



Cornton Baptist Church

Demonstrating God's love in action

in the community of Cornton

Through the Bible

Exodus
Nehemiah
2Chronicles Luke
Malachi
Philemon
Job
1Kings
Ruth
Amos
2John
Jeremiah
Romans
1Chronicles
2Thessalonians
1Thessalonians
Jonah
Jude
3John
Hosea
Haggai
Colossians
Micah
Sons of Songs
Deuteronomy
Acts
2Timothy
2Peter
Zephaniah
Ecclesiastes
1Timothy
Joshua
Psalms
James
Isaiah
Titus
Galatians
Daniel
Hebrews
Zechariah
1Samuel
2Corinthians
Ezekiel
1Peter
John
2Samuel
Ezra
Leviticus
Numbers
Mark
Ephesians
1Corinthians
Judges

November 2011

Elijah went before the people and said, “How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.” But the people said nothing. (v.21)

A while ago there was a silly kid’s movie called “Rocketman” where the lead guy kept messing things up and then he’d say, “It wasn’t me!” That’s a great Scottish saying “It wisnae me!” The reason for the drought in Israel was because of God’s judgment on the sin of Israel, the sin that Ahab led them to commit. But rather than admit his own part in it, Ahab wants to point the finger at Elijah. Today we are getting better and better at pointing our fingers at other people rather than accept responsibility for our own behaviour.

Elijah, who has been in hiding for three years, is now called out by God to go and challenge Ahab and the people. Elijah confronted the people of Israel. They were guilty of worshipping both God and Baal. He asks them, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions?” Many of us are guilty of having more than one god. We have the Lord and our house, or the Lord and sports, or the Lord and our career, or the Lord and our finances, or the Lord and our addiction. But God is not content to be one of two gods. He will not stand for it.

The people were in a quandary. It was time to choose – God or Baal. But they couldn’t choose. They liked the best of both worlds. And so they remained silent – they had nothing to say. Elijah suggests a challenge and we see the great showdown with the sacrifice waiting and calling on Baal and then God for fire. Of course after much calling and shouting there is no response from Baal. Elijah prays to God and fire comes. The LORD is shown to be the one true God and the people cry out to him.

What will it take for us to recognise God and serve him only? What will it take for us to speak out and decide to follow Him? What will it take for us to stop sitting on the fence and fully commit to Jesus?

Pray: proclaiming Christ as your Lord and Saviour.

Reflect: what stops me from fully following Christ?

And after the fire came a gentle whisper. (v.12)

Elijah has just had a great victory with the Lord on his side. We have to be careful though because so often after a victory comes a hard attack. The devil does not like us following God and seeing success. Elijah hears his life is in danger and runs. He came and sat under a broom tree and prayed that God would take his life. He was discouraged and depressed and simply wishes it was all over. How often in life we get down and discouraged as well. The answer to depression is not always simple...but sometimes it is. An angel of the Lord comes to Elijah and touches him. He looked around and saw food and water so he ate and drank. We are human. Sometimes depression can come simply because we have pushed ourselves too far and too hard and we simply need to take a break. Take a nap. Eat a better balanced diet.

Having gained his strength, Elijah heads for Horeb. Why Horeb? Well it is the mountain of the Lord. This is where Moses met with God and I think Elijah is now looking to hear from God again himself. The Lord was not heard in the wind, the earthquake or the fire but in the gentle whisper.

Before refrigerators, people used icehouses to preserve their food. Icehouses had thick walls, no windows, and a tightly fitted door. In winter, when streams and lakes were frozen, large blocks of ice were cut, hauled to the icehouses, and covered with sawdust. Often the ice would last well into the summer. One man lost a valuable watch while working in an icehouse. He searched diligently for it, carefully raking through the sawdust, but didn't find it. His fellow workers also looked, but their efforts, too, proved futile. A small boy who heard about the fruitless search slipped into the icehouse during the noon hour and soon emerged with the watch. Amazed, the men asked him how he found it. "I closed the door," the boy replied, "lay down in the sawdust, and kept very still. Soon I heard the watch ticking." Often the question is not whether God is speaking, but whether we are being still enough, and quiet enough, to hear.

Pray: asking God to speak to us in the midst of the noise of life.

Reflect: do I push myself too hard? Is it time for a rest?

Because the Arameans think the LORD is a god of the hills and not a god of the valleys, I will deliver this vast army into your hands, and you will know that I am the LORD. (v.28)

Many people think that God is with them when things are going well and when they are healthy and wealthy. They mistakenly feel he has left them when things are tough and they are suffering affliction. How wrong they are.

A merchant was informed by his confidential secretary that his company was in serious financial difficulty. "It's been a bad year, sir," said the employee; "there have been vast losses and few gains." The merchant saw that bankruptcy was imminent. When at last he spoke, his voice was low and steady. "No, John, it has been a good year in spite of everything. Every one of those figures 'in the red' represent hours of agonising prayer on my part - experiences that have made me so spiritually rich that I cannot despair over any earthly losses. The future is bright, for the Lord has promised, 'No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.'" The secretary looked at him for a moment, and then said, "I want to tell you it was your steadiness under the testing of the past year that has made me long to know Christ as you do; and so the other night I received Him as my Saviour. I agree, sir; it has indeed been a good year!" Both men had come to realise in a wonderful way that the Lord is also 'the God of the valleys!'

