

Is There Hope for the Rebellious? 2 Kings 11-16

Parents often struggle with mercy and patience. My wife sometimes jokes, "I was never tempted to cuss, until I had kids!" Sleep patterns, eating habits, and homework are just a few issues that can drive moms and dads crazy. As I was working through this passage of Scripture, I was reminded of my need for fatherly patience. I was watching the kids at home while my bride attended a meeting. That seemed easy enough. But one of my nicknames in seminary was "Task-mode Tony." I get locked in on things, and I do not like being interrupted. And with headphones in, I was focused on finishing this message. This particular week I was very tired, weak, and stressed. So, after about the third time my kids interrupted me about an issue over a movie, I lost it. I slammed down my commentary and said, "I'm trying to study the Bible! Leave me alone! I have a sermon to prepare!" It was not one of my best moments.

Later, I walked down stairs, paused the movie, and told my kids that I needed to apologize for being quick tempered. I asked for their forgiveness, and they graciously forgave me. I gave them a hug and went back up stairs. I opened up 2 Kings 11-16, and observed the amazing patience and grace of God to the children of Israel. I was reminded of what a good God we have, who invites us into his presence, and how often fail to display his character, and need his grace. It was a teachable moment for me.

In chapter 17, we see Israel eventually going off into exile. Why has God not already turned his back on them? Commenting on this chapter, Paul House summarizes, "God's grace alone has delayed the fall this long" (House,). God was so gracious to his people.

Though they received abundant grace, they were a "rebellious" people. We could also call them an "idolatrous" people, or a "worthless" people (17:15, NIV). The question is, "Is there hope for this rebellious, idolatrous, worthless people?" Yes. There is hope because Psalm 145 is true! This text, along with other passages, emphasize how God is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (8; cf., Ex 34:6; 2 Chron 30:9; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:15; Ps 103:8; Ps 111:4; Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2). The words "all" or "every" occur seventeen times in this particular Psalm to emphasize the scope of his compassion and mercy. Here is hope for the rebellious! Christopher J.H. Wright points out, "The only exception in this litany to the universality to God's love are the wicked who choose, in their wickedness, to refuse it (Ps 145:20b) (Wright, *The Mission of God*, 235). So yes, there is hope for all who turn to Yahweh in repentance. Yahweh is patient, and merciful, but do not sin away your day of grace. Seek him while he may be found.

In the midst of the disobedience and decline of chapters 11-16, there are whispers of this hope. We will focus our attention upon these whispers, while not ignoring the tragic cries of the darkness. We will confine our attention to the reigns of

two particular kings: Joash in Judah (11-12) and Joash in Israel (13:10-25). From these stories, I have two gigantic expressions of God's grace to point out, but first let us scan the material in these six chapters.

WE THIRTEEN KINGS

Thirteen different kings are mentioned in chapters 11-16. Five kings are from Judah and eight are from Israel. I do not think it is necessary to tease out every detail of each king. In fact, in chapter 15, the author flies through five kings of Israel over a thirty-year period. Ralph Davis says that the writer has his finger on the fast-forward button through this chapter, and that to slog through it slowly ruins the impression the writer is trying to give (221). Allow me to press the fast-forward button on chapters 11-16, and then hit rewind, to go back and examine our two "Joashes."

5 Kings in Judah

Joash: The Surviving Seed of David (11-12). His rise to the throne is fascinating, filled with warning and example, and should lead us to worship to our God of all grace.

Amaziah: The Arrogant Thistle (14:1-22). Amaziah was a decent king, who followed the Law of Moses at times. Sadly, after he defeated the Edomites, he worshiped their gods (2 Chron 25:14-16). This combination of idolatry and pride led him to pick a fight with Israel. Jehoash "talked trash" to Amaziah. He referred to himself as a "wild beast" that would stomp Amaziah like a little "thistle." he told him to "stay home" (10), but Amaziah fared as well as Robin Ventura when he left home plate to charge after Nolan Ryan in a baseball game. He got stomped. Amaziah was captured by Joash, who destroyed part of Israel, and plundered the temple, giving Judah a taste of the coming exile.

