Israel, Joram determined to bring the wayward Moabites back under his thumb, enlisting the help of the kings of Judah and Edom to do so. No sooner had Joram led forth his expedition, however, than we are told they met with a crisis: "the army had no more water for themselves or for the animals with them" (v. 9).

Notice the responses to this difficult situation. While Joram immediately blamed God, Jehoshaphat's words offered a wiser way: "Is there no prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of the LORD through him?" (v. 11). These kings were in a fix and only godly Jehoshaphat recognized the importance of God's word in a difficult time. When Elisha the prophet had been called, the word was given: water will come, and Moab will fall. Indeed, God declared that it was too easy simply to provide needed water; He would defeat Moab as well. It turned out that the provision of water was also the provision of victory over Moab.

Understand the message here. To this wicked and rash king Joram, God delivered grace upon grace. But notice too the reason: it was not Joram who secured God's favor, it was Jehoshaphat, godly king in the line of David (vv. 13-14; cf. 1 Kings 22:41-43). Israel's victory over Moab may have been incomplete (vv. 26-27), but it was more than Joram ever deserved. We, like Joram, also receive God's abundant grace because another Righteous One stands by our side "who speaks to the Father in our defense" (1 John 2:1).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Let today's passage probe your heart: do you seek God's wisdom in all you do? Do you wait until you're in trouble before calling upon Him, or even blame God when things don't go your way? Perhaps you wonder whether you're worthy to approach God for help. Reflect on 1 John 1:5-2:2, a reminder that God's blessing of grace and victory over sin comes freely to us because of Christ. Then offer Him your thanks today for the blessing you have in Christ.

2 Kings 4

2 Kings 4:1-7

Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them. - Psalm 111:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

Twenty-seven million people are enslaved in the world today, including millions of children. In places such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Kazakhstan, Russia, Europe, South America, and even the United States, children are enslaved as child soldiers, involuntary servants, debt slaves, or in commercial sexual exploitation. Debt slaves are sold into work to pay their family's debt. They work ten to twelve hours per day to satisfy even small debts; they suffer sickness, injuries, and are deprived of education.

God worked powerfully through Elisha to rescue two children from debt slavery in our story today. Elisha was the successor of the prophet Elijah (cf. 2 Kings 2:9-15). Elisha's name means "God saves," and throughout the stories of his life and ministry recorded in 1 and 2 Kings, God's redeeming power is clearly evident.

In our passage today, Elisha encountered a desperate widow whose deceased husband feared the Lord and was from the company of the prophets, which afforded her a connection with Elisha (v. 1). Commentators describe the company of the prophets as either a guild of professional prophets or an informal group of lay supporters of Elijah and Elisha.

This poor widow was on the verge of selling her sons into slavery to pay off family debts (v. 1). Elisha immediately sought to help her, taking what she had and depending on God to multiply it to pay her debts. The woman mentioned her inadequate means twice (v. 2b), but her brief comments pale in comparison to the lengthier account of God's lavish provision. Verses 3 through 6 explode with the theme of plenty. We see reflections of this story in Exodus 16, God's provision of manna and quail, and in John 6:1-13, which records Jesus feeding more than five thousand men, women, and children from a boy's five loaves of bread and two fish (cf. 2 Kings 4:42-44). In all these stories, God creates abundance out of scarcity; from insufficient resources, He supplies excess.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

No human created in the image of God should be enslaved. You can learn more about human slavery around the world and how you can combat it by visiting the Not For Sale Campaign at www.notforsalecampaign.org, the Polaris Project at www.polarisproject.org and International Justice Mission at www.ijm.org. There are many ways to become a modern day abolitionist of slavery like Elisha. Begin today through prayer, trusting that "the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:16)

2 Kings 4:1-7

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine ... be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus. - Ephesians 3:20-21

TODAY IN THE WORD

Sometimes in modern films, when a particularly pivotal scene or an especially complicated action arrives, a visual effect will be employed: "slow-motion." By using this slow-motion technique, the viewer is given the opportunity to catch the significance or details of the transpiring events. Without slowing things down, the director risks his audience missing important aspects of the film.

All of 2 Kings 4 is about the various ways God provides in difficult times. By slowing things down and spending the next three days on one chapter, we have the opportunity to observe this important theme more closely. Look at the difficult situation laid out at the start of today's reading: a helpless woman had just lost her husband, had two sons to support, faced a creditor ready to exact payment, and had "nothing there at all ... except a little oil" (v. 2). If we take these words at face value, this family was truly facing its last days! Does it get much bleaker than this?

Yet notice how the desperate woman responded. She neither sulked in a corner, nor turned to criminal ways to supply her needs, nor cursed God and waited to die. She cried out to God through Elisha and sought His aid and comfort in difficult times. In this faithful woman we hear the affirmation of Psalm 121:1-2: "Where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth."

And then we come to God's response, which illustrates the pattern of His faithfulness in difficult times. Elisha called the woman to collect numerous empty jars from neighbors and then in the privacy of her home to begin pouring oil into the jars. As the woman kept pouring, every last jar she borrowed was filled. God took what the woman thought of as a sign of her destitution (the oil), and used it to bring about not only provision, but an abundance of provision. What a remarkable picture of our gracious God who pours out His blessing so our cup overflows (Ps. 23:5)!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's message is simple, but profound: God cares for His people and can provide for us abundantly. Perhaps you know someone who needs to hear this today: a family member who struggles with loneliness, a neighbor who has lost employment, or a friend who wonders if God really cares. Through a phone call, a brief note, or an act of service, encourage them to turn to the God who truly cares; He may provide for your needs in surprising and abundant ways.

2 Kings 4:1-7

TODAY IN THE WORD

D. L. Moody was brought up in grinding poverty. Just a few months after his father died, his mother gave birth to twins. Now Betsy Moody had nine mouths to feed and no income. Creditors hounded the family constantly. Yet Mrs. Moody never turned a needy person away from her farmhouse door. When there was an extra person at the dinner table, Moody said his mother ""just sliced the bread a little thinner.""

The widow in today's story was facing the same kind of extreme need as the Moody family--with one startling addition. She lived in a society in which family members could be taken away to satisfy the family's debts. Her two sons were about to be claimed by the family's creditor. Most likely, they would be made to work until the debt was fully paid.

We don't know very much more about this widow's situation. She was obviously a younger woman, since her husband had been in Elisha's ""company of the prophets"" (a training school for new prophets) and her children were still at home.

The woman reminded Elisha that her husband had been a faithful servant of the Lord. Then she laid her desperate need before him. Very sympathetic to her plea, Elisha offered her what proved to be a miraculous solution to her debt problem.

Like so many of the stories we have studied so far, this was a faith operation from beginning to end. Elisha's hint to the woman to gather as many jars as she could indicated that something special was about to happen.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Few if any of the people we are studying performed what could be called heroic feats. Most were very ordinary people--but they believed and served an extraordinary God.

2 Kings 4:8-37

Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? - 1 Corinthians 15:55

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his musical composition *Peter and the Wolf*, Serge Prokofiev employed a technique known as leitmotif in which each character in the story is represented by a particular musical instrument. When the listener hears the oboe, for instance, one knows that the duck has entered the scene. Leitmotif can also be a literary term referring to recurring themes throughout the work, identifying for the reader central motifs of the narrative.

As one reads through today's passage, it becomes obvious that the story of the Shunammite woman falls into a familiar scriptural leitmotif: a barren woman gets a child. Much like the stories of Sarah (Genesis 11—21), Rebekah (Gen. 25:21), and Rachel (Gen. 29:31-30:24), we meet in today's reading a faithful, yet barren, woman. Having receiving much kindness from this woman, Elisha learned of her heart's desire and promised that she would soon have a child. A year later, the woman bore a son.

All seemed well to this point, another story of God's generous provision for His people. But then things turned dark. Before reaching adulthood, the child died and the woman was left with perplexity and "bitter distress" (v. 27). Why would God grant the happiness of a child only to take him away so quickly? With that anxiety in her heart, the woman turned to Elisha, and in doing so essentially turned to God Himself. In a living act of faith, the woman clung to God during desperate, confusing times (see vv. 27, 30).

Elisha too modeled true faith; without answers himself (v. 27), Elisha went to the dead boy, "shut the door ... and prayed to the LORD" (v. 33). Both the woman and the prophet turned to God in times of distress. And what started as a story about a barren woman soon became a marvelous declaration of God's triumph over death—and a preview of the coming, final resurrection in Christ of all God's faithful people (see 1 Corinthians 15). Although suffering and death still remain (even this boy would eventually die again), they do not have the final say. Today's resurrection account proclaims that message.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Many of us know the pain of losing a loved one, and those moments of grief and loss may tempt us to question God's power or love. Let today's message reorient your thinking. Realize that in the raising of this woman's son, we are given a picture of Christ's final

and ultimate defeat of death where we can join with Paul in proclaiming: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" Make that your quiet but powerful reminder today.

2 Kings 4:8-37

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? - Romans 8:35

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Great Sichuan Earthquake in China in May 2008 left many parents childless after some 7,000 schoolrooms collapsed in the quake. China's population control program introduced in 1979 requires citizens to comply with the "one child policy." Pictures of grieving parents from the Sichuan Province pierced hearts worldwide as parents mourned the loss of the family's only child.

Recalling such painful bereavement helps us to identify with the woman in today's passage. Our text begins with a wealthy married woman with no children. The unnamed woman was from Shunem, located approximately three miles from Nazareth, and when Elisha was in town, she always shared godly hospitality with him because she knew he was a prophet of God.