And Ben-Hadad, as well as the children of Israel, realised that here in chapter 20. Ben-Hadad and his men had been defeated in the hills by the Israelites. He wrongly assumed their God was only god of the hills. He decided to attack the next time in the valleys. But God overcame for the Israelites in the valley proving that He is God of all. God is with us always. He has promised in his word to never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He is with us on the mountain top experiences of our lives and just as importantly he is with us in the deep valley.

Pray: thanking God for being with us always.

Reflect: do I need reassurance today that God is with me in the valley? Turn to his word and be encouraged afresh.

When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. (v.27)

We all look at items we wish we had but don't – the fancy car, the big old house in the country, the designer clothes, the top job in our business, etc. Sometimes we look at items that belong to others and wish we had them. There is nothing wrong with admiring that which is good. The problem comes when it comes to coveting that item or possession and trying to do whatever we can to get it. And sometimes we go too far. We turn to cheating or stealing to get our hands on something.

Worse is done by Ahab and Jezebel. Ahab wants Naboth's vineyard but Naboth is not for exchanging it. Ahab goes home in a sulk – isn't that how we behave sometimes when we do not get our own way? Jezebel wants to help him so she prepares this elaborate plan to have Naboth killed. In these verses Ahab and Jezebel have committed some horrible sins in that they have perverted the Law of God, put an innocent man to death, bribed false witness to lie against him, and they have taken that which belonged to the dead man. They have earned a judgment sentence from the Lord.

Elijah comes and brings that sentence to Ahab. At long last we see a glimmer of hope for Ahab. When Ahab hears the sentence that is handed down by Elijah, he knows that he has run out of chances, he knows that he must repent or perish. So, even this wicked little man does what he should have done many years before. He repents of his sins and walks in humility before the Lord. Because Ahab repents, God let's Elijah know that He is going to show Ahab mercy. Judgment is still coming, but it will be held off until after Ahab's death. That is grace in action!

We must watch we don't covet an item so much that we do whatever we have to in order to get our hands on it. And we ought not to wait until someone has to come and warn us of our sin – we should daily be confessing our sins before God.

Pray: thanking God for the many blessings we have received and asking him to help us be content (Philippians 4:11-13).

Reflect: is their sin in my life that I need to confess right now?

In everything he walked in the ways of his father Asa and did not stray from them; he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD. (v.43)

Jehoshaphat comes on to the scene in this chapter and we see straight away that he is a man of God. When Ahab asks him to go into battle with him, Jehoshaphat asks that they inquire of the Lord. He then chastises Ahab for the way he speaks about the prophet of the Lord. They go into battle and Ahab is killed in battle. The chapter ends with some words on Jehoshaphat although we learn more of him when we get to 2 Chronicles.

It is verse 43 we take note of for it tells us an important fact – Jehoshaphat learned from his father Asa and walked in God’s ways. He was well brought up. There is nothing more important for a parent to do than bring their children up well. Proverbs 22:6 reminds us ‘*Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.*’

Whenever major league baseball player Curt Schilling pitches, he writes his dad’s name on the free-ticket list for that game. It’s a practice he started in 1988, and continued as long as he played the game. This wouldn’t be all that unusual, except that a few months before Curt’s major league debut his dad died of cancer. Putting his father’s name on that list is an ongoing tribute to the man who for 22 years provided guidance, instruction, encouragement, and inspiration.

Just as Curt Schilling’s dad gave him the incentive to succeed in baseball, so we need to instil in our children the knowledge, desire, and wisdom to succeed in the arena of faith. Nothing is more important than to spend time building into our children the skills to do right in God’s eyes. Read to them from the bible when they are young and as they grow help them to read it for themselves. Pray with them from a young age and encourage them to keep praying with you as well as on their own as they grow. Teach them God’s way by the way you live and act and speak every day as well.

Pray: thanking God for our children and asking him to protect them as they grow.

Reflect: how am I influencing the lives of my children and grandchildren?

Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? (v.3)

Ahaziah is in trouble. He has fallen through the lattice in his upper room and has injured himself badly. He is looking for help and wondering what will happen to him. Ahaziah wasn't asking to be healed. He just wanted to know what was going to happen. So he sends some of his people to consult Baal – a false god to see what answers will come back.

People today still want to find out what is going to happen to them so they try various things. Things like astrology, witchcraft, tarot cards, Ouija boards, séances, etc. are very, very dangerous. They are an abomination to the Lord. It's kind of like going to the enemy to ask advice. It can start out as a harmless diversion, but it intrigues you and sucks you in. There seems to be something real there and there is. There is an open door to demonic spirits. When people say at work or out for coffee, "I wonder what my horoscope says today", just say no! A Christian has no place in seeking the occult for answers.

There is a place for asking advice of other people. But we need to be careful that we're not going to other people just to avoid going to God! Are we afraid that we might not hear what we want to hear from the Lord? Ahaziah got a pretty harsh word from the Lord. But he was in total rebellion against the Lord. And sure enough the words of God through Elijah come to pass and Ahaziah dies in his bed.

The place we ought to go for answers is to God. He made us and he knows us. Where do we find answers from God? Well the first thing to do is pray and ask for his guidance and his wisdom. Then we can read His Word. His Word was written and recorded and handed down to us so we could learn how to live life God's way. You will find God's answers in His Word.

Pray: thanking God for His Word and asking him to help you in an area you are struggling with just now.

Reflect: where do I turn to for advice? Keep reading God's Word and learning from Him.

Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" (v.9)

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. As they walk together, Elijah spends his last moments with Elisha teaching him about obedience and faithfulness. Elijah doesn't clap Elisha on the shoulder and walk off into the sunset. He knows this man is to take his place some day. He knows that Elisha needs and deserves the best training he can be given. The future depends on Elijah doing his duty today. Before he leaves, he must hand down his ministry to the same keeping of the next generation. Therefore Elijah asks Elisha what he can do for him before he goes.

Friends, as some of us near the end of our own road, there is another generation coming along behind us. What are we teaching them about faith, obedience to God, faithfulness to the Lord's house and work, love for the Bible, etc? What kind of legacy are we leaving behind as we travel toward our crossing?

Pray: thanking God for his faithfulness and praying for those who come after us.

Reflect: what kind of legacy will I leave behind when I die?

Elisha son of Shaphat is here. He used to pour water on the hands of Elijah. (v.11)

Trouble is brewing again for the king of Israel and as he looks out he only sees disaster. He is living in fear. He is pessimistic – the glass half empty kind of guy. Jehoshaphat is different. He always turns to God and walks in his ways. So he asks if there is a prophet of the LORD around who could inquire of the LORD for them. Jehoshaphat wants to seek God's opinion. He wants someone to talk to God on their behalf.

When you come across a Pessimistic Pete, try suggesting prayer! It's amazing what kind of transformations can take place before the throne of God. And don't just tell them to pray, pray with them! One of the best encouragements for people comes when we pray with them. Do you know no-one has ever declined an invitation by me to pray for them. Many times, all it takes is prayer to alleviate a person's fears: Psalm 34:4 *'I sought the LORD, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears.'*

As Jehoshaphat asks the question an officer comes forward and tells them of Elisha. Elisha is described as one who *'used to pour water on the hands of Elijah.'* The way Elisha is described tells me something important about him – this 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.

We often want the top positions in life and even in the church without first being willing to work our way up the ladder and to serve others. Jesus will later teach that the first will be last and the last first; the least will be the greatest. He also said that he came to serve and not to be served. In the Lord's work, rank or position is not nearly as important as being willing to serve wherever He places you, even if its "pouring water."

Pray: asking God to help in a situation you are struggling with.

Reflect: am I willing to serve wherever God places me?

Tell me, what do you have in your house? (v.2)

The widow we read of here is in a bind. She sees no way out from it. Her husband has borrowed money and has now died. She has no way of paying the money back and the creditors are after her wanting to take her two sons into slavery as payment for the debt. She does not know what to do – except turn to God. Her life has been a life of devotion to the Lord and in her trouble, she still trusts Him and turns to Him for the things she needs! In spite of her pain, her problems and her lack of possibilities, she still looked up to God for the help she needed! Even though she couldn't see a way out, she knew that she couldn't see everything. Even though she didn't understand everything she was facing, she still believed that God cared and that He could do something about her situation, so she cried out to Him in faith!

She finds Elisha and cries out to him. Elisha asks her what he can do and what she has. The widow thinks she has nothing and replies with that. She does admit to having a little oil but after all that's not worth even mentioning is almost the impression you get. But God takes what we have, little though it may be, and uses it for his glory.

God will start to meet your needs with what you have. Sometimes we can get caught up in a fantasy thinking and wishing for something that we don't have...“If I'd only win the Lottery ...” “If I only had a rich uncle that was really, really old and sick ...” But God often starts with what you do have, and works first with that. When Jesus was faced with a crowd of 10,000 people to feed for lunch he asks what they have. The disciples find a boy with two loaves and five fish. Jesus took that boy's lunch, and fed the whole crowd with it.

When difficulty comes, turn first to God and ask for his help. And then be willing to hand over whatever you have to allow God to use it for his glory and to work a miracle.

Pray: thanking God for his abundant provision.

Reflect: when trouble comes where do I turn first? Make sure it is God.

Go wash yourself seven times in the Jordan and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed. (v.10)

Naaman was a highly regarded man and a valiant soldier. But he also had leprosy. And that word but shows that despite all that is going well for the man something is holding him back. In Naaman's case it was leprosy. We know leprosy as that terrible disease that affects the skin. Back in biblical times, in Jewish circles if you had leprosy you were put out of the camp and told to stay away from people. The people of Aram tolerated it though – it didn't bother them. Naaman was still able to live among them and serve among them.

I think we get a picture of sin here and it is likened to the leprosy of Naaman. Many things are going well for him but one thing mars his life – the leprosy. For many people things in life appear to be going well but still something mars their life – sin. In fact it mars all of our lives. And until we come to Jesus and accept the forgiveness he offers it will continue to mar our life. The people of Aram are like our world today as well – we tolerate sin. Sin that used to land people in prison for twenty years now only brings a ticket with a fine. Behaviour which was considered utterly sinful when we were a Christian nation is now both tolerated and welcomed. It is time we remembered what sin is and how destructive it can be. Sin is sin – no matter how big or small we think it might be.

A new captive girl tells Naaman of Elisha the prophet. Naaman goes and seeks out the king of the land but he obviously can't help him. Elisha hears and sends a message to Naaman. He is to go and wash seven times in the Jordan River. Naaman is angry – what a futile exercise he thinks to himself. He is persuaded to go and he does and God works a miracle and heals him. Naaman now believes in God.

