

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

### PART ONE - CHAPTERS 1-3

This book continues the story of the one before without interruption. Kings of Israel and Judah came and went. The main change as we move from one book to the other is the transition from the ministry of Elijah to that of Elisha. This mirrors the handover in the New Testament from John the Baptist to Jesus, whose name means 'The Lord saves'. Elisha means 'God saves' and frequently pictures the work of the Lord Jesus. When studying I and II Kings it is good to compare frequently with II Chronicles which tells the same story from a slightly different perspective. The books of Kings are told mainly from the standpoint of Israel, while II Chronicles gives greater emphasis to the southern kingdom of Judah and therefore continues the story of I Chronicles when the countries were one nation based in Jerusalem.

The most absorbing story in the early chapters is that of the preparation for and handover of ministry from the older prophet to the younger one. Just how can we pass our vision and task to someone else? Many leaders in Christian history have tried to do this, usually with disappointing results.

CHAPTER ONE describes a new king of Israel, Ahaziah, as godless as those who had gone before. Quickly he faced two major problems, war with the neighbouring Moabites, and a serious injury, the result of falling out of his window. The real test of our faith is to ask to whom do we turn in times of trouble. Ahaziah sought guidance from an idol, Baal-zebub, who becomes Beelzebul in the New Testament, another name for the devil.(Matt.10:25) God sent Elijah with both a rebuke and the answer to his question; he will die. Ahaziah had learned nothing from his father, Ahab. He thought it was an easy matter to arrest Elijah and therefore somehow prevent Elijah's prophecy coming true. Two officers and 100 men die in the attempt before the third group pleaded for God's mercy and were spared. Elijah accompanied them to the king to tell him again what God had said. As predicted, Ahaziah died and a new king, Jehoram, his brother succeeded him. Sadly he too had learned little from the fate of his father and brother.

CHAPTER TWO recounts the story of the handover of responsibility as God's mouthpiece from Elijah to Elisha. Before his final departure, Elijah revisited 3 places which had enormous significance in Israel's history. Gilgal was where Israel were instructed to build a pile of stones from the bottom of the River Jordan as a reminder of the old life, dead and buried, and the new life received in Christ.(Josh.4:20) Bethel was where Jacob met God on the way to find a wife and where he learned that God wants a house on earth.(Gen.28:10-22) His mistake however was to think that God's house would be a pile of stones not a human body. Jericho was the site of Israel's first victory in the Promised Land God had given them. Remember that the capture of Jericho was a gift not a battle.(Josh.6:16) In these three places are three key discoveries in our Christian lives. Finally the two men came to the River Jordan itself the place where Israel having learned everything they could about their new land actually committed themselves to God. Step by step Elisha was asked whether he wanted to follow and each time he did. His request for a 'double portion' was not a request to be twice the man his teacher had been. The double portion of an inheritance was the privilege of the first born.(Deut.21:17) He wanted to be like a true spiritual son of Elijah. The Holy Spirit cannot be measured. He followed all the way despite the discouragement of the 'sons of the prophets', the people who thought they knew about God and could see only disappointment first for Elisha, and then for Elijah whose removal to heaven they doubted. There was no question however that the same God who had worked through Elijah was working through his successor, first in parting the Jordan, then in sweetening bitter water. Perhaps

taking the example of the sons of the prophets a step further, a gang of young men verbally abused Elisha. A curse from God is not a magic spell but the removal of blessing and protection. This story demonstrates such danger powerfully.

CHAPTER THREE relates Elisha's first involvement in the government of Israel and Judah, and shows him very much a man of God in his own right, no longer in the shadow of Elijah. Jehoram, the new king of Israel, realised from the death of his brother that worshipping Baal was a bad idea, but otherwise he still clung to the heathen ways of earlier kings of Israel. He was soon in a situation where he needed to rethink his faith because his authority was challenged. Mesha, king of Moab, used to pay a tax in sheep and wool to Ahab, acknowledging Ahab's authority. When he saw Ahab's sons as weak he seized the opportunity to rebel,(II Kgs1:1) and now refused to pay the previous tax. Jehoram wanted to deal with the rebel but he needed allies. He found support as his father had in an alliance with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, who was a believer who seemed to see kings of Israel as his mission field. The king of Edom joined forces with them to make a substantial army. Despite their superior numbers the invading force soon found themselves facing supply problems. They were out of water in a desert. Jehoram panicked but Jehoshaphat very sensibly suggested asking God whether the whole project was His idea. The king of Israel asked counsel of Elisha who agreed to seek God's answer because of Jehoram's believing ally, Jehoshaphat. The answer came through music. God would give victory and also provide water if they would believe Him and dig trenches to contain it. The water achieved two purposes, firstly it satisfied thirst, and secondly it fooled the Moabites into thinking their enemies had fallen out and killed each other. Not only did they make an unwise attack which failed but their king showed his faith in his god by sacrificing his oldest son and would-be successor. Hated by the Moabites, the armies of Israel went home victorious.

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER STUDY

1. What does chapter one teach us about the lengths some people will go to avoid listening to God? What does Jesus' use of the name Beelzebul,(Matt.12:27) for Satan tell us about the real nature of false gods?
2. Just what are the conditions for successfully handing over leadership of a ministry to some one else? Look for example at Paul's example with Timothy and others in the New Testament. What were the essential discoveries Elisha had to make for him to be God's man for the next generation? How even unconsciously do we discourage those who really want to serve God? Should we curse those who mock us? Was God unfair to 42 naughty boys?
3. Read II Chron.17-20 to learn much more about Jehoshaphat and his reign. How does this account help to explain why he involved himself so much with the kings of Israel. Was this a good idea or a bad one? Why did God rescue him from this unnecessary colonial war in chapter 3? What does it tell us about God's faithfulness to those who trust Him some of the time?