Elisha was blessed and grateful for the woman's kindness, and asked her how he could return the blessing. She hesitated to give an answer, but Elisha was persistent and inquired a second time, "What can be done for her?" (vv. 13-14). Elisha's servant noted the unlikelihood of the Shunammite woman ever bearing children, and so Elisha promised her a son, a blessing from the Lord (cf. Ps. 127:3-5). The promised son is born—but some time in his early youth, he died (vv. 18-20). The Shunammite woman immediately displayed trust in God's power working through His servant, Elisha. She quickly left to seek his help (v. 22), hopeful yet ready to hold Elisha accountable for the promised child's life (v. 28).

The Shunammite woman has great character. She is hospitable, resourceful, and admirable (vv. 8-10); in crisis, she acts in integrity, intentionality, and decisiveness (vv. 20-30); she is fit, for her round-trip journey to find Elisha was nearly thirty miles (v. 25); and she is faith-filled and grateful (vv. 30-37).

In both yesterday's and today's texts, we obtain glimpses of God's salvation amid hopeless circumstances. God's blessings upon these two women through Elisha are abundant and full of life.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God the Father knows the anguish of losing His only Son, for "He did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). The Father and Son know the agony of separation (Matt. 27:46). Death is the ultimate hopelessness, but the story does not end here. Resurrection is the utmost hope, and Christ is the firstfruits of those who will follow in resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20). Today, rejoice afresh in the great news of the gospel: the last enemy has been conquered (1 Cor. 15:26).

2 Kings 4:8-37

TODAY IN THE WORD

As the 1920s drew to a close, America experienced a boom that seemed to have no limits. Herbert Hoover announced happily: "The poorhouse is vanishing among us. We in America today are nearer to the final triumph over poverty than ever before in the history of the land... We shall soon with the help of God be in sight of the day when poverty will be banished from this nation."

But about a year later, the stock market crashed and America was plunged into the Great Depression.

Circumstances can change fast. This happened to the wealthy woman from Shunem who befriended the prophet Elisha and used her home and wealth to support him. From serving Elisha an occasional meal when he was in the area, she persuaded her husband to build an extra room for the prophet to use whenever he visited.

Within this context of generosity and sensitivity to the Lord, Elisha offered to fulfill a request for this woman. Elisha's servant Gehazi had observed that the woman was childless and had little hope of ever having children. So Elisha made a promise that she would have a son within a year. The woman's reaction was very normal (v. 16). She did not want to get her hopes up in case it proved impossible for her to have a child.

Elisha's promise, however, was not based on physical factors but on the power of God. The Shunammite did have a son, although one day a few years later her circumstances changed dramatically again. The boy suddenly fell ill in the field and was dead by noon.

Anyone can sympathize with this mother's frantic trip to Elisha at Mount Carmel. She had experienced the miracle of her son's birth. Then as Elisha raised the boy to life, she saw the power of God again.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Friday the thirteenth is the day the world frets about ""bad luck.""

But neither luck nor any similar false idea has any place in a believer's life. Today's text is a testimony to the power that rules in our lives: the grace and goodness of God. The woman from Shunem could tell us that God is always gracious to His faithful people.

2 Kings 4:38-44

For this is what the LORD says: "They will eat and have some left over." - 2 Kings 4:43

TODAY IN THE WORD

One day a little girl asked her mother, "Where did I come from?" After a moment of shock, the mother calmed her nerves and launched into a lengthy and comprehensive explanation of the wonder of pregnancy and birth. After she finished, there was a long pause. Then the little girl replied, "Oh, because my friend says she came from Cleveland."

Like this interaction between mother and child, sometimes in Scripture we focus on the wrong details. Many commentaries spend large amounts of time exploring the puzzles in today's passage: exactly what's wrong with the stew? Will it kill them or only make them sick? How does the addition of flour fix the problem? One important detail, however, is often overlooked, and it holds our two food miracles together. Verse 38 tells us "there was a famine in that region." This was a time of serious dearth and deficiency; a spoiled meal or a hundred hungry people to feed was not just an inconvenience, it was a moment of great magnitude, perhaps even one of life and death.

Into this context of famine and scarcity, today's reading speaks an overarching message of God's abundance in deficient times. With God's intervention, a pot of death became a much-needed meal of sustenance and nourishment. A hungry crowd of one hundred was miraculously fed with only twenty loaves of bread. Not only were they fed, but as the Lord promised, they had some left over. Lest we miss the point about God's provision for the mundane necessities of life, Scripture uses the verb "to eat" eight different times in just seven verses. These two stories are all about food. And it was God who was doing the feeding and providing!

Of course we must be careful here. Today's reading is not a promise that God's children will never go hungry or that we will always have food in abundance. But it does show us that God's power and will are not thwarted even by great need or seemingly impossible circumstances. Nothing is too difficult or too trivial for God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Each day we have food is a day when God has continued to provide. Christians in more affluent countries often take this for granted; but around the world children, women, and men are desperate for food and clean water. Consider supporting one of several Christian ministries that work to share the gospel with tangible resources like food, water, and other necessities to those in need. Visit www.samaritanspurse.org or www.worldvision.org to see how you can get involved.

2 Kings 5

2 Kings 5:1-15

Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. - 2 Kings 5:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

Everyone thought that they knew the contenders to win the Kentucky Derby this past spring. No one, not even the television announcer of the race, knew exactly who the number 8 horse was when he started moving from dead last up into first position, pulling away to win the race by over six lengths. Various described as "scrawny" and "impossible long shot," the horse "Mine that Bird" provided another reminder that the biggest and strongest horses don't always turn out to be the best.

What's true of horses is also true of people; we often think status, power, and appearances tell the whole story. But God loves to surprise us with the way He uses unexpected people. We see such a story in our reading today.

The core contrast here lies between the young servant girl and two powerful men, the Aramean military commander Naaman and the king of Israel. Despite his position of power and his proven battle valor, Naaman suffered from the disease of leprosy. His wife had a slave girl who had been abducted from Israel. This girl confidently told Naaman's wife, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy!" (v. 3). She knew of the prophet Elisha and his power and was unafraid to recommend him.

In contrast, when the king of Israel heard about Naaman's request, he thought only of himself and was filled with fear (v. 7). One wonders how a slave girl could have known more about Elisha than the king of Israel! The king could only think in terms of

geopolitical struggle, not spiritual power.

The second contrast occurs when Naaman pouted over the instruction to bathe in the Jordan River (v. 12). The young girl had complete trust in Elisha's God-given power to heal, but Naaman wanted the healing to look the way he expected, not the way he was instructed. When he finally complied and was healed, it provoked his worship. The testimony of the young servant girl resulted in praise being given to God (v. 15).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

This girl wasn't daunted by her position as a foreign slave; she still proclaimed the life-giving power of God. When we realize the depth of the richness of God's grace and salvation, how can we refrain from sharing this with others? People around us—perhaps in our family, neighborhood, or workplace—are suffering from the spiritual disease of sin and separation from God. We can point them in the right direction! Ask God to give you opportunities to share a testimony of His power with someone who needs to be saved.

2 Kings 5

Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. - 2 Kings 5:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

The nation of Aram ("Syria" in some translations) lay to the northeast of the land of Israel. Throughout the eighth and ninth centuries B.C. Israel and Aram were in a constant state of tension. Military clashes occurred frequently, interspersed with occasional periods of peace. Israel would have kept a close eye on the Aramean armies, for they were perennial rivals.

Understanding the international politics of the day makes today's reading all the more startling. This healing of Naaman the Aramean was an extension of God's grace not just to a foreigner, but to the very enemy of God's people Israel! And from this text we learn important lessons about God's ways. First, we see that He is the God of the whole world. Our text shows us that it was God who supervised the military victories of the Arameans, orchestrated the arrival of a nameless Israelite girl into the home of the foreigner Naaman, and then extended His grace and healing powers to one outside His people. As Psalm 24:1 proclaims: "The earth is the LORD's and everything in it."

We also see that God's ways can effect great change. Naaman expected a lot more attention and fanfare in his healing experience. Instead, he was asked to take a bath in the Jordan. Naaman eventually obeyed, but notice the transformation in his attitude. His initial reaction to Elisha's command was anger and pride. Thanks to the wisdom of some servants, Naaman shifted to an attitude of obedience. Finally, he softened to a humble confession that "there is no God in all the world except in Israel," and then made the promise to worship God alone for the remainder of his days. God's unexpected ways have the power to humble our pride, elicit true confessions of faith, and prompt us to appropriate worship.

Notice, finally, the warning at the end. Countering the message that God's grace was truly free, Gehazi's greed and lying undermined that message by asking Naaman for payment. In the end, there was a switch: while Naaman was healed through faith, Gehazi became leprous.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's reading is a good reminder that God's care extends to the whole world. The gospel message is the same: God's grace is not just for one nation, one people group, one race, or one sex; it's offered to all in Christ (see Gal. 3:28). This Sunday as you enter corporate worship, intercede for the thousands of people who live around the world who yet know nothing of the truth of Christ. Ask God to shower His grace upon them in powerful and unexpected ways.

2 Kings 5:1-19

TODAY IN THE WORD

Charles Spurgeon had been a pastor in London barely a year when in 1854 his district was hit with a cholera epidemic. Large signs were posted on street corners warning everyone that the dreaded disease was present. Family after family summoned the 20-year-old pastor to comfort the dying. And almost every day, Spurgeon conducted the funeral of another beloved parishioner. He himself became so worn out in body and spirit that he felt he would collapse. But God protected His servant, and Spurgeon was able to carry out his duties without contracting cholera.

Imagine what would have happened if God had revealed to Charles Spurgeon a means for curing cholera. Spurgeon would certainly have announced it far and wide, and his stricken parishioners would likely have done anything their trusted pastor told them to experience a cure.

The Syrian army commander Naaman had just such an opportunity to be cured of a dreaded disease. In his case, the disease was leprosy; and the opportunity came through a godly Hebrew slave girl who became an unsung Bible heroine.