Notice Elisha does not draw attention to himself or come up with some fancy solution – he simply says wash and God will do the rest. Sometimes the best we can do for others is the simplest – point out sin and point them to the Saviour.

Pray: thanking God for your salvation.

Reflect: do I tolerate sin in my life and in the life of others?

“Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” (v.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. The king of Aram was furious at how the Israelites kept escaping their traps. He thought there was a mole in his camp. He was told that Elisha the prophet was the problem for he knew what was coming and warned the king of Israel. The king of Aram decided to encircle the city at night with so many horses and chariots that the people would be afraid and would not be able to escape.

Elisha’s servant awoke and was immediately concerned. He was frightened by what he saw. Elisha tells him not to be afraid for there are more with them than with the king of Aram. 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. He has promised to never leave us nor forsake us. 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!

Pray: thanking God for never leaving us nor forsaking us.

Reflect: in what situations have I experienced God’s deliverance in the past? List them and then thank Him for his goodness.

We're not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. (v.9)

Four starving lepers, in quarantine outside Samaria, decided to surrender to the enemy soldiers who were besieging the city. But they found the Syrian camp empty of men and full of provisions, evidence of a terror-stricken flight. Unknown to them the LORD had caused the Arameans to hear the sound of a great army with chariots and horses and so they had run away in fear. The lepers 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 (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8), and He will hold us accountable for our obedience to Him when we stand before Him (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Blunt common sense always characterised D.L. Moody. Once a man rose in one of his meetings to give his experience. "I have been for five years on the Mount of Transfiguration," he said. Instantly Mr. Moody interrupted him by the sharp question, "How many souls did you lead to Christ last year?" "Well, I don't know," answered the surprised man. "Have you led any?" then came sternly from the preacher. "I-ah-don't know that I have," said the man. "Then," snapped Mr. Moody, still more sternly, "we don't want that kind of mountaintop experience. When a man gets so high that he can't reach down and save poor sinners, there is something wrong."

Friends we have good news to share – in fact the best and most important news ever – Jesus died to save sinners. Let's not keep it to ourselves.

Pray: asking God to give us the courage to share the good news.

Reflect: who can I share the gospel with today? Get on and share it.

Just as Gehazi was telling the king how Elisha had restored the dead to life, the woman whose son Elisha had brought back to life came to beg the king for her house and land. (v.8)

In chapter 4 while living in the house of a Shunammite woman and her husband, Elisha prophesied that they would give birth to a boy within the year. But later, after the child was grown, he grabbed his head and died shortly thereafter. The woman showed great faith and trust, and God used Elisha to raise him from the dead.

Elisha knew that a famine was coming, and he told the Shunammite woman to find a place to move to for the next seven years. We discover this here in chapter 8. The Shunammite woman packed up and moved with her family to the land of the Philistines for seven years. It appears that during the seven years she was gone, someone had seized her house and land as if it had been abandoned. When they wouldn't give it back, she went to make an appeal to the king. "Coincidentally," at that same moment, the king happened to be having a conversation with the servant of Elisha about this very woman. Gehazi was telling him the story of her son being raised from the dead when she walked in.

I have become more and more convinced over the years that there is no such thing as luck or coincidence. God has demonstrated to me so many times how perfect His timing is, and making the impossible happen. I wonder if it grieves Him when we say, "I sure was lucky," instead of giving glory to God. I do know that the words "luck," "lucky," and "coincidence" are nowhere to be found in the Bible. So God had made the timing perfect, and the result was that the woman had great credibility in the eyes of the king. Her land and house were restored, plus she was granted all the produce that her field had grown in the last seven years.

There are no such things as coincidence – rather we should refer to them as God-incidents because God is always at work. Let's give him the glory!

Pray: thanking God for a God-incident in your life recently.

Reflect: on ways God has been at work in your life and give him thanks.

How can there be peace as long as all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel abound? (v.22)

Elisha the prophet was getting very old by this point, and sent one of his students to go and find Jehu and anoint him as king. The reason for this change of leadership was the judgment that God had pronounced years before: King Ahab and his wife Jezebel had been completely hostile to the people of God. Jezebel had even ordered that all the prophets of God be put to death. Only a hundred of them had been spared (1 Kings 18:4). They had continued in sin, and God had pronounced judgment upon Ahab's house and all his descendants, so that none of them would ever sit on the throne of Israel again.

Jehu goes to deal with the wrong king as well as the wrong influences on the king and the people. Joram has allowed the influences of Jezebel to influence him and the people. Jezebel had encouraged idolatry and witchcraft and had drawn the people away from the LORD. Jehu is being sent to deal with this. Jehu understood that peace couldn't come to Israel as long as they were caught in such horrible idolatry.

Jehu deals with Joram and then directly with Jezebel. People may have been thinking she had gotten away with her crimes. After all this is some twelve years down the line since the prophecy against Ahab and Jezebel in 1 Kings 21. The Lord sees to it that she pays for her crimes.

We might have wished that Jezebel had been dealt with quicker but God had it all in mind. We might get frustrated too when evil survives and even thrives around us. We might want to take things into our own hands and sort it out. Vengeance is mine says the Lord and he will indeed deal with evil in his time. All we can do is keep trusting and keep reminding ourselves that judgement day is coming. With that in mind we perhaps ought to try harder to convince people of their sin and point them to the Saviour.

Pray: asking God to help us remain faithful to him.

Reflect: do I have any idols in my life that draw me away from God?