Azariah/Uzziah: Long-Reigning Leper (15:1-8). This king, called by two different names, sought the Lord and experienced many victories for the majority of his reign, leading the nation to great peace and prosperity. His reign was fifty-two years! However, he tragically fell later because of his pride. The chronicler gives that chilling word, "But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction" (2 Chron 26:16a). When he tried to burn incense in the temple, an act reserved for the priests, and was struck him with leprosy (cf., 2 Chron 26:16b-21). The prophet Isaiah received his call at the time of his death (Isa 6:1-8). Amos also prophesied during this time (Amos 1:1). Both Amaziah and Uzziah illustrate Proverb "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall" (16:18).

Jotham: A Glimmer of Light (15:32-38). After already exercising power during his father's reign (because of his leprosy), he becomes the king. He is a relatively good

king who “did not enter the temple of the Lord” like his father (cf., 2 Chron 27:2), who “did right in the eyes of the Lord” but did not remove the high places. He improves the defenses in Israel. During his reign a crisis emerges. Syria and Israel try to force Judah to align with them to go up against Assyria. This is “Syro-Ephraimite war” which features so prominently in Isaiah 7-9. It is during his reign that the prophet Micah begins his prophetic ministry (Provan, 244).

Ahaz: The Awful (16:1-20). His apostasy is described in the first few verses: he followed the kings of Israel (a phrase used of Jehoram who married Ahab’s daughter); he behaved like the cursed Canaanites; and he burned his own son (an offering to Molech). The chronicler adds that he made pagan sacrifices in the Valley of Hinnom (2 Chron 28:2; cf., 2 Kings 23:10; Matt 23:15). When threatened by Syria and Ephraim, he faithlessly looked to Assyria instead of trusting Yahweh for help. He was unlike his son Hezekiah who is remembered for his trust in God (2 Kings 18:5). He paid the Assyrians with treasures from the Temple. He then corrupted worship by replacing the bronze altar with an altar like that in Damascus, and also rearranges some of the temple furnishings. So, he looked to Assyria for salvation and to Damascus for his liturgy (Davis, 236). The only good note about Ahaz is the last sentence, “Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.” The Davidic line still holds despite his awful reign. Such grace will be explained below. Isaiah prophesied during his reign, including his fascinating word about the sign of Immanuel (7:13-14).

8 Kings in Israel

Jehoahaz: Rescued but Unrepentant (13:1-9). This king was the first son of Jehu to reign. He did “evil in the sight of the Lord” and God was “angry” with Israel, and he gives them into the hand of Hazael comes against Israel (2-3). Then surprisingly we read that Jehoahaz “sought the favor of the Lord” (4a) and God “listened to him” (4b) and gave Israel a Savior (who is unnamed, 5). Why did God do this? It was because he saw “the oppression of Israel” (cf., Ex 3:9). God is acting as he did in Exodus, showing pity to the people in distress. But despite this display of God’s mercy, we find an ungrateful people persisting in sin (6). We then read of the military’s powerlessness (7-10).

Jehoash: Lost Opportunity (13:10-25). Jehoash (or Joash) sixteen years is briefly summarized. His most crucial moment is the meeting with Elisha, in which he received a golden opportunity to defeat Syria completely but he failed to do so.

Jeroboam II: Prosperous but not Pleasing to God (14:23-29). We find another whisper of God’s mercy in this brief description of another Jeroboam, the longest reigning Israelite king. His life was prosperous but even though prosperity is a gift from

God, it does not mean the approval of God. We read of his mixed life in that he did “evil in the sight of the Lord” (24), yet “he restored the border of Israel” as spoken by the prophet Jonah who predicted a military recovery (25; cf., Jon 4:2). Is it possible to have a booming economy and a strong military but be wicked? Yes. Some say that the days were similar to the power of Solomon during this time (Davis, f. 16, 216). But notice how his achievements are barely listed. The big issue with a person is worship, not human prosperity and power.

Why did God show them such favor? The writer tells us: God’s incredible compassion:

For the Lord saw the affliction of Israel was very bitter, for there was not left, bond or free, and there was none to help Israel. But the LORD had not said that he would blot out the name of Israel under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam, son of Joash. (26-27)

Like with Jehoahaz, the God of the Exodus was the God of the kings, being rich in mercy to them. God is so patient and merciful to them despite their hard-heartedness. If a person fails to turn to God in repentance and faith, it is not because of a lack of compassion in God.