This girl had been taken captive by a band of raiders from Aram, an ancient name for Syria. She became a personal servant to Naaman's wife, a higher position than some slave women of that day who were forced to work in the fields and stables of their captors.

From her position, this young girl from Israel urged her mistress to have Naaman visit the prophet Elisha and be cured. Actually, our heroine's role in this drama is limited to two sentences (v. 3); but the effects of her faith were far-reaching. Here was a girl who knew her God and who wasn't hesitant to witness to His power.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

How do you treat the other members of your family? Today, take a moment to consider

It really is amazing what God can do with us right where we are—if we'll let Him.

It's easy to feel trapped by circumstances. A difficult boss, the demands of motherhood, or a mountain of bills can make us feel that we have little to give to someone in need.

2 Kings 6

2 Kings 6:1-23

Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." - 2 Kings 6:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

In an age of identity theft, our personal and financial security seems daily at risk. Knowledge of this persistent fear leads one company to offer full, guaranteed protection against identity theft. For a monthly fee, they will monitor your identity credentials and notify you of abnormal activity. Their motto: "We watch out for you so you don't have to."

While there may be consolation in knowing some company watches out for you, today's passage teaches us that there is also a God who watches over and cares for us. Sometimes we just need the vision of faith to see it. Our reading begins with the account of an axhead accidentally slipping into the river. Elisha recovered the tool by miraculously making the axhead float. One may wonder why such a seemingly inconsequential story is included in Scripture. If nothing else, the episode tells us that God cares for our needs no matter how trivial they seem. Have you ever avoided praying for something, thinking God doesn't care about such small concerns? Today's text speaks otherwise; God watches over us—even in the small things.

The second half of today's reading demonstrates that God watches over us in the big things, too. Aram and Israel were at war (again). Elisha warned the Israelite king of the Aramean's plans until the frustrated Aramean king sent his troops to capture the prophet. The army surrounded the town, and Elisha's servant feared the worst. Elisha prayed: "O LORD open his eyes so he may see" (v. 17), and the servant observed the hills filled with God's blazing, heavenly army. Of course, God's army was there all along; what changed was not God's decision to protect Elisha, but the servant's ability to see.

Continuing the theme of sight, the Aramean army was temporarily blinded until they were delivered into the hand of the Israelite king. At the urging of Elisha, the armies were fed, then sent home with a clear message blazoned in their memories: God cares for His people; you just need the right vision to see it.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The last stanza of a 1904 hymn, "God Will Take Care of You," conveys today's message: "No matter what may be the test / God will take care of you; / lean, weary one, upon his breast, / God will take care of you." Big or small, God can handle your problems and provide for your needs—in a wondrous display of power or a quiet assurance of His love. Either way, He is here and He cares. Ask God today to open your eyes that you may have that vision of faith.

2 Kings 6:24-7:20

He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; he will not despise their plea. - Psalm 102:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

The period from 1921 to 1923 was marked by hyperinflation in the Weimar Republic. In early 1921, roughly sixty German Marks equaled one U.S. dollar. By 1923, through a series of economic circumstances and governmental decisions, the exchange rate

became four trillion German Marks per U.S. dollar! At its worst, prices doubled every two days. In late November 1923, when a new currency was introduced, the old Marks became worthless and were collected to be recycled as paper. No one living in the Weimar Republic could deny those were desperate times.

Israelites living in Samaria knew desperate times as well, as today's reading makes painfully clear. Suffering the consequences of covenantal disobedience (see Deut. 28:45-57), the city of Samaria was under siege by the Arameans. Sustenance was scarce and food prices were sky high. So desperate was the situation that citizens had resorted to eating their own children in order to survive.

When the king of Israel heard first-hand of this drastic practice, he tore his robes and grieved the situation. Yet instead of turning to God in sorrow over his disobedience and idolatry, he blamed God and Elisha for such desperate times. He wanted revenge instead of repentance. His anger toward God was clear: "This disaster is from the LORD. Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?" (6:33).

Surprisingly, the king got a message of hope: this time tomorrow, the crisis would be over. And now the test remained: will you believe the explicit promise of God? The servant voiced his disbelief, and the king displayed sheer skepticism (see 7:12), but the bulk of the passage highlights the fulfillment of that word.

Run off by God's power (note 7:6-7), the Arameans abandoned their camp. Four lowly lepers reported the news to the king, royal messengers verified it, and the word of God was fulfilled: food prices dropped and the king's disbelieving servant was dead. Scripture underscores the reliability of God's promises by telling us four different times that everything happened just as God said it would (7:16-20).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

When God speaks His word of promise, it can be trusted. Scripture provides us with a multitude of promises from our God: His care for our needs (Phil. 4:19), His constant presence with us (Heb. 13:5); His aid in temptation (1 Cor. 10:13); His mighty future return (Rev. 22:7). Choose one of these, or another promise you find in Scripture, and post it someplace where you will see it throughout the day. Each time you see it, pause to give thanks for God's promising word.

2 Kings 8

2 Kings 8

"For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone," declares the Sovereign LORD. "Repent and live!" - Ezekiel 18:32

TODAY IN THE WORD

Before filming *The Girl from Petrovka*, actor Anthony Hopkins searched in vain throughout London bookstores for the George Feifer book by the same name. No bookstore had any, but Hopkins finally discovered a discarded copy left lying in a train station. Years later, Hopkins met Feifer and learned that the author had lost his own annotated copy. Hopkins retrieved his own and showed it to Feifer. To the amazement of both, it was none other than Feifer's own lost copy!

Gehazi and the king of Israel experienced a similar coincidence in today's reading. Just as Gehazi was telling the king about the time Elisha restored a woman's son to life, the Shunammite woman herself appeared. In response, the king ordered the woman to have all her land and possessions restored. Of course, Scripture's point is not to offer examples of coincidence, but to show God's grace bestowed upon His faithful people, orchestrating all the details in order to do so.

If earlier chapters demonstrated Elisha's ministry of God's grace, verses 7 through 15 highlight Elisha's ministry of God's judgment. Hazael had been sent to Elisha by the ailing Aramean king Ben-Hadad to discover whether recovery was likely. Elisha's puzzling answer in verse 10 suggested that if he were left alone Ben-Hadad would recover, but with Hazael's involvement, he would not. In fulfillment of 1 Kings 19:15-17, Elisha declared that Hazael would become the next Aramean king and would inflict extreme violence on the Israelites. Such news brought Elisha to tears, but delight to Hazael (who promptly returned and killed his king!).

Although we do not yet see the promised destruction of Israel by the Arameans, the mindful reader knows it is coming, and the rest of chapter 8 exhibits the spiraling direction of both Israel and Judah away from God and toward His judgment. Verses 16 through 29 record that the family ties between Judah's kings and Israel's kings were working their ill effect. The Judean kings, like the kings of Israel, "did evil in the eyes of the LORD" (vv. 18, 27).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today we see kindness shown to one, but judgment promised to disobedient Israel. Notice Elisha's response; like Jesus weeping over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44), Elisha displayed God's deep love for His people—even when disobedient. We are encouraged to see God not as an angry judge, but as a loving God who wants us to live and be blessed rather than reject Him and die. Take heart

in the words of our key verse today (Ezek. 18:32).

2 Kings 9

2 Kings 9:30-37

Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. - 1 Kings 21:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to information from the Social Security Administration, at least one biblical name has ranked as the most popular baby name atop the list for boys or girls every year in the past century. From Mary in 1910 to Jacob in 2009, biblical names have always been among the most popular in the United States. Other biblical names, however, are rarely used because of their history in the Bible. For boys, there may be no name less popular than Judas. The female equivalent from the Bible that will forever carry an intensely negative connotation is Jezebel.

King Ahab sunk to new lows for royalty in Israel, urged on by his wife Jezebel (1 Kings 21:25). He desecrated the faith of Israel, instigated crimes against the prophets of God, and promoted Baal worship. But the disgusting crime that appeared to arouse the anger of the Lord beyond them all was one Jezebel perpetrated on his behalf. She had a man named Naboth killed so that her husband could take his vineyard. The Lord immediately sent Elijah to proclaim judgment on Ahab, his descendants, and Jezebel. Ahab showed remorse, and the Lord showed him some mercy (1 Kings 21:29). Jezebel remained defiant to the undignified end.

Jehu had just been anointed as king of Israel, and God's first assignment for his new king was to avenge the murder initiated by Jezebel (v. 7). After killing former king Joram and Ahaziah, king of Judah, Jehu arrived at Jezreel. Jezebel greeted the news with actions befitting her selfish, shallow, wicked nature: she put on makeup and did her hair (v. 30). Whether divinely directed or simply as a natural response to her wickedness, the previous servants of Jezebel turned on her without hesitation (v. 33).

Jehu recommended a proper burial for the downfallen queen because of her royal descent, but it was too late. The prophecy of Elijah had come to fruition, an appropriate end for a woman who did as much as anyone in history to influence God's people negatively. After the dogs were through with her, no one would ever visit her grave or remember her fondly (2 Kings 9:37).

APPLY THE WORD

Perhaps we haven't stooped as low as Jezebel in the volume of our sins—but we are just as susceptible to pride in our own way. Jezebel was more concerned about her external appearance and meeting her selfish desires. Who among us can claim to be immune to such things? She served as the extreme example of sins that can be routine for us. Take some time today to ask God to forgive you and cleanse you from such unrighteousness.

2 Kings 10

2 Kings 10

Yet Jehu was not careful to keep the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart. - 2 Kings 10:31

TODAY IN THE WORD

Any boy scout who has earned his Wilderness Survival merit badge knows the importance not only of starting a fire, but also of keeping that fire strong. The best-built fires, if left unattended will eventually diminish to smoldering ashes. To keep the fire strong, one must continue to feed the flames with new sources of fuel.