Yet Jehu was not careful to keep the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart. (v.31)

Jehu continues to deal with the family of Ahab. He then moves on to deal with Baal worship and destroys the temple of Baal – demolishing the sacred stone of Baal and tearing down the temple of Baal. Jehu has done well but for some reason or another, he just can't seem to finish the job. Unfortunately, he was not willing to eradicate all of the idolatry out of the land. We discover in verse 28 and 29 that although destroying Baal worship in Israel he did not deal with the golden calves at Bethel and Dan.

Jehu's reluctance to get rid of the golden calves was symptomatic of his heart. He was good at doing the right thing when it suited him, but his heart was wicked. God desires obedience to come from the heart: to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. The key is not to look to your works to see if you are doing everything correctly, but to look at your heart. True obedience to the Lord comes out of the heart. For some reason Jehu still had those calves in his heart. If you get the heart right, the rest will follow. And so often we are the same. We deal with so many of the idols in our lives but keep one hidden in the corner for a rainy day or perhaps it is the one thing we simply cannot give up. Let's allow God to change our hearts that we might follow him wholeheartedly.

God acknowledged that Jehu had done what he was commanded, but also brought judgment for his wicked heart. He allowed Israel to be attacked, and territory taken from them. What territory was taken from Israel? The land east of the Jordan. The land of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. These were the tribes that decided not to enter the Promised Land. They thought that they'd prefer to stay right outside of what God had promised them. And now, they are the first ones to be picked off.

When we decide to live outside of the best that God has for us, it will only be a matter of time before we too get picked off by our enemies. Let's seek to live in the centre of God's will for our lives.

Pray: asking God to help us follow him wholeheartedly.

Reflect: what is the one thing that keeps me from serving God fully?

Jehoiada then made a covenant between the LORD and the king and people that they would be the LORD's people. (v.17)

We begin in terrible times. Athaliah has seen her son Ahaziah killed and she decides she wants the throne. In order to do this she has to destroy the whole royal family. The only royal family left are her grandchildren and so Athaliah starts putting them to death. She wants total control of the kingdom to herself! She is about to destroy the Davidic line. Although the Lord had promised that the house of David would rule over Israel and Judah forever (2 Samuel 7:16) Athaliah's purge brought the house of David to the brink of extinction. I think there is also a plot from Satan here as well. If she puts to death all of the royal offspring, then the line of David would be destroyed. And that means the line of the Messiah.

Joash is saved and protected in the temple of the Lord for six years. When he was seven he is anointed as king and the people clap their hands and cheer. Athaliah hears this and is distraught. Fortunately she is captured and killed. Jehoiada wanted to see a return to the Lord in the land of Judah. He saw it was a real possibility that revival could start right here. He'd had such an influence on the boy king for the first seven years of his life, and would continue to be able to instruct him in the ways of the Lord. This could be the first godly leader for Judah in 35 years! And so, he made a covenant including the Lord, the king, and the people, making them promise that they would be the Lord's people.

Revival had truly broken out. Newly dedicated to the Lord, the people saw the wickedness of Baal worship, and tore down the temple to Baal. They broke the altars and images, killed Mattan, the high priest of Baal worship. True revival consists not only of turning to God, but of turning away from false Gods. The people have now made a new commitment to Yahweh, but it's not just a matter of words, but is followed by action. Your relationship with God is more than words. A true commitment brings true change. We call this repentance.

Pray: asking God to continue that work of changing your heart.

Reflect: is my life changing daily that I might become more like Christ?

Joash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD all the years Jehoiada the priest instructed him. (v.2)

When you teach your kids to ride a bike, you can only do so much with stabilisers/training wheels. After a while, it's time to try without the stabilisers. But even without the stabilisers, you usually have to run alongside them, holding them up, until they get the knack of balancing on two wheels. But for you to successfully teach them, you eventually have to let go and stop running with them.

It appears that Jehoiada did not learn this lesson. All the time he was alive Jehoiada instructed Joash and told him what to do. When Jehoiada dies (2 Chronicles 24) Joash falls to pieces – he rebels against the Lord. Quite a sad turn of events at the end of Joash's life! As soon as his uncle dies, the strong guiding influence he's so grown accustomed to is gone. And he doesn't seem to know how to handle things on his own.

It's a good thing to teach your kids to respect you and to respect your advice. But it seems to me that every once in a while a parent goes a little too far in trying to control their children. They make all their decisions for them, never letting them learn to think for their own. They always step in and rescue them, without ever letting them experience the consequence of their actions. It's important that we as parents instil in our kids the right values and the ability to make good decisions. But just teaching them these things isn't good enough. Eventually you need to start stepping back and see whether they've really learned it or not. Sometimes you have to learn to just let go and see if anything has sunk in!

Jehoiada taught Joash the ways of the Lord but he clearly did not point Joash toward God himself. We are to teach our children about God and his ways remembering always to point them to him directly as well.

Pray: thanking God for our children and asking him to help us teach them wisely.

Reflect: are we teaching our children to handle themselves well in life or are we living their lives for them? Are we pointing them to God?

He did evil in the eyes of the LORD by following the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat. (v.2)

Jehoahaz became king up in Israel. Like the kings of that kingdom before him, he was not righteous before the Lord. He followed the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat. You will recall that Jeroboam was the first king of the northern kingdom after civil war split the nation. Jeroboam was the one who had feared that the people would return to the land of David. Because Jerusalem and the new temple were both in the southern kingdom, he was afraid that the frequent trips to make sacrifices would draw their hearts back towards the house of David. So he had two golden calves made in Bethel and Dan for the people to worship.