Five Kings and Four Coups (15:8-31). After some peace and stability, and the long reign of Jeroboam, Israel goes through five kings in some thirty years: Zachariah (six months, the end of Jehu’s reign); Shallum (one month); Menahem (ten years); Pekahiah (two years); and Pekah (twenty years). Four of them die as a result of conspiracy (10, 14, 25, 30). The nation is in great decline, and signals of the coming judgment are present both internally and externally.

Grace to the Rebellious

#1: God Preserved the Davidic Pipeline in Judah (11-12)

God promised that the line of David would continue until the coming of the Messiah (cf., 2 Sam 7:16). With the kingdom divided, that hoped rested upon the line of kings in Judah. This “lamp in Jerusalem” (cf., 1 Kings 15:4; 8:19) continues to burn throughout the Kings narrative. In chapters 11-16, we read of the continuation of this line (see 2 Kings 15:7, 38; 16:20). Later, Matthew records some names that should be familiar to us by now in his genealogy (Matt 1:1-17, esp. 7-11; curiously he omits Joash, his father, and his son), highlighting the faithfulness and grace of God. But around 840BC this Davidic promise/covenant was hanging by a thread. It was one infant away from extinction.

Joash Protected (11:1-3). Consider the situation. The chronicler also tells us that King Jehoram had all his brothers killed (2 Chron 21:1-4). Then, the Philistines and Arabians invaded Judah and carried off and killed all Jehoram's sons except for Ahaziah/Jehoahaz (2 Chron 21:16-17). Ahaziah gets caught up in Jehu's purge, and is killed after a one-year reign, along with forty-two relatives (9:27-28). The Davidic line has been severely decimated (Davis, 172-73). Now in chapter 11 we meet a new "Jezebel," Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab (2 Kings 8:18, 27), grandmother of Joash, who "ruled" for six years (11:3). (We are reminded of the tragic choice of Jehoshaphat making a marriage alliance with Ahab of Israel, giving his son Jehoram of Judah to Ahab's daughter, Athaliah. See 2 Kings 8:16-18; 2 Chron 18:1). She is another evil, Baal-worshiping queen mother, who viciously sets out to eliminate what is left of David's descendants in Judah (11:1). However, one son remains: Joash. He is referred to in the story as "the king's son" (4, 12).

Athaliah's desire to eliminate the seed of David reminds us of this Genesis 3:15 trend. The evil one continues to attack any hopes of the coming seed of the woman who would crush his head. This trend begins in Genesis 3, but continues throughout history, as evidenced in examples like Cain killing Able, Pharaoh killing Hebrew children, Saul seeking to kill David, and eventually Herod seeking to kill Jesus (Matt 2:13-18). We too should not be surprised that enemies of the kingdom of God oppose us, as we seek to bear witness to Christ (cf., 1 John 3:13). There will always be a struggle of light verses darkness; righteousness verses wickedness; truth verses error – until the coming of Christ.

Jehosheba, Joash's aunt (sister to Ahaziah, daughter of Athaliah and Jehoram, wife of Jehodiah the priest – 2 Chron 22), acts heroically and saves the child and his nurse (2). She is the true mother of Judah, who for the sake of the kingdom protects the royal seed, reminding us of other important women in Scripture (Ex 2:1-10; Josh 2) (Leithart, 225). Apparently, Joash's mother, Zibiah (12:1) had been put to death already. Athaliah probably had her killed because she would have been a threat to her queen mother status. Joash is hidden for six years in the temple (11:2), a safe place to hide the prince since Athaliah could not enter because she was a foreigner.

We have much to ponder here. Consider Jehosheba. You have heard about the "Grinch Who Stole Christmas," here is the story of "The Lady Who Saved Christmas." Apart from the action of this faithful servant, there would be no Christmas, no Messiah. We need to recognize the importance of faithful servants in the kingdom of God. What characterizes this lady? For one, She is marked by a deep commitment to Yahweh. When forced to decide between her mother or Yahweh, she chooses Yahweh. She also

values human life. Granted this was a “special child,” but can we not draw the application here to protect the lives of children? What can you do to protect life, and fight for the good of the oppressed? Most people will not recognize the name of Jehosheba. Have you ever heard of anyone naming their daughter after her? Probably not. But most people will not recognize our names either, but the Judge of all the earth takes notice of every seemingly “small act” of obedience. Her obedience was a quiet, hidden obedience. That is the way the kingdom of God normally grows and advances, not by showy performances. Finally, I think we must hold up her incredible courage and boldness. Without her courage, we would not rise from the dead! Let us follow the example set by Jehosheba, as we set out to defend the unborn, care for the oppressed, and take the gospel to the nations boldly.