The need to continue fanning the spiritual flame is an important lesson in today's reading as well. Previously, Jehu had been given the task of ridding Israel of the wicked house of Ahab. Jehu did that with great zeal. First, Jehu eliminated the seventy princes of the family of Ahab at Jezreel. He then displayed the evidence at the city gates, not as some barbaric act of cruelty, but for theological purposes. As Jehu himself declared: "Know then, that not a word the LORD has spoken against the house of Ahab will fail" (v. 10). Jehu understood the reliability of God's word, and publicly proclaimed his own zeal for the Lord (v. 16).

He then demonstrated this zeal by laying a cunning trap for the prophets of Baal. Feigning a festival to honor Baal, Jehu assembled every last Baal prophet and had them slaughtered. The prophets were now dead, the sacred stone was demolished, and the temple turned into a latrine. Baal worship in Israel was gone (v. 28), and God rewarded Jehu with the promise of four generations of kings (v. 30). All seemed well; zeal for God and His word was a driving force in Jehu's life.

But then comes the rest of the chapter. Immediately after the glowing comment about Baal eradication, we read: "However, [Jehu] did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat" (v. 29). Then after God's promise of reward, we read: "Yet Jehu was not careful to keep the law of the LORD ... with all his heart" (v. 31). What a sad commentary on how quickly Jehu forgot. What started as a

burning zeal had turned into a barely smoldering ember. The fire was gone.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

For how many of us could the words of verse 31 be true, forgetting to set our whole heart upon God? Like burning logs, we too are aided by joining with others to keep the spiritual flame alive. Find someone today—a friend, a spouse, a spiritual mentor—with whom you can create a list of ways to continue fanning the flame of love for God in your life. Agree to pray for one another and to hold each other accountable to a life committed to Christ.

2 Kings 11

2 Kings 11

Jehoiada then made a covenant between the LORD and the king and the people that they would be the LORD's people. - 2 Kings 11:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

Take a look at the ingredients on almost any food item in the grocery store and you are bound to find a list of food preservatives. Those ingredients can be natural (such as salt, sugar, and spices) or artificial (such as nitrates and sodium bicarbonate). Preservatives are used to keep food fresh and to slow down the process of food spoilage. Without preservatives of some kind, most of the food in our kitchens would be unusable in a matter of days.

In today's reading we find God using His own version of preservatives, not for food but for His promises to the southern kingdom Judah. Keep in mind God's previous promise that King David's line would be "established forever" (2 Sam. 7:16). Yet in 2 Kings 11 that line was teetering on the edge of destruction. Athaliah, the mother of now-dead Ahaziah, seized the throne and proceeded "to destroy the whole royal family" (v. 1).

If all heirs of the kingly line were killed, God's earlier promise would fail. Enter the preservers, the faithful priest Jehoiada and his wife Jehosheba (see 2 Chron. 22:11 for mention of their relationship). Two previously unknown figures in history quietly stepped forward to save the infant Joash from certain destruction, hiding him away from ruthless Athaliah, and raising him for seven years in the temple. When ready, Jehoiada publicly presented the boy and proclaimed him king. The wicked usurper Athaliah was soon put to death.

As important as the actions of Jehoiada and Jehosheba actions were in preserving the physical heir of God's chosen line, they also preserved something more: God's covenant. Notice Jehoiada's actions in verse 12. He brought the boy to the crowd, anointed him king, but also "presented him with a copy of the covenant." A few verses later, Jehoiada helped the king and people renew their covenant with their God. As a result, the people rushed to destroy the temple of Baal in the land. Jehoiada's action not only preserved the physical line of David, but also the life-giving, covenantal relationship with their God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Perhaps today's reading reminds you of a similar story in the New Testament. There, another small child in David's line was whisked away from certain death at the hands of a raging, paranoid ruler (Matt. 2:13-18). There, like in today's story, the Davidic line was preserved, now in the promised Messiah Jesus. Give thanks to God today for His constant preservation of His people and His word—a word that brings us the rich salvation of a relationship with Him.

2 Kings 12

2 Kings 12

Joash did ... right in the eyes of the LORD all the years Jehoiada the priest instructed him. - 2 Kings 12:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

A motivational speaker stood in front of the audience, a beautiful pocket watch resting on the table before him. He explained to the crowd that such a watch took months to create and required careful attention to detail, finely-crafted parts, and a gentle touch. The speaker then proceeded to pull out a large hammer and smashed the watch to pieces. The speaker's conclusion: "It's much easier to ruin a good thing than it is to create and maintain it."

The same could be said of a healthy relationship with God—it's much easier to diminish it with neglect than it is to nurture it and cause it to grow. Today's reading provides a similar picture. Young Joash, king of Israel, started off his forty-year reign on the right foot. With the help of Jehoiada the priest, Joash "did what was right in the eyes of the LORD" (v. 2).

Presumably a large part of his piety was his interest in repairing the temple. Thirteen verses are devoted to a description of Joash's careful attention and concern about the temple repairs. When the work was not proceeding quickly enough, Joash himself stepped in to ensure God's house received the required repairs. Clearly the covenant renewal of 2 Kings 11 had led to a conscious concern for covenantal worship at the temple, demonstrating that a healthy relationship with God should naturally lead to a zeal for our worship of God.

What started off so well, however, soon began to unravel. After a long description of temple repairs, verses 17 through 21 depict a shift in Joash's focus. Feeling the pressure from Hazael, king of Aram, Joash quickly undid everything by using temple goods as a payoff to a wicked king. Hazael departed, but the temple now stood empty, and Joash himself would meet an untimely death at the hand of his officials. The clue to this shift comes in verse 2—as long as Joash was instructed by the priest, all was well, but once Jehoiada died, Joash quickly lost his focus (see also 2 Chron. 22).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

What a reminder of the importance of godly influences in our life! Without Jehoiada the priest, Joash quickly drifted from God and ended up undoing much of his earlier good. Such a message cuts two ways. Perhaps you find yourself faltering in your faith. Find a spiritual mentor to help you get back on track. It may be that God is prompting you to invest yourself in another person, providing a godly influence in the life of someone else. Act on that need today as the Holy Spirit leads.

2 Kings 13

2 Kings 13

But the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion and showed concern for them because of his covenant. - 2 Kings 13:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

A notoriously absent-minded man had once again lost his remote control. He spent an hour searching the house for the missing remote—under the couch cushions, under the chair, in the bedroom, behind the TV, in the bathroom—all to no avail. Later in the day, feeling a craving for ice cream, the man went to the freezer. When he opened the door, what should he see but the misplaced remote control!

Sometimes God's grace of salvation shows up in unexpected places as well, and today's reading gives us an example of just that. This chapter recounts the story of two evil kings of Israel, Jehoahaz and Jehoash. Both received the same indictment: "He did evil in the eyes of the LORD," and both continued Israel's pervasive idolatry (vv. 2, 11). As a result, the nation of Israel suffered for its disobedience: the Arameans persisted as a thorn in Israel's side, oppressing them continually.

Yet in the midst of this oft-repeated cycle of sin and idolatry, surprising moments appear when the kings softened and God's grace and mercy showed through. Jehoahaz, we are told, unexpectedly "sought the LORD's favor" (v. 4). The response? Seeing their great suffering, "The LORD listened to him" and sent a deliverer (this could also be translated as "savior") to rescue them (vv. 4-5). Is this not God's gracious way? In the midst of humanity's oppression under sin and death, God sent the ultimate Savior, Christ, to rescue us.

Then there was Jehoash, the second wicked king. Hearing of Elisha's impending death, the king went to him in tears over the coming loss of God's prophet in Israel. The response? Through Elisha, God demonstrated the hope of salvation and life. First, Elisha declared "the arrow of victory (literally "salvation") over Aram" (v. 17), and the three-fold defeat of the Arameans was soon fulfilled. Then came the strange resurrection of a dead man through Elisha's bones. Both episodes illustrate God's ability and willingness to extend life and grace to His people, if only they would turn and ask.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Notice the stated reason for God's grace and mercy: "because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (v. 23). That covenant, the New Testament tells us, was fulfilled in the coming of Christ, and the grace, compassion, and concern that God showed Israel is now ours in and through Him. If you know someone who struggles to believe God's love and forgiveness in Christ is real, share today's message: for those who turn and seek the Lord, He is always ready to listen and act.

2 Kings 14

2 Kings 14

Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness ... not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance? - Romans 2:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

In a well-known Aesop's fable, a slow-paced tortoise races a quick and arrogant hare. It's obvious in the beginning who should have won the race, but the hare in the lead unwisely decided to take a nap. As he slept, the slow and steady tortoise plodded along to the finish line, beating the snoozing hare. One lesson from the fable might be this: finishing strong is just as important as starting well.

Amaziah of Judah would have done well to heed such a lesson in today's reading. His reign over southern Judah started off well. After gaining control of the kingdom, he eliminated those officials who had assassinated his father, but spared their sons. Why? Because he knew God's law, which said that children should not be put to death for their fathers' sins (see Deut. 24:16). He knew God's word and put it into practice. In addition, Amaziah had great success in battle, defeating large armies and securing new cities.

Yet despite that impressive start, Amaziah's end was not so wonderful. In arrogance, he challenged Israel to battle, lost miserably, and saw the temple depleted of its riches. Eventually he was forced from Jerusalem and killed by conspirators. The king had a godly start that ended in misery and defeat. Clues as to why are given early on: he was no King David, for he allowed the high places to remain (vv. 3-4). Early faithfulness soon turned to incomplete devotion and arrogant action.