We see that not only did he corrupt those in his kingdom in this way, but that he also personally worshiped there as well (1 Kings 13:1). So the sins of Jeroboam included both personal idolatry as well as causing God's people to fall into it. The new king of Israel, Jehoahaz, was guilty of the same sins. Despite calling on God for mercy, and God helping them, the people did not turn away from their sins.

Jehoahaz died and his son Jehoash succeeded him on the throne. He too did not turn from sin, did evil in the eyes of the Lord and continued in sin. The boys watched their dads and followed in their footsteps. How careful we have to be in living our lives that our kids don't fall into sin because of us. We are to set them a good and godly example in life. We are to live God's way and model that for our 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 moulding for the years to be - that little chap who follows me.

Pray: asking for wisdom in raising our children.

Reflect: how can I set a godly example for my children/grandchildren?

He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, but not as his father David had done. In everything he followed the example of his father Joash. (v.3)

When a person tries to justify his wrong behaviour 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 misbehaviour. The young fellow offered this lame excuse for his questionable conduct: "But, Sir, you'd find it difficult to locate ten 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 ten?"

Amaziah was a good king. He worshiped 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, '*He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, but not as his father David had done.*' He followed the example of his father Joash and did not go far enough back to follow in the footsteps of his ancestor David who was a man after God's own heart. He followed Joash' example and failed to put a stop to the semi-pagan worship conducted on hills throughout the land. That was the pattern for several of the kings – they followed God partially but still allowed idol worship in the high places.

Amaziah should have patterned himself after his forefather David. Instead he followed in the footsteps of his father Joash. Remember Joash had lived a good life while Jehoiada was there to help him but once he died Joash turned from the Lord. Amaziah simply didn't aim high enough.

May we set our sights high and aim to follow the example of Christ.

Pray: committing yourself to follow the example of Christ.

Reflect: how can I follow Jesus better?

So the word of the LORD spoken to Jehu was fulfilled: Your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation. (v.12)

Azariah becomes king and he was very much like his father. He was a good king, lived righteously, and worshiped the Lord. But again we see that the high places were not taken away during his reign. This has become a common theme in the book of Kings, hasn't it?

Each time we've come to a verse that says this, I have wondered why the high places were not taken away. Why were houses of the worship of idols allowed to remain on the hilltops? If the kings were really kings, why didn't they see that it was done?

What was it? Was it an unwillingness to be unpopular? Was it not having a complete heart for God? Were there financial considerations? Were there political undercurrents or powerful lobbyists? And then I realised, "It doesn't matter." Each person will give an account to God for what they had the power to do but did not. Excuses won't matter. And how many times do I make excuses? Excuses for not serving God fully; excuses for habitually committing the same sins. We all do it. And in the end what matters is how we live our lives and how we follow God. The challenge that comes from Kings I think is for us to truly follow God with all our heart; to fully commit to him and not allow any sin to hold us back; to fully serve him and not keep a foot in the world as well.

And within this chapter there is a wonderful reminder that God keeps his promises. Jehu was the guy who had overthrown the house of Ahab, and had destroyed Baal worship from the northern kingdom of Israel. He had done these because God had instructed him to do them. As a reward for what he had done, God promised that his sons to the fourth generation would rule Israel (2 Kings 10:30). The descendants that reigned were: Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam, and Zechariah. And Zechariah is now the fourth generation. What God promises, happens. Trust in the promises of God.

Pray: thanking God for all his promises.

Reflect: what holds me back in my walk with God?

Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God. (v.2)

Although Jotham had done what was right in the sight of God, Ahaz is another story. Ahaz is the next king of Judah. Ahaz was a worshiper of false gods. He was so steeped in idolatry that he even offered his son as a human sacrifice. When the Bible speaks of children “passing through the fire,” it is talking about sacrificing them to Molech, the god of pleasure. The statues of Molech were big, hollow, bronze statues of a man with an ox’s head. Inside, a fire would be kindled and fed until the outstretched arms of it were red-hot. Worshipers of Molech would put their babies on the heated arms, killing them as a sacrifice. God had specifically forbidden this in Leviticus 20:2. So Ahaz did not follow in the footsteps of David but in other recent kings.

It is a challenge sometimes to be different but God calls for us to be set apart from the world. We are to be different to the world. We are not to follow the world’s ways but rather to walk in God’s ways. And this can be tough; it requires great courage. But that same call is for us today – to stand up and out from the crowd.

Ahaz had been struggling because God had brought the Syrians and Israelites against him because of his idolatry. But rather than respond in the manner that God desired, which was repentance, he responded by making things worse. He took money and tried to buy his way out of trouble. He gave it to the Assyrians and asked them to help him. After this he saw an altar in Damascus and decided to copy it and have one himself. The king offered his sacrifice on it, instead of the bronze altar of the temple. That altar was put off to the side for occasional use of divination.

We have to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and on the things of God. We have to stand out from the world and not become a part of the world. It is tough but with God’s help we can do it.

Pray: asking God for the strength and courage to stand out from the world.

Reflect: what is it that is trying to take me away from God today?