Consider also the subversive presence of the king, Joash. Does this not remind you of our day? Athaliah is on the throne, but the real king is present (3b). Davis notes, “The usurper rules, but the chosen king secretly reigns, unknown to Athaliah” (174). God preserved the Davidic line by using these faithful servants, until Joash’s greatest descendent arrived. After his death, resurrection, and ascension, he sat down at the Father’s right hand, where he rules and reigns (cf., Eph 1:20-22), despite the fact the earthly leaders are unaware of his reign. The presence of our King should give us peace and hope in this troubled life.

Thus in these three verses we have gospel and example. We have a godly example of a faithful servant, and the reminder of the grace of God. Jehosheba gives us an example; God preserved the Davidic line by his grace. We are not left to our own power and strength to live just and merciful lives like Jehosheba. For the King is with us, over us, and for us, and the Spirit of God in us, empowering us to advance the kingdom of God in the face of enemy’s opposition.

Joash Proclaimed (11:4-16). When the prince turns seven years old, the priest Jehoidiah orchestrates a meeting in the temple complex (4). Jehoidiah serves as another example of risk-taking boldness, as he seeks to crown Joash as king. Later, we read about his tremendous influence on Joash (see 12:2). His plan leading to the coronation is recorded in detail in verses 5-10. He designates the time for action at the end of the Sabbath, when the changing of the guard would involve double the number of soldiers (Olley, 270). The guards take their weaponry and their stations, as they prepare for the coronation in verses 9-11. In verse 12, we read that they “brought the king’s son and put the crown on him and gave him the testimony. And they proclaimed him king and anointed him, and they clapped their hands and said, ‘Long live the king!’” The “testimony” refers to God’s covenant law (cf., 25:21-22; 26:23; Ex 38:21). Joash received a copy of the testimony, reflecting Deuteronomy 17:18-20. The king was to rule and live by the law of God.

When Athaliah hears all the commotion, she rushes into the temple. Then we read that in verse 14, the king is standing by the pillar at the temple entrance (14; cf., 23:3). She cries out “treason!” but she has no authority (14b). Jehodiah has her taken out of the temple to be executed (15-16).

This drama has numerous Messianic images. The final Davidic King was also at the temple at an earlier age, being about “his Father’s business.” John also says in Revelation 5 that the King, the “Root of David” (4) is “standing” (6; 2 Kings 11:14), surrounded by heaven’s host, being praised for his salvation.

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.... Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever! (Rev 5:6a, 13)

Joash is just a flicker of the glorious light that was to come in Christ, a better King, who would be slain for the salvation of the nations. He is truly worthy of endless praise.

Joash’s People (11:17-20). Next, we read of a covenant renewal. The people pledge them to the commitments of Exodus 19:1-8 and 24:1-8 (House, 299; Davis, 178). But there was more. This covenant renewal involved destroying the house of Baal and the priest of Baal, Mattan. This house of Baal (notice the contrast in the story to the “house of the LORD”) was probably the work of Athaliah, who built a place for the storm-god in Judah, like Jezebel did in Israel. Finally, we read that Joash eventually took “his seat on the throne of the kings” (19b); and there was rejoicing and peace in the land (20).

Consider these powerful pictures. First, notice how following the living God involves smashing idols and following God’s word. Jesus told his disciples that you must renounce “all that you have” in order to be his disciple (Luke 14:33). If anything is keeping you from wholeheartedly submitting to the Lordship of Christ, then we must lay it down. (We will return to this application when we look at chapter 12).

Consider also this picture of the people covenanting together. Together they are committing to be “a people of God’s own possession,” dedicated to living for his glory. Is this not a great reminder to us about the importance of biblical community? Christianity is not a lone ranger religion. It involves covenant relationships. Many today want benefits of a local church (use of facilities, occasionally receiving some teaching, etc) without committing to a covenant people. It is like dating versus marriage. But part of

following Christ involves belonging to a people, covenanted together, who care for one another and live on mission together.

