

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY OF THE SECOND BOOK OF KINGS

PART FOUR - CHAPTERS 9-13

The last few chapters have described the miracles of Elisha which so vividly anticipate the work of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament. They had undoubtedly had a deep impact on the leadership of both Israel and to a lesser extent Judah. Now the story returns to the much greater changes that God had told Elijah would come back in I Kings 19:15-18. Elisha was already established as the new prophet. Hazael had made himself king of Aram but the biggest problem still continued in Israel itself. The Lord chose a 'larger than life' character by the name of Jehu to bring about the total clean sweep of the leadership of Israel which was the only solution to the spiritual cancer which was eating away the life of the country. God is incredibly patient but there come times when He acts against sin - and may use some unlikely people to do it.

CHAPTER NINE introduces us to a Rambo-like character by the name of Jehu. One of the sons of the prophets from Elisha's Bible school was sent with a special mission to anoint Jehu, an army commander, as the new king. Prophets, high priests and kings were anointed with oil in the Old Testament anticipating Jesus being anointed with the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. (Acts 10:38) By this symbolic act each was both given a task and promised the power of God to carry it out. Jehu received the news in private but was not a good liar so his friends found out and proclaimed him king. As he rode to confront the king of Israel, Joram's messengers defected to Jehu. Joram accompanied by king Ahaziah of Judah went out to meet Jehu and they were killed one by one. Jehu had no argument with Ahaziah but his association with Joram cost him his life. There is a warning here of the consequence of partnership with unbelievers. When Jehu arrived at the royal palace at Jezreel, Jezebel, the king's mother, was waiting for him, painted up in her seductive best. She was presumably hoping to control him as she once controlled her husband, sons and son-in-law. Jehu asked her attendants to decide whose side they were on. They did and that was the end of Jezebel! When Jehu and his men returned after dinner to bury Jezebel the dogs had also had dinner and there was very little left, just as God had foretold.

CHAPTER TEN continues the account of Israel being cleansed of its corrupt leadership. Again Jehu used the strategy of inviting the people of Samaria to choose between fighting him and disposing of Ahab's family. They choose Jehu. Now he met some of Ahaziah's followers who were clearly sympathetic to Joram, and they too died. Next to choose was Jehonadab who sided with Jehu and was spared. Generations later his family were still faithful to God's plan. (Jer.35:6-19) The root of the problems of Israel was not simply the behaviour of men but the god, and therefore the religious teaching, they followed. Jehu's next task was to remove the worship of Baal from Israel. Again he tricked people into openly acknowledging their allegiance to Baal rather than the God of Israel by arranging a mass rally for Baal. Those loyal to Jehu then executed Baal's followers and destroyed the temple which became a public toilet. Having dealt with Baal, Jehu should have put uncompromising trust in the Lord but unfortunately his clean up did not go far enough and the calf worship of Jeroboam's time continued. The problem was likely to have been a lack of Bible teaching because of which he failed to grasp who must replace Baal in the hearts of people. Nevertheless he had obeyed God up to a point and was promised the throne for 4 generations. Little by little however Israel's territory was being eroded by the new king of Aram. They seemed to lack a God given zeal to defend what He had given them presumably because they did not really know Him.

CHAPTER ELEVEN describes one last episode in the terrible story of Jezebel's influence on two nations. Athaliah, Jezebel's daughter had married Joram, king of Judah. When she heard the news

of the death of her son, Ahaziah, she immediately set out to wipe out the entire royal family including her children and grandchildren so that she could retain the throne. One of her daughters took Ahaziah's baby son, Joash, and hid him from his murderous mother. He was kept with the help of the priest in the temple of God, probably the one place Athaliah never went. After 7 years Jehoiada the priest with support from the temple guard revealed Joash to the crowd of worshippers and proclaimed him king. When Athaliah came to investigate the cause of the noise she was taken out and executed. The temple which had been built to Baal was totally destroyed.

CHAPTER TWELVE tells the remarkable story of a boy king who was determined to restore the Lord to His rightful place among the people of Judah. Under the wise guidance of Jehoiada he tried to have the temple repaired. He made the mistake of assuming that the priests would use the money they received from those who came to the temple for the care of the temple as they saw need. Twenty-three years later he and Jehoiada realised their mistake when absolutely no repairs had taken place. Instead they instituted a more realistic system by setting up a central fund from which the various tradesmen were paid direct. Those appointed proved more trustworthy and used the money well. There is an interesting lesson here about financial management of the Lord's work. Joash made two further mistakes in his reign. He did not deal with the high places, the hidden superstitions of the people. When threatened by king Hazael he bought him off rather than trusting God for victory. Finally he was murdered by two of his servants.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN takes us north to Israel again where Jehu's son, Jehoahaz, was now king. He continued the spiritual compromise of his father and his distant predecessor Jeroboam which caused God to be angry and led to repeated defeat at the hands of Hazael and his son. When finally Jehoahaz did turn to God for help the Lord was ready to answer and sent a saviour to give them victory over the Arameans. His trust in God was only for the hard times. When all seemed well he went back to his old gods. The Lord let him struggle to learn the futility of his ways. The next king of Israel was Jehoash, or Joash, not to be confused with the earlier king of Judah of the same name. He too wavered between faith in God when he was facing trouble and idolatry when he was not. Elisha, now a very old man, had one last opportunity to witness to another king. He challenged him to trust God in a much bigger way than his father did but sadly he settled for less. Elisha's death gave a last remarkable picture of the Lord Jesus, as his death became the means of life for another man.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER STUDY

1. Was it really necessary for Jehu to kill so many members of both royal families? Where was God in this mass execution? When will God's judgement happen for our generation, according to the New Testament?(Heb.9:27) Why do we find this topic of judgement rather an embarrassment as Christians?(chapter 9)
2. Again will God actually be this tough on the followers of other gods?(Matt.23:13-36) How was it that Jehu was so strong in dealing with Jezebel and family, and with the followers of Baal, and yet failed to recognise other forms of idolatry? What is the lesson in this for us?(chapter 10)
3. Chapter eleven describes a terrible episode of family violence. What can we learn from the example of those who sought to rescue and protect a child in this situation?
4. How was Joash a remarkable testimony to the potential of teaching a young child about Jesus Christ? What can we learn from his experience of trying to have the temple of God restored?(chapter 12)
5. What was Elisha's message to a new young king? How can we communicate the same challenge to young Christians today? Explain the final picture of Jesus in the death of Elisha.(chapter 13)