The Israelites secretly did things against the LORD their God that were not right. (v.9)

The first half of this chapter deals with the sinfulness of the people of Israel and how God punishes them by banishing them from his presence. Israel's sins had been numerous. They had forgotten where God had taken them from, and forgotten why He drove out the nations from the land of Canaan. They had turned away from the Lord, and followed after idolatry. This was not just a few people in a few places - it had permeated the culture. Idols were as numerous as televisions in our society. No matter how big or small the population was - whether it was a city or simply a watchtower, there were idols being worshiped.

Verse 9 tells us that '*The Israelites secretly did things against the LORD their God that were not right.*' There are times when we know what is right and wrong, but because we plan on doing it anyway, we do it in secret. We don't want anyone to know. I think we even get the idea that maybe God won't know either. How wrong we are. Psalm 139 reminds us the Lord knows everything about us.

If you're involved in something that you feel you need to keep a secret from those close to you, there's a good chance it's wrong. One of Satan's best tricks is to isolate us by making us keep things secret. And once we become enslaved to certain sins, but feel we need to keep it secret, then we become slaves for life. The answer? Bring it out into the light. There's no need to be in bondage any longer.

God always warns his people. The people of Israel had been warned through the prophets but they ignored God's warning. God warned them so they might repent and turn back to God. If they had all would have been well. But they chose to ignore the warnings and ended up being destroyed. May we not ignore God's warning of sin in our life. May we turn to the Saviour and find forgiveness.

Pray: confessing your secret sins to God.

Reflect: what do I hide from those close to me? If it's sin, confess it and bring it into the light.

*He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father David had done... He broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made.
(v.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 (Numbers 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).

Hezekiah brought about a lot of reforms in the nation of Judah. You get a full list of the things he did in 2 Chronicles 29-30. In addition to the restoration of the proper worship of Yahweh, Hezekiah destroyed all idolatry and even destroyed the "high places", some of which may have been for the worship of Yahweh, but of which God had wanted destroyed. Hezekiah trusted God and held fast to him.

Are we trusting in God and holding fast to him despite the temptations of the world around? Are we willing to stand up for what is right regardless of the cost? Are we willing to tackle problems as they occur like Hezekiah?

Pray: asking for strength and courage to hold fast to God.

Reflect: am I willing to stand up for the truth regardless of the cost?

Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God. (v.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 (v.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 (v.19). Hezekiah's actions said, in effect, "Look, God! Read this! I need your help. Your honour is at stake!" You can see Hezekiah's maturity in the Lord here. When he received the letter, he went to the temple, spread the letter out before the Lord, and prayed.

Friends, when will we learn that this is the answer in every difficulty? Are you dealing with threats? Spread them out before the Lord and pray. Are you facing difficulties? Lay them before the Lord and pray. Are you encountering opposition? Put it before the Lord and pray. So many times we suffer through the sleepless nights, the upset stomachs, and the high blood pressure over things we have no control over, instead of spreading them before the Lord and praying. 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.

Corrie Ten Boom wrote, "Is prayer your steering wheel or your spare tire?"

Pray: asking God for help in an area you are struggling with just now.

Reflect: do I take all my problems straight to God or do I try and handle them myself? Learn to turn to God first.

This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover. (v.1)

King Hezekiah had become terribly sick. The prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, was sent by the Lord to give him the news that this was a fatal disease. He was told to set his house in order.

If you knew that you were going to die within a specified period of time, how would you set your house in order? Would you begin to reassure your spouse and children how much you love them? Would your prayer life increase? Would you call up your brother and apologise for letting the relationship be ruined over that argument? Would you become bold and start telling your co-workers about Jesus?

If you would do things differently if you knew you were dying, I've got news for you: you are dying. Each of us is one day closer to eternity than we were yesterday. Every minute, our time gets shorter, and we don't know when that time will end. James says, James 4:13-14, *'Now listen, you who say, today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money. Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.'*

You don't know what tomorrow holds. Maybe you have 15 years to live, or maybe you only have 15 minutes. Is your house set in order? Are you ready to enter into eternity with no regrets?

Hezekiah weeps as he prays to the Lord. He wants more time to serve God. And God hears his prayer and grants him more time. He is told he has another fifteen years. We have no guarantees how long our life is...let's live it well now by following God wholeheartedly.

Pray: asking God to help you live life fully now.

Reflect: do I live my life in light of the knowledge that it could end tomorrow? How different would my life be if I did?

He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, following the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed. (v.2-3)

I think it's wrong when we look at people who have "gone bad" and wonder what kind of parents they must have had to turn out so bad. Yes, good parenting has a tendency to turn out good kids, but it's not a guarantee. Look at Franklin Graham, the son of Billy and Ruth. If it weren't for his turning to the Lord, he would have become one rebellious son, most likely with no fault to his parents.

You might say to me, "But Hezekiah had his problems too, he was a proud man, and Billy Graham was probably never around when his son needed him ..." If you're thinking that bad children are products of dysfunctional families, the problem is there is no such thing as a "perfect" or "functional" family. All of us have sin. All of us make mistakes. Each person will grow up and have to face God with the consequences of their own actions, and not give excuses like blaming it on their parents.

Although Hezekiah had been a godly man, it is evident that Manasseh did not follow in his footsteps. He was completely sold out to wicked religious practices. They are listed at length in these verses. This is not down to any faults in Hezekiah. Manasseh is responsible for his own actions. No matter how good the teaching he was given and the example set for him, he has gone off the rails. He built up the high places again, he erected altars to Baal, he put up an Asherah pole, he bowed down and worshiped the starry hosts, he sacrificed his own son in the fire, and practiced sorcery consulting mediums. Everything that Hezekiah had done to bring about reform and revival in Israel was undone. Manasseh faced the consequences of his actions.