Consider also the picture of the seated king and the "quietness" of the city (20). When I was a kid, my father would come home from work and sit on his recliner. If my friends and me began to be too loud (normally playing Nerf basketball!) then I would here my father say, "Tony Clifford." That is all it took. Just his voice (and my middle name!), and the house got quiet. My dad transferred that seat to me now. When I am studying in my recliner, I often have to speak to my kids with a loud voice to get quiet. Normally, I just say, "Quiet!" And it works. The author of Hebrews reminds us that we now have a king seated, the Son of David, on the throne, who controls the universe "by the word of his power" (Heb 1:3). What comfort to know this! Just last week, I had my Bible open to this verse when we were Skyping with our missionary friends in East Asia. As they go through a very difficult time, I thanked God that we have the King on the throne, and because of that we can rest in his strength and assurance as we face the challenges of this life.

Joash's Problems (12:1-21). In the opening verses we read that Joash reigned for forty years. He receives a qualified commendation for doing "what is right in the eyes of the Lord" but failing to remove "the high places" (2-3). Hence, his first problem: high places. There are mixed aspects of the reign of Joash. In Verses 4-16, the writer speaks of the slow pace of his unspectacular temple renovations. At the close of the chapter, we read of his submission to the Syrians, which involved giving away the treasures from the temple (17-21). He has good intentions and a good start, but his reign is mingled with failure, poor decisions, and eventual wickedness. In verse 2, we also observe the influence of Jehoiada, who instructed him. Unfortunately, Joash is not as faithful as his mentor. Once his mentor dies, things fall apart (2 Chron 24:15-27).

His next problem had to do with the repairing of the temple. We have not read of the temple since 1 Kings 15:18. After the reign of Athaliah it surely needed some repair. The first thing we notice is the collection of money taken up for the renovations, taken from the census (cf., Ex 30:11-15), in fulfillment of vows (cf., Lev 27:13), or brought voluntarily. His appeal echoes the building of the tabernacle in Exodus, "And they came, and everyone who spirit moved him, and brought the LORD'S contribution to be used fro the tent of meetings, and for all its service, and for the hoy garments" (35:21). Those with a "generous" and "willing hart" brought their goods as an offering (35:5, 22, 26, 29). There is also an echo from Exodus in that the skilled workers performed their work unto the Lord (Ex 36; 2 Kings 12:11-12).

However, the pace of the rebuilding is puzzling. We read that they moved at the pace of a snail. In the twenty-third year (he would have been thirty), the priests had

done no repairs (6)! It reminds me of a quip from my father-in-law. He used to work at the Pentagon, and I asked him, "How many people work there?" He said, "About half!" A lot of priests, but they made no progress in the temple. Eventually takes the job out of their hands (7-8). (That would have been a very interesting meeting!).

Why the delay? Davis says they were probably not being dishonest, for if they were, the high priests would not have been given the new role to collect (10). He says they were "more slow than slick" (Davis, 186-87). Another option is that Jehoidiah did not deem Joash old enough for such an initiative. Handing over leadership to a younger person is extremely difficult for some, and so is submitting to younger leadership (Olley, 276). Joash would not be the last one to face this conflict if this were the case. Paul told Timothy, "Do not let them look down upon you because you are young, but set the believers an example" (1 Tim 4:12). Perhaps it was purely a financial issue. Their budget was obviously tight, as suggested by the failure to use any money for temple items (13), and budgetary decisions are hard for people to justify, especially if it means that it will hurt them personally. "More work without a raise!" We have heard these complaints.

The whole matter also speaks to the human limitations of leaders. One may lead a movement to crown the new king, but not be any good at administrating the vision to repair the temple like Jehoidiah. One may also be able to initiate a fund raising campaign, but not be out of touch with the whole project, like Joash! (Olley, 276-277). The body of Christ, with all of its various gifts is needed to do the work of God.

Joash's idea was to have a chest dedicated for receiving the needed funds (9). This allowed monies to be divided for the priests and for the building project (Davis, 187). Money was collected publically and counted and distributed by the secretary and the high priest, with supervisors being trusted to handle things honestly (9-15). The writer finally tells us that the priests retained their customary income.