Another twist occurs in our reading today, this time concerning Jeroboam II of Israel. We are told quite clearly of God's condemnation of Jeroboam's sin of idolatry. Yet surprisingly, under Jeroboam, Israel's borders were restored and Jeroboam himself was used by God to help deliver the Israelites from oppression. The wicked king had found blessing. Note the subtle warning: Jeroboam's success had nothing to do with God's indifference to sin. It was because of God's mercy and covenantal faithfulness that Jeroboam enjoyed God's goodness for a time (see vv. 26-27). We must not mistake God's patience over sin as His approval of sin.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's reading offers a double message. If you started your Christian walk well but are now floundering in spiritual laziness, be admonished to continue faithfully to the end. Commit to renewing your walk with God today. And if you have never truly committed your life to God, but have experienced God's blessing anyway, let today's message challenge you not to take God's patience over sin as His approval of it. Let God's kindness lead you to repentance today (see Rom. 2:4).

2 Kings 15

2 Kings 15

He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, as his fathers had done. - 2 Kings 15:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

Most whirlpools found in nature are not very strong. But more powerful vortexes do exist, sometimes called maelstroms, which have been known to cause injury and death to the unfortunate or inexperienced. In such maelstroms, the danger comes from the faster, spiraling waters and the resulting downdraft that pulls the unsuspecting seafarer under the waters.

In today's passage we see something of a spiritual maelstrom for the nation of Israel as the succession of wicked rulers becomes more and more frequent in a short amount of time. Consider the quick sequence of Israelite kings reported in our chapter: Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, and Pekah—five kings in a span of less than thirteen years, all of whom “did evil in the eyes of the LORD” (vv. 9, 13-16, 18, 24, 28). In that brief space of time, these kings unleashed a flood of sin and turmoil on the land: treachery against rulers, three assassinations of reigning kings, brutality against pregnant women (and their still-developing infants), heavy taxation on their subjects, international strife from foreign nations, loss of cities and land, and even the deportation of Israelite families into Assyria. These were horrific and chaotic times for Israel.

The speed with which Scripture presents these reigns indicates something profound: a spiritual maelstrom of death has been created, and as the succession of wicked kings rapidly moves on, the downward spiral has begun to drag Israel down. All of the chaos above should have acted as warning signs to those paying attention, but none of the leaders seemed to take notice.

We're not left only with despair; Scripture does give us a poignant contrast, bookending the chapter with two positive reigns (both from southern Judah). Azariah (also called Uzziah) and his son Jotham combine to rule Judah for sixty-eight years, both of them doing “what was right in the eyes of the LORD” (vv. 3, 34). The point should be clear: sin and disobedience lead to the downward spiral of chaos, but obedience to God's word brings the assurance of stability.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

What's true for God's people of old is true for God's people today. Churches that consistently refuse to heed God's word should not be surprised when turmoil and chaos seem to creep in. The question challenges us: will people respond to the warning signs of the

spiraling vortex before it's too late? Pray today for Christ's body at home and around the world, that He would raise up godly leaders to guide His children into obedience and the much-needed stability that comes with it.

2 Kings 16

2 Kings 16

I am your servant and vassal. Come up and save me. - 2 Kings 16:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

In prairie states like Kansas and Nebraska, the terrain is so flat that one can see far into the distance. Looking to the west, an approaching thunderstorm can be seen miles away, long before it ever hits. Sunny skies might be enjoyed at the moment, but the wise and observant person will make preparations for the coming storm.

Our passage today likewise gives us a glimpse of the coming storm for southern Judah. In our last chapter, two kings ruled Judah in relatively stability for sixty-eight years. Now, with the rise of Ahaz, things take a turn for the worse, and the impending danger for Judah can be seen on the horizon.

First, there was a problem of leadership. Scripture tells us that the kings of Aram and Israel marched against Judah. Aram had already captured the important town of Elath, and now Jerusalem was under siege. What did Ahaz do? Instead of turning to God for help, Ahaz looked to the Assyrian king. Notice the language Ahaz used, typically employed to describe Judah's relationship with God: "I am your servant and vassal (this word could also be "son"). Come up and save me" (v. 7). Ahaz then emptied the temple's treasures in order to secure this "salvation" from "Father" Assyria. The ploy worked, but Ahaz's actions clearly indicated a rejection of the true God who saves.

Second, there was the more serious problem of worship. We are told earlier that Ahaz was not a godly king; he followed the ways of Israel, practiced idolatry, and "even sacrificed his son in the fire" (vv. 3-4). Later, while in Damascus paying homage to Tiglath-Pileser, Ahaz encountered a new altar and immediately ordered one to be built back home. Upon his return, Ahaz employed even further temple remodeling "in deference to the king of Assyria" (v. 18). While little explicit commentary on these activities in the text, don't forget the earlier warning: Ahaz was "following the detestable ways of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites" (v. 3). The storm was coming; would Judah heed the warning signs?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Most of us would not fall into the extreme categories of sin like Ahaz; after all, we might protest that we don't practice child sacrifice today! But what of the subtler disobedience in today's reading? Do we look to something other than God for comfort—a large bank account, "safe" neighborhoods and schools, or an insurance policy? Certainly, God can use a variety of means to protect us, but when those earthly means become our only consolation, are we truly trusting God?

2 Kings 17

2 Kings 17:1-23

So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. - 2 Kings 17:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

In his 1905 work *The Life of Reason*, Spanish-American philosopher and poet, George Santayana, famously penned: "Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness... Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." While Santayana was speaking about the progress of the human mind as it matures and develops, the quote is often used as an exhortation to take the study of history seriously.

Santayana's claims about the importance of the past ring true in 2 Kings 17 as well. While the first six verses record the final end for northern Israel, including its destruction and deportation, the more important lesson comes in the next fourteen verses explaining Israel's demise. First, Israel did not remember its past. This forgotten past included not only God's grace in bringing them out of Egypt (v. 7), but also the fate suffered by their forefathers who refused God's word and remained stiff-necked (v. 14). Had Israel recalled both what God had done for them and the warning of their predecessors, perhaps they would not have been doomed to repeat God's discipline.

Second, Israel repeatedly and thoroughly rejected God's commands. Although God specifically warned about following the practices of the nations in the land (Deut. 7:1-5), Israel quickly fell into pervasive idolatry. Their idolatry was a full-blown disobedience: worshiping Asherah, Baal, and the starry host; offering child sacrifice; and setting up altars throughout the land. Scripture

summarizes their fate: “They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless” (v. 15).

Finally, Israel ignored God’s repeated pleas for repentance. Twice God mentioned His grace in sending prophets to call the people back to Himself (vv. 13, 23). Yet Israel did not heed those calls. All of Israel’s forgetting, rejecting, and ignoring did one thing: it provoked God to anger and brought the most serious judgment of all, mentioned three different times: the loss of God’s presence (vv. 18, 20, 23). The message is profound: earthly suffering may be unpleasant, but the real disaster is losing God Himself.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We are called to the task of remembering. Remember the grace shown us in Christ. How has God shown that grace to you personally? Remember the commands laid out in God’s Word. Are there areas in your life where you need to repent and turn back to God? Remember Israel’s own past that we may not be condemned to repeat it. Don’t let today’s history lesson go unheeded. Renew your commitment to a life for Christ today, and thank Him for the lessons of divine history.

2 Kings 17:24-41

Do not forget the covenant I have made with you, and do not worship other gods. - 2 Kings 17:38

TODAY IN THE WORD

A young man who had lived a fairly secluded life was excited to be headed to college. After a week, he wrote his parents describing the most exciting part of college life—the cafeteria! Having eaten the same limited meals over and over again back home, the school cafeteria options were overwhelming. Pizza, salad, soups, grilled chicken, Asian entrees, burgers, fish, and a variety of desserts. He could have anything he wanted; the choices seemed endless.

The choices of religion seemed endless in today’s reading as well. Having deported the northern kingdom of Israel, and hoping to prohibit future revolts, the king of Assyria repopulated Samaria with foreigners, who of course brought a panoply of religious options. Only one problem: this was not the worship God required. The entirety of today’s passage explores what faulty religion looks like.

First, it is a placating religion. When they first arrived, these foreigners “did not worship the LORD” (v. 25), so God sent lions to torment them. In response, the people requested an Israelite priest to teach them the rituals required by the God of the land. They were taught how to worship the Lord, but continued worshiping other gods as well. Seemingly, what mattered to them was placating God so they could avoid trouble. How many of us treat our worship the same way?

Second, it is a do-it-yourself religion. Notice that the verb “to make” is repeated six times in verses 29 through 31. Each nation “made” its own god and set it up in its own high place (even using some of the high places previously “made” by the Israelites). Isn’t this the way of so much religion? We decide what we like and then we make God into that image.

Third, it is a syncretistic religion, one that combines truth with falsehood. The problem was not a failure to worship God—it was a failure to worship Him alone. Verses 29 through 33 describe their worship of the LORD and other gods, but verse 34 tells us that, in fact, this was not true worship of God. True worship exclusively worships God alone.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Most of us don’t practice overt worship of stone or wooden idols, but what about the subtler deviation of syncretistic or “combination” worship? This worship is “God plus something else.” We pray and go to church, but also bow down to the idols of money, public opinion, pleasure, and career ambition. Take a moment today to list those things that compete for your allegiance to God. Then ask God to help you put those idols away and give your exclusive devotion to Him.

2 Kings 18

2 Kings 18

How then can the LORD deliver Jerusalem from my hand? - 2 Kings 18:35

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Perils of Pauline (1914) was one of the most well-known suspense serials of the silent film era. The main character, Pauline, would find herself in a series of life-threatening predicaments: tied to train tracks, caught in a burning house, strapped to a board approaching a buzz saw, or stranded on the side of a cliff. In each episode, the audience was left wondering how Pauline would escape impending doom.

The writers of The Perils of Pauline could not have thought of a more suspenseful scene than our reading today, as the Assyrian army surrounded Jerusalem and promised its defeat in graphic detail. By the end of the 2 Kings 18, the question remains: can God

be trusted to save, or not?