What can we do? Pray for our kids and try and bring them up in the way of the Lord setting the best example we can.

Pray: asking God to protect our children from the harms of the world.

Reflect: what can I do to help my children/grandchildren through life?

I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD. (v.8)

A number of years ago a 5-year-old boy in the States recognised 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 realised 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. Josiah became king at age eight. He had a heart for God like David did, never straying from the Lord. We read that he neither turned to the right nor the left. He had assumed that he and his nation were spiritually where they were supposed to be. But then something happened to change that assumption. As they were repairing the temple the Book of the Law was found. This of course is the books of Moses, the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. It is horrible to think, but at this time in Judah's history, the Word of God had been neglected - forsaken for so long a time that it had nearly been lost for good.

When Josiah heard what the book said, he knew that the nation was in trouble. The Scriptures contained both the promises of blessing and the warnings of cursing, depending on the Jews' observance of God's commandments. Josiah knew that in spite of his heart for the Lord, the nation was guilty and that God would judge. He tears his robes in mourning and wants to know just how bad the situation is. Josiah knows this is a serious situation.

It's easy for us 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, recognise our sin, and repent of it.

Pray: thanking God for His Word.

Reflect: have I lost the interest in the Word or do I read it every day? Get into a good reading habit.

He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD. (v.2)

As a young preacher Richard Baxter was called to a large parish composed primarily of people who seemed more interested in their social status than in understanding and obeying the Word of God. Baxter was disturbed by the spiritual coldness of his parishioners and found his work extremely difficult. After much prayer and heart-searching to know the will of God, the young pastor was confident that he had received the answer. “I believe the way to save the church and this community,” he said to a friend, “is to establish family altars in the homes of my members.” He spent the next three years in visitation, earnestly pleading with his people to set aside a time each day for prayer and Bible study.

Soon his congregation began to catch fire with a new zeal for God. Those who rededicated their homes exerted such a strong spiritual influence that his church was revived and was being filled with sturdy saints and receptive hearts. His ministry became increasingly effective because many of his people had followed the example of the patriarch Joshua who declared unequivocally, “...as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Josiah knew what an impact the Word of God had on him. So he had the people of the nation gather together to hear him read the Word. It was the simple reading of the word that brought about the revival which took place. King Josiah and the people made a covenant with the Lord, that they would follow His Word.

May we keep reading His Word and seek to follow what it teaches each and every day of our lives. May we read it daily in our homes and share it with our families as well.

Pray: asking the Holy Spirit to open your eyes as you read the Bible each and every day.

Reflect: do I allow the Word of God to impact my life?

Surely these things happened to Judah according to the LORD's command. (v.3)

If the book of 2 Kings were a movie – it would be one of those movies that take you on an emotional roller coaster ride. Up & down from hope to despair and back again. We have seen recently Josiah restore hope as he walked in the Lord's ways like his father David. But Josiah is dead and the baddies are back again. First Jehoahaz and now Jehoiakim. And we read that they both did evil in the eyes of the Lord just as their fathers had done. Then it's the turn of Jehoichin to do the same as did Zedekiah. How easy it is for people to ignore God and rebel against him.

Jehoiakim had been oppressed by Pharaoh Neco of Egypt, and now by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon. Maybe there's only so much a guy can take, because after three years, Jehoiakim rebelled. But when the Lord has a lesson for you to learn, or discipline to bring, there's no fighting against it.

When God called Jonah to Nineveh, he tried to run in the opposite direction (Jonah 1:3). But between a big storm and a big fish, God's will was done. When King Herod knew that the king of the Jews had been born, he was determined to alter God's plan. He commanded that all children in Bethlehem and its surrounding regions be killed (Matthew 2:16). But this didn't solve his problem, for God protected the baby Jesus.

And even though Jehoiakim was determined to throw off the yoke of oppression of Babylon, there was no resisting God. He sent the Babylonians, the Arameans, the Moabites, and the Ammonites to fill in the gap. The destruction of Judah was to be certain, for the Lord had certainly spoken it.

God's ways always come to pass. We would do well to learn that lesson early on and recognise that the best way to live is God's way. Stick to His Word and follow it closely.

Pray: asking God to help you remain close to Him.

Reflect: how can I remain faithful to God?

So Judah went into captivity, away from her land. (v.21)

There have been some horrendous defeats in sporting history. The worst rugby defeat was 142-0 recorded by Australia against Namibia in the 2003 Rugby World Cup. The Namibians who had been happy to play in the finals for the first time were devastated at losing so heavily.

Another kind of loss happened to the people of Jerusalem in 586BC, and it was much worse than any sports defeat. Because of God's punishment for their sin of worshipping 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. When Jerusalem was starved out, the Babylonians broke into the city. The army of Judah was wiped out, the king blinded, and the king's sons killed. 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. God always gives lots of warnings. The problem is that we don't often pay attention to them.

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.

God warns us often that a day of judgment is coming for all humanity. One day we will be judged on what we did with Jesus – did we accept him and put our trust and faith in him or did we reject him. Those who trusted will head to heaven and those who reject will go to hell. What a challenge to keep living for Him and to keep telling others that they too might repent and be saved.

Pray: thanking God for our salvation.

Reflect: am I following God fully and completely?