A final problem is found in verses 17-21. After telling us of the drama of the temple repair, we read of the depleting of the temple out of fear of the Syria! For whatever reason, Joash gives away sacred objects and gold in submission to Hazael (18). Others unfortunately gave away temple treasures for political and military security. See: Rehoboam (1 Kings 14:25-26); Asa (1 Kings 15:18-19); Joash; Ahaz (2 Kings 16:8-9), and Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:13-16). All of these are previews of what the Babylonians will do (Davis, 188).

The chronicler gives more information about his reign including how things changed dramatically after the death of Jehoiada (2 Chron 24). Judah abandoned the house of the Lord, took up fertility worship and idolatry (2 Chron 24:18, cf., 24:2), and wrath came upon them. Then Joash executes Jehoiada's son, Zechariah, who by the Spirit of God spoke out against their idolatry (2 Chron 24:20-22). While the writer of

Kings reports his assassination (20-21), he simply leaves an impression of disappointment. The chronicler tells more of the wickedness of Joash (Davis, 188-189).

What a sorry picture of a young man who received wonderful instruction from a godly teacher, only to turn his back on God later. He reminds us of Judas, who received superior instruction, but turned his back on Christ; and Demas, who learned from Paul, but who deserted Paul for the things of the world (2 Tim 4:9). Having the best Christian education does not immunize you from apostasy and unfaithfulness. In his excellent book, *A Dangerous Calling*, Paul Tripp says, "So seminary students, who are Bible and theology experts, tend to think of themselves as being mature. But it must be said that maturity is not something you merely do with your mind.... No, maturity is about you live your life" (25). He goes on saying Adam and Eve "didn't disobey because they were intellectually ignorant of God's commands.... The battle was fought at a deeper level" (26). How do you avoid this? You must cultivate a deep relationship with Jesus, and cultivate an insatiable desire for the word of God personally.

Despite the tragic collapse, we still read of God's grace in that "Amaziah his son reigned in his place" (12:21). Is there hope for the rebellious? Yes because God preserved the Davidic pipeline, until this King came to save us. It was not due to the "goodness" of the kings, but the goodness of God.

#2: God's Power, Compassion, and Truth Provided Hope to Israel (13:14-25)

God displayed his grace to sinners in preserving the Davidic line in Judah, but what about Israel? Was there any hope for this people that were headed into captivity. Through this fascinating interaction between Elisha and Joash of Israel, we find that the answer is "Yes." We last read of Elisha in 2 Kings 9, as he appointed a son of the prophets to anoint Jehu. Now, Elisha is about to die, and the king goes to visit him, crying out and complimenting the prophet, "My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" (14). The first phrase honors him ("My father"), and the second phrase acknowledges that he is in need of the prophets help, for his prayer and work was more powerful than horses and chariots. Elisha echoed these words about Elijah (2 Kings 2:12). Now, Elisha is dying. Who will replace him? To whom will they look for divine help?

In effort to encourage the king, Elisha gives him an object lesson (or an "acted oracle"). He has him take a bow and arrows, and then he places his hands on the king's hands, and they both shoot the arrow out the east window (15-17a). The picture is that

God is with the king. Elisha then explains this act. The arrow signified how Israel would defeat Syria. Though he is sick, the prophet still speaks with authority.

Then Elisha tells to strike the ground with the arrow (18a). I think this means shooting them out the window into the ground. If the arrows represent victories, then what should Joash do? He should empty his quiver! He should shoot every arrow he has. Elisha was saying, "Trust me. Shoot all your arrows and you will have total victory over Syria." However, the writer says that he struck three times and "stopped" (18b) He did not have to say he "stopped." This is a note of sadness. He could have said that he shot three times, and we would have known that he did not shoot four or five times. Elisha grows angry, telling him that he should have struck five or six times (19a). As a result, he tells him that they will only defeat Syria three times (19b).

What is Joash's problem? Did he think this was childish? Did he not want to annihilate the Syrians (perhaps wanting a buffer country between him and mighty Assyria?). Maybe some of that was true. I agree with those who say the issue was a lack of zeal and enthusiasm. "He lacks zeal to be an enemy to the enemy's of Israel" (Leithart, 233). "He did not obey it [the word] enthusiastically enough" (Provan, 228). "The anger of the prophet is instigated by the king's limited faith and resolve" (Konkel, 527). "His response is half-hearted" (Olley, 282). Joash is like Ahab who failed to also eliminate Syria previously at Aphek (1 Kings 20:28). He was content with only three victories. Davis says, "God gave him a blank check, but he only cashed half of it" (paraphrase, 195). He missed his golden opportunity.