Before providing the details of that predicament, Scripture first introduces the new king of Judah, Hezekiah. The portrayal is a refreshingly rare commendation, for Hezekiah not only did right in God's eyes, he was like David himself. Despite a slight stumble in faithfulness (vv. 13-16), Hezekiah received rave reviews: "He removed the high places, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles" (v. 4). Moreover, Hezekiah "trusted in the LORD," "held fast to the LORD," and "did not cease to follow him" (vv. 5-6). In turn, "the LORD was with him" (v. 7) and gave him success in everything he did. That's an impressive summary of a godly and faithful king.

Then there's the rest of the chapter. Sennacherib's armies arrived in Jerusalem and sent a chilling message that went to the heart: can you really depend on your God? (The word *depend*, which can also be translated as "trust," occurs seven times.) With an echo of the wicked serpent himself (cf. Genesis 3), the messengers cast doubt on God's promises, contradicted God's word, lied about God's purposes, promised a better life under their terms, and reminded them that no other gods have yet stopped the Assyrians. Even the king's men seemed forlorn. So the chapter ends with the questions hanging in the air: will Hezekiah and the nation continue to trust God? Can He even be trusted?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Some of us may find our faith under attack. We look around the world and see lying politicians re-elected, tyrannical dictators basking in power, dishonest business people gaining wealth, and faithful Christians suffering persecution. Many are the voices which call us to question: "Can God be trusted?" Sometimes it's worth sitting before God with our heavy hearts, asking Him to increase our faith. Do that this Lord's day, knowing that God hears us even in our darkest moments of doubt.

2 Kings 19

2 Kings 19:1-19

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. - 1 Peter 5:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

This day marks the death in 1963 of renowned Christian apologist C. S. Lewis. In his work *A Grief Observed*, Lewis observed how suffering can strengthen faith: "Your bid for God or no God, for a good God or the Cosmic Sadist ... will not be serious if nothing much is staked on it. And you will never discover how serious it was until the stakes are raised horribly high... Nothing less will shake a man ... out of his merely verbal thinking and his merely notional beliefs."

The stakes couldn't have been higher for Hezekiah and company. Assyria stood at the gate threatening Judah's destruction and mocking God as helpless deity. Would Hezekiah bet everything on God, or would his profession of faith prove empty? Observe Hezekiah's response to the disheartening news: joining together his grief and his God, Hezekiah tore his clothes (a symbol of grief) and went to the temple (the symbol of God's presence), and then sent messengers to Isaiah the prophet. Here is a man who offers us a godly example, not only professing belief in God, but acting upon it when the stakes were highest.

Notice the tension from what follows. Isaiah sent a word of hope and deliverance, but nothing changed in the external situation. Assyria remained and their verbal abuse poured forth, reminding Judah (again) that no god had yet withstood the fearsome Assyrian king.

In the face of such dire circumstances, Hezekiah again sought the Lord, his prayer offering instruction for us today. He began, not with his own anxieties, but with God, acclaiming Him as the true Creator, enthroned over all kingdoms of the earth. Only then, and on the basis of who God is, did Hezekiah then call for God to hear and act. In the face of Assyria's taunts, Hezekiah called upon God to defend His name "so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God" (v. 19). Perhaps the best prayers are simple: remember who God is, admit our need of Him, and entreat Him to act.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's passage shows us that the best prayers often start with our own helplessness, urging us to turn for help to the God of all. Perhaps there is someone in your life—a neighbor, a co-worker, a family member, or friend—who needs to hear this simple, yet profound, message. Pray for a way today to encourage that person to turn his or her helplessness into a prayer in which they cast all their anxieties before the God who can indeed hear, see, and act (1 Peter 5:7).

2 Kings 19:20-37

I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant. - 2 Kings 19:34

TODAY IN THE WORD

For several decades, E. F. Hutton & Co. was one of the most well-respected financial firms in the United States. It was made popular by its numerous television commercials in which a room full of boisterous people would suddenly quiet down when someone would say, "My broker E. F. Hutton says 'I'" In the still of the room, the commercials ended with the words: "When E. F. Hutton talks, people listen."

If people could learn about financial investments by listening when E. F. Hutton talks, how much more could we learn by listening when God talks? Today's reading is dominated by God's word through the prophet Isaiah, and provides important lessons for us all. In the first section, God rebuked the Assyrian king. The problem was not just Sennacherib's mockery of Judah, but his arrogance toward God Himself, boasting of Assyria's conquests. God corrected the Assyrian king by noting his three-fold failure.

First, Sennacherib failed to recognize God's sovereignty; it was God who raised up the Assyrians and gave them power. Second, the king failed to realize the omniscience of God. God knew where Sennacherib was, where he went, and what he said. Third, Sennacherib failed to account for the zeal of God. The gods of the nations might sit idly by, but the God of Israel would not stand for such insolence. A little awareness on Sennacherib's part would have eliminated his arrogance and brought him to repentance before the living God. Instead, God promised destruction: "The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this" (v. 31).

The second part of our passage describes God's word to Hezekiah. The message is simple and counters His people's hopelessness: God does not turn back on His people; He will deliver and protect, and you will prosper once again. "For my sake and for the sake of David my servant," God would deliver His people (v. 34). That night God's word proved true as 185,000 Assyrian soldiers were struck down by God's hand, while the escaping Sennacherib met his own end at the hands of his sons. When God speaks, it happens!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Both challenge and encouragement are found in today's reading. For those whose lives reflect hardness toward God, His words urge an attitude of repentance and humility: God is truly in control, and nothing escapes His notice or His plans. Will you yield to Him today? For those who feel hopeless in the face of an unjust world, God's word provides encouragement: God has not forgotten you or your plight; He is powerful to defend and deliver. Will you trust in His saving zeal today?

2 Kings 20

2 Kings 20

I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. - 2 Kings 20:5

TODAY IN THE WORD

We don't know much about the life of William Hammond, an eighteenth-century hymnist. He was a well-educated, committed English Christian who loved to write original hymns, many of them still sung in churches today. One such hymn speaks of our approach to God in prayer, and the first stanza reads: "Lord we come before Thee now / At Thy feet we humbly bow; / Oh, do not our suit disdain! / Shall we seek Thee, Lord, in vain?"

If Hammond's hymn were around during Hezekiah's reign, one could bet that the king would sing it from the heart. Hezekiah was ill, and the initial word from Isaiah was that the king would not recover. In response, Hezekiah turned to the Lord in prayer, weeping bitterly, seeking God's favor. God's response was immediate; no sooner had Isaiah left the middle court than God sent him back with a new word: "I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you" (v. 5); fifteen more years would be added to his life. To make sure of God's word, Hezekiah asked for a difficult sign, and it was granted. Here we see a king who lived by faith, knew that prayers matter to God, and turned to Him in his greatest need. We also see a God who hears our cries and delights to answer prayer.

But if the Hezekiah of verses 1 through 11 lived by faith, the Hezekiah of verses 12 through 19 lived by sight. Messengers came from Babylon, and Hezekiah showed off all his wealth, likely hoping for an alliance against the Assyrians. Just when Hezekiah seemed flawless in his devotion to God, he tried to gain a little extra help elsewhere.

God's message of rebuke came through Isaiah, and His opinion on the matter is clear: you can't serve two masters. Doing so will only result in the ultimate demise of your kingdom. The sad truth is that Hezekiah was more faithful in times of suffering and distress than in times of health and blessing. How often do we act the same way?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's passage is a good reminder that we need to seek God in all times, both bad and good. William Hammond's hymn echoes

this teaching in Scripture, reminding us that we do not seek the Lord in vain. See if you can find Hammond's full hymn online or in your church's hymnal, and spend some time memorizing the stanzas and reflecting on your own need to seek the Lord. Perhaps even learn the melody and teach it to your friends or family.

2 Kings 20:1-7; Psalm 86

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. - Psalm 147:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the strong name of Jesus Christ I stand against the world, the flesh, and the devil... I reject the distorted concepts and ideas that make sin plausible and desirable. I oppose every attempt to keep me from knowing full fellowship with God... These things I pray for the sake of him who loved me and gave himself for me. Amen.—Richard Foster, Prayer

There is a growing recognition in the medical community of the role of prayer in physical healing. Many medical professionals who have no other explanation for a patient's recovery are willing to credit prayer.

As Christians, we shouldn't be surprised by this close connection—today's passage from 2 Kings records one such healing, and Jesus' incarnational ministry was filled with healings. Also, the gospels show that physical and spiritual healing may be closely connected.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In his book, *Prayer*, Richard Foster offers insights on physical healing, cautioning Christians to avoid the extremes of seeking medical means without prayer or seeking prayer while ignoring medical help. Foster documents miraculous healings, yet he frankly admits that healing is a mystery and discourages believers from blaming themselves when healing does not occur.

Foster outlines four steps for healing prayer, appropriate for both emotional and physical healing. First, listen. "We listen to people, and we listen to God" for more discernment. Second, pray. "This is the step of faith. As we come to clearness about what is needed, we invite God's healing to come." Third, believe. "This is the step of assurance... We focus on [his] trustworthiness and especially on his steadfast love." Fourth, give thanks. "This is the step of gratitude... Gratitude is often very powerful."

If you seek healing, consider also asking the elders of your church to pray for you, as outlined in James 5:14–15.

2 Kings 21

2 Kings 21

Manasseh ... has done more evil than the Amorites ... and has led Judah into sin with his idols. - 2 Kings 21:11

TODAY IN THE WORD

We have all seen idyllic portraits of the supposed "First Thanksgiving" in 1621. Pilgrims and Native Americans gathered together, feasting on the bounty of the land, forging alliances of peace, and giving thanks for the blessings of life. Yet, just a generation later colonists and natives found themselves at war with each other. Many colonists and Native Americans feared each other, and tribe after tribe would be forced from their land through unjust transactions, eventually relegated to impoverished reservations in unwanted lands. How quickly the tide can turn!

With the rise of King Manasseh, the tide turned quickly in Judah as well. After 29 years under godly Hezekiah, Manasseh took the throne and plunged the land into incredible wickedness, reversing everything Hezekiah had done (cf. 2 Kings 18:3-8). He rebuilt the high places, re-introduced Baal and Asherah, worshiped the starry host, and even practiced child sacrifice. Moreover, he desecrated the temple, the place where Scripture twice reminds us that God had promised to place His very presence. Manasseh was not only the most wicked king of Judah, he was more wicked than pagan nations (see vv. 9, 11).

Judah had a long history of disobedience (see v. 15), but Manasseh was the final straw. The consequences were laid out in full detail: Judah would experience immense disaster. They would be wiped out, forsaken, handed over to their enemies, looted, and plundered. Scripture is clear: all of this would happen "because they have done evil in my eyes" (v. 15).

In this bleak chapter, there is an important lesson about the power of legacies. On the one hand, Manasseh's wickedness brought both Judah's inevitable destruction and another generation of wickedness in his son Amon. Our sin rarely affects just ourselves, but almost always has future repercussions. On the other hand, there is a glimmer of hope in verse 24. After Amon's death, they made Josiah king. As we will see, not only would he preserve the promised line of David, his godly heart would bring important healing to the people.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As you celebrate Thanksgiving, consider the legacies bestowed on you by forebears and those you will bestow on future generations. For all the blessings you have received because of the faithfulness of previous generations, give public thanks today, naming those blessings and those faithful individuals. As you ponder the kind of legacy you are leaving, ask God's forgiveness for poor examples and His wisdom and strength to be a godly influence on those around you.

2 Kings 22

2 Kings 22:1-20

Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. - James 1:22

TODAY IN THE WORD

The books of 1 and 2 Kings narrate the relationship between Yahweh and His people from the time of the united kingdom under Solomon, through the parallel history of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, ending with a focus on the southern kingdom of Judah and its fall to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. The kings are assessed throughout the books as those who did either evil or right in the eyes of the Lord. Our text today is set during the time of King Josiah, an extraordinarily important figure in the history of ancient Israel and Judah. Equally significant is that 2 Kings presents Josiah as the most righteous and repentant king of Judah (2 Kings 23:25).

In the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign (approximately 622 BC), when he was only 26 years old, a temple renovation project was in progress. The community collected a special designated offering in order to compensate the workers as well as buy the products needed for repairs. While rummaging through the relics in the temple, the high priest found the Book of the Law. The scroll found is commonly identified by scholars as a form of Deuteronomy.

A section of the Book of the Law (regarded as Deut. 31:14-29) was read to King Josiah. In response, he tore his robes as a sign of sorrow and mourning. Judah had been disobedient, and the reading curses rebelliousness with disaster (Deut. 31:27-29). Josiah wanted the Lord's message from the Book of the Law interpreted, so he sent the high priest and others to Huldah, the prophetess. Huldah's exposition contains two parts: a confirmation of disaster (vv. 16-17) and an exemption for Josiah (vv. 19-20). Surprisingly, though Josiah was found faithful, God did not relent against Josiah's kingdom, Judah. Nonetheless, Josiah remained faithful and initiated diligent religious reforms to eliminate idol worship and syncretism throughout Judah (2 Kings 23:1-28). The prophetess Huldah accurately described how Josiah's heart was humble and responsive before the Lord.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

James 1:22-25 invites us to be like King Josiah, readily obedient to the Lord's Word. As we see in Josiah's life, James also confirms that faithfulness to God brings blessing (v. 25). Are you humble and submissive to God's Word, allowing it to transform you by the power of the Spirit? Or do you find yourself resistant and rebellious, clinging to the idols in your life? Just as Josiah's temple renewal project uncovered the Book of the Law, let the Spirit excavate the depths of your heart through His powerful Word.

2 Kings 22

Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD ... I have heard you. - 2 Kings 22:19

TODAY IN THE WORD

Of all the responsibilities and powers entrusted to U.S. state governors, the authority to issue reprieves is one of the weightiest. Convicted inmates on death row may appeal to the governor for a delay of execution while further evidence is examined, or even for a full prison release under certain circumstances. At those moments, that single elected official holds the power of life and death. Granting a reprieve means life; denying it means death.

While most gubernatorial reprieves are issued on the basis of legal evidence, today's passage shows us a divine reprieve, this one on the basis of the spiritual evidence of humility. We've just surveyed fifty-seven years of wicked leadership under Manasseh and Amon, but now a complete change: Josiah. Messengers were sent to the temple on financial business, but Hilkiah the priest "found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD" (v. 8). We're not told where it had been, but it was likely pushed aside during the Law-less reign of Manasseh.

The book was taken to King Josiah and read to him. Then came Josiah's stirring response. Realizing that "our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book" (v. 13), Josiah tore his robes in grief and immediately sent messengers to inquire of the LORD. Struck with repentance and humility, Josiah moved to action. Oh that we would respond to God's word with such zeal and sincerity—not just hearing God's word, but taking it to heart, grieving over our failure to obey, and seeking from the Lord what to do.

Finally, there was God's response, which included both judgment and mercy. On the one hand, the promised judgment over disobedience would come; Judah could not escape the consequence of generations of disobedience. But there was also mercy: "Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD ... I have heard you" (v. 19). Judgment would come, but Josiah received a reprieve. He would die in peace. This is so often the way of God, to offer mercy and forgiveness in the face of repentance and humility?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

This teaches us the power and importance of humbly responding to God's word, even when it points out our sin. The pain of facing our sin with repentance will always be met with the grace and mercy of a forgiving God. Attitudes of humility and repentance cannot simply be conjured up like magic. Pray for the Holy Spirit to soften your heart, making the words of Bob Pierce, founder of World Vision, your prayer: "Let my heart be broken with the things that break the heart of God."

2 Kings 22:3-20

When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. - 2 Kings 22:11

TODAY IN THE WORD

A Scottish scholar working in New York found a previously unknown drawing by Michelangelo. Sifting through storage boxes at a Smithsonian museum in 2002, Timothy Clifford found a drawing of an elaborate candelabrum that he was sure was by the master Renaissance artist. "It was just as I recognize a friend in the street or my wife across the breakfast table," he said, and leading art scholars have concurred. The museum director said, "The manner in which the drawing was discovered is straight out of a children's storybook."

A similar story is found in today's reading, when a copy of the lost Law was discovered during Josiah's temple restoration project. Josiah was the last godly king before the Exile. Since he took the throne at age eight, his mother Jedidah should probably be given much credit for putting her son on the right spiritual path. The young king dedicated his life to the Lord at age 16 and began campaigning against idolatry at age 20 (2 Chron. 34:3-7). Jeremiah and Zephaniah also prophesied during his reign.

By the time of the events in today's reading, Josiah was age 26. A collection had been taken for repairing the temple, and the king put the priests in charge of making renovations. During this project, they discovered a copy of the lost "Book of the Law," which may have been the entire Pentateuch or at least the book of Deuteronomy. When had it been lost? Perhaps Manasseh or Amon, Josiah's predecessors, had tried to destroy all copies in their thoroughgoing wickedness.

Hearing God's Word, Josiah responded with repentance; tearing his robes showed grief over the nation's sins. Deuteronomy 28 would have been quite clear about why God was angry with His covenant people. Thanks to Josiah's humble and responsive heart, revival came to Judah and the prophesied judgment was delayed (vv. 16-20). God's Word changes hearts, and changed hearts change history.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Creating a specific, personal narrative about one impact Scripture has had in your life can help you remember the power of the Word. It need not include a "torn robe," and the story can be told either through speaking or writing.

2 Kings 23

2 Kings 23:1-30

Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did. - 2 Kings 23:25

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the 2008 film *Fireproof*, Caleb Holt slowly came to understand God's intentions in marriage by following a life-transforming forty-day relationship experiment (the "Love Dare") recommended by his father. In one scene, Caleb came to see that his addiction to Internet pornography was destroying his relationship with his wife. In response, Caleb destroyed the computer with a baseball bat and left in its place a note for his wife: "I love you more."

That movie scene depicts the extreme reaction needed against sin in our life. Rather than simply pushing sin away, sometimes we need to take steps to destroy it. Today's reading illustrates this destructive action. King Josiah called the people together to hear God's law and to renew their covenant with Him. Both king and people pledged "to follow the LORD and keep his commandments" (v. 3).

But there was more than verbal assent; 2 Kings 23 is a chapter of an assault against sin. Consider the language used to describe the violence against idolatry. At the king's orders, the priests "removed," "did away with," "desecrated," "burned," "ground to powder," "broke down," "smashed," "defiled," and "slaughtered" the vestiges of pagan idolatry, their places of worship, and their priests. This was no half-hearted attempt; it was a full-blown destruction of sin that violated their covenant with God. What a model of how we should treat sin in our own lives.

Yet how do we reconcile this thorough-going reform and the pronouncement in verses 26 and 27 that God would nevertheless destroy Judah? Perhaps the point is to show us what true repentance looks like. God had already declared that Judah's punishment would come because of Manasseh's sin, and Josiah knew that pronouncement (22:16-20). Despite this, Josiah pressed on in obedience, not in order to manipulate God's mercy, but because it was right in God's eyes. This is the picture of one turned to the Lord with all his heart, soul and strength (v. 25). And there is great comfort in knowing that another King in David's line whose own obedience to the Father did remove the penalty of our sin once for all!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

What is your reaction to sin? Do you take steps to destroy its power, or do you only push it to the margins where it can soon drift back into a position of influence? We should imitate Josiah's active commitment to God by destroying opportunities for sin in our life. Take time for serious, prayerful reflection and respond to any conviction of the Holy Spirit. With God's help in light of Christ's work, commit to tangible, even life-changing, actions to demolish sin's power in your life.

2 Kings 23:31-24:20a

It was because of the LORD's anger that ... in the end he thrust them from his presence. - 2 Kings 24:20

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Christian season of Advent consists of the four Sundays preceding Christmas day, and today marks the first Sunday in Advent. For centuries Christians have noted a penitential season reflecting on the two "advents" or "comings" of Christ, His first at the Incarnation and His Second Coming in the future. Advent also brings an air of excitement as we approach the joys and festivities of the Christmas celebration.

As we begin this season of reflection and excited anticipation, we get something of a contrast from today's reading. The rapid downward spiral of Judah is not the most joyous reading. So much more time and detail were spent on the previous godly leadership of Josiah and Hezekiah, but here we are rushed through Judah's last twenty-two years and four kings. Perhaps that's the point. Holiness and obedience should be more exciting and capture more of our attention than the drab dullness of sin and disobedience.

So we get the uninspiring, repetitive report that Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah all "did evil in the eyes of the LORD." Some were vassals of Egypt; others of Babylon. Some paid taxes to their oppressors, while others experienced siege and exile from the land. Some were kings in their own right; others were mere puppets in the hands of foreigners. No matter how you look at it, the consequences of sin were always the same, leaving the land deprived of its treasure and people. Sin may promise excitement and fulfillment, but it only delivers predictable disappointment.

Finally, today's reading reminds us of the reason for Judah's downfall: the egregious sin of its people. Scripture repeats this lesson again and again. Verses 2 through 4 record that it all happened at God's command "because of the sins of Manasseh" (24:3b). Verse 13 reports that their destruction was in perfect fulfillment of God's earlier word (see 21:10-15), and verse 20 again narrates that God Himself was behind it all, to "thrust them from his presence." The fall of Judah was severe, but it also demonstrated the trustworthiness of God's word. He promised consequences for disobedience, and now we see that word fulfilled.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God's trustworthy word will always be fulfilled. As we begin the Advent season and reflect on Christ's promise to return one day, we can trust that word. Let today's reading challenge you to reject sin's empty promise of excitement and to use this Advent season to prepare your heart for Christ's coming. Use your corporate worship experience today to repent of your sins, sing God's praise, commit your day to His service and glory, and encourage others to do the same.

2 Kings 24

2 Kings 24:20b-25:26

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. - 2 Corinthians 7:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Johnny Cash, the renowned American country singer with that distinctive voice, had a long and successful musical career. But not all of Cash's life was characterized by joy. In the early 1960s Cash started drinking heavily and became addicted to drugs. As a result, his behavior became increasingly erratic, his performances suffered, and his marriage was being destroyed. By 1967, his life out of control, Cash crawled deep into Nickajack cave in Tennessee hoping to die. He had hit rock bottom.

Today's reading is Judah's version of hitting rock bottom, and it's clear that the writer wants to emphasize the sadness and loss Judah experienced. First, there was the loss of land. Verse 11 reports that "Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard carried into exile the people." The land was now gone, and the people were forced to live in a foreign land. In many ways, 2 Kings 25 is summed up with these simple words: "So Judah went into captivity, away from her land" (v. 21). That promised land of milk and honey, that land of freedom from the slavery of Egypt, was now taken away.

Second, there was the loss of the city, Jerusalem. That fortified capital of Judah, God's Zion, represented His protection and glory. The Psalms are full of the praises of Zion's strength and beauty (see Ps. 2:6; 48:2), but now that city was destroyed. Its walls were broken through, torn down, and burned. The great city had been reduced to ruins.

Third, there was a loss of temple, the place of worship and of God's presence. Not content simply to capture the city, the Babylonian king burned the temple to the ground. Later, his commander removed the articles from the temple, piece by piece. The bronze pillars, the bronze Sea, the pots, shovels, wick trimmers, dishes—all were removed from the temple and taken to Babylon.

Why dwell on such loss and sadness? Perhaps because often the realization of our loss prompts us to return to God. Sadness can evoke our repentance (2 Cor. 7:10-11).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

You may know someone who has hit rock bottom, and like the writer of today's passage, you feel the sorrow and see the consequences of their sinful choices. You can pray that God will use the loss and sadness in order to bring about true repentance. Only when we first see our own misery can we long for redemption from it. Our God remains a God of compassion, forgiveness, mercy, and love.

2 Kings 25

2 Kings 25 Jeremiah 52:1-23;

If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me. - Jeremiah 15:19a

TODAY IN THE WORD

Sometimes ancient history can feel ... well, ancient. In our fast-paced world, looking at centuries-old events seems like a luxury. Yet as philosopher George Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." So jump on board for a quick journey back a few thousand years.

We'll start three hundred years prior to Jeremiah with Solomon's son. Rehoboam's forced labor policy led to a devastating revolt. In 930 B.C., the rebel leader, Jeroboam, broke away and formed the northern kingdom of Israel. Rehoboam remained in Jerusalem, ruling over the southern kingdom Judah.

Jeroboam was the first in a series of evil kings who caused the people to sin. In 722 B.C., God judged Israel's idolatry and wickedness through the cruel Assyrians, who destroyed Israel and took the people into captivity--never to return.

About one hundred years later (627 B.C.), God raised up Jeremiah, who prophesied to the last five kings of Judah. The first of these kings, Josiah, did what was right in God's sight and instituted great spiritual reform. Sadly, Judah's four remaining kings did great evil.

By 604 B.C., Assyria had fallen to a new power, Babylon. The fierce king Nebuchadnezzar conquered all of Judah excluding Jerusalem and returned home with hostages, including a youth named Daniel. Six years later, Judah's unwise alliance with Egypt provoked Nebuchadnezzar to attack Jerusalem and to carry off more exiles, including the prophet Ezekiel.

Ten years later, Judah's last king arrogantly rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. When the Babylonian king had to deal with Judah once again, he made sure it would be the last time and laid siege to Jerusalem, starving the people to submission. Eighteen months later, in 586 B.C., Jerusalem fell and was destroyed (Jer. 52:1-23).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

When someone is grieving or experiencing personal difficulty, it's often helpful to know the circumstances behind the grief and pain.

In a similar way, the historical background of Lamentations is key to understand Jeremiah's lament.

2 Kings 25:27-30

So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king's table. - 2 Kings 25:29

TODAY IN THE WORD

As Johnny Cash lay in the dark, waiting to die deep inside Nickajack cave, a strange sensation overcame him. With a sense of clarity and peace, he began to think about his life, his decisions, and God's presence with him there. With a flicker of hope, but surrounded by pitch blackness, Cash began to crawl. After a time, he felt a faint breeze on his back, and Cash followed it until he eventually made his way out. Realizing God's hand in his life, Cash later entered rehab and recommitted his life to God.

Today's reading is something like that faint breeze of hope in an otherwise dark landscape. We ended yesterday with a bleak picture of loss and sadness for the nation of Judah: no land, no city, and no temple. Some were killed brutally, others taken into exile. And we were left wondering if Judah would ever be restored? Would it all be darkness from here on? Then we come to verses 27 through 30 and there is a flicker of hope.

A new king of Babylon took the throne and a change occurred. Jehoiachin, king of Judah, was released from prison. The Babylonian king, Scripture says, "spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honor" in Babylon (v. 28). Jehoiachin was permitted a place at the king's table where he ate well "for the rest of his life" (v. 29). Moreover, Jehoiachin was given a regular allowance to support himself and his family.

In the face of the utter darkness of 2 Kings 25:1-26, we get not a floodlight of promise, but still a glimmer of hope. Perhaps the reader is expected to remember God's everlasting promises to Judah in 2 Samuel 7:13-16 and 1 Kings 11:39. Judah may have forgotten God, but God had not forgotten His people.

Of course, it would still be another five centuries of ongoing oppression under foreign nations, but eventually, out of that darkness, the Light of Christ would come (see Matt. 1:12-16). The book of 2 Kings ends with a glimpse of that coming glorious restoration.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The glimmer of hope in today's passage finds its fulfillment in the coming of Christ. This is the season when we focus on preparing our hearts to celebrate Christmas and preparing our lives for His Second Coming. As His disciple, what lessons has God taught you this month? Jot down some of the things you learned about yourself or about God's own character through our study of 2 Kings. Then thank Him for His word to us and His unfailing promises.

BYPASSING DEATH BY THEODORE EPP

2 Kings 2:1-11

The closing incident in Elijah's life was perhaps the most touching in his whole history. He was translated to heaven without having to die.

His ministry may have covered 15 or 20 years, but the public aspect of it was much briefer than that.

At a time of great depression in his life, when lying under a juniper tree, he had prayed for death, but when the time of his translation came, he was thankful that God had not answered that prayer.

The prophet's translation was to be at a specially designated place. Elijah had learned long ago that absolute obedience to God's directions was necessary for God's blessings.

Elijah began his journey from Gilgal to the place of his ascension, and Elisha insisted on going with him. This journey involved a great test for Elisha, who was to be Elijah's successor.

From the account you may be led to think that Elijah was reluctant to have Elisha go with him, but this may well have been part of the test for the younger man.

Elijah was alone in his ministry, and he was humble, and he may have felt that his coming translation was too sacred a matter to be witnessed by others.

We can learn valuable lessons from this experience. If we wish to behold the glory of God and to be fit vessels to participate in God's work, we must go on to maturity in Christ.

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17).

- See more at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20150816225322/http://www.backtothebible.org/devotions/bypassing-death#sthash.Y7AHR7Wf.dpuf>