Surely we would not be tempted to such half-hearted religion, would we? Managing sin instead of putting it to death? Having half-hearted prayer life? Giving sporadically, if at all to the mission? Witnessing inconsistently? Not taking your studies seriously? Are you a three-strikes Christian? Fire every arrow you have! May God forgive us for half-heartedness, and give us a fresh passion today to trust his word and act on it.

Hope in God's Power Over the Grave (20-21). Despite, the king's failure to fully embrace Elisha's word, God gave them hope through the death of Elisha. Unlike Elijah, Elisha died a "typical death" but he performed a miracle after he died! A group of men are burying a corpse, when Moabite raiders interrupt them, forcing them to throw the body into Elisha's grave. As soon as the dead man touches the bones of Elisha, he is revived to life (21). This is amazing! This incident apparently occurred a few years after Elisha's death, since the writer speaks of the "bones of Elisha." I do not know of any other story like this in the Bible.

What is the point of this miracle? It certainly is not intended to lead us to embrace a theology of relics. The church has had a history of this practice, rooted in part by this passage. If you look at a vial of Mary's milk, or touch the bones of Peter, would there be healing power in these relics? If we build our church building over the site of a martyr, would that place have more power than another place? The answer of course is "No." This is a Messianic miracle. This story displays the resurrection power of God. For those who trust in the God of Elisha, death is not final. God is giving a foretaste of the greater-than Elisha to come (cf., Matt 27:52).

But there is more. It is an event that is probably intended to also give Israel hope for their future. They are about to head into exile, a death, as we see in chapters 11-16. If they stay attached to the life-giving word of the prophets, then there is hope of resurrection (cf., Ezek 37:1-14). Elisha is dead, but God is not, and God will continue to send prophets to speak to them, just as Elisha and Elijah have done. A body was "thrown" into a grave, and Israel was about to be thrown into exile (notice the same verbs in verses 21, 23, "thrown"), but hope is not lost. God will be faithful to his covenant, and God is the God who raises the dead. As people read of this story in exile, they would have received great hope. The life-giving power of God has not departed. So, despite all of the sad declining history of chapters 11-16, there is hope in the resurrection power of God and in his life-giving word.

Hope in God's Compassion (22-23). There is also hope in the compassion of God. The writer tells us that Hazael oppressed Israel (22). Then we read these amazing words "But the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion on them" (23a). The God of Exodus 34 and Psalm 145 would not utterly destroy them. The phrase "until now" is difficult. Some take it to mean that he had not destroyed them up to that point, but now he has. But it is probably best to take it to mean "up to this point" (Davis, 202). God "still did not cast them out of his presence" (Ibid., 203). Why? We are told that this compassion was due to his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (23b). This is the only mention of the patriarchs in Judges-Kings apart from 1 Kings 18:36. Provan says, "God was unwilling to destroy Israel because of Abraham, and Judah because of David. The two kingdoms are ultimately being treated the same way" (Provan, 230). God promised to bless Abraham but the Northern kingdom turned their back on God from the beginning (1 Kings 12). But they were not destroyed because of the covenant. Hope was not lost.

But this compassion should not have led them into rebellion; it should have led them into repentance and praise. God was willing to forgive them and show compassion to them, if they would but call to him. Here is hope to rebels! Do you think you have

sinned too badly? Do you think that God cannot save you? Sibbes says it well, "There is more mercy in Christ, than sin in us" (*Bruised Reed*). You are just the candidate for grace! Do you realize that God only saves bad people? Self-righteous people do not think they need his forgiveness.

This grace makes me think of Jesus' teaching on forgiving others, as well. How many times should we be willing to forgive our brothers? "Seventy-times seven," he tells Peter (Matt 18:21-22). In light of the patient grace of God toward rebels, let us show mercy and forgiveness to others without keeping count.

Hope in God's Trustworthy Word (24-25). The final note of hope comes from the fact that Elisha's word came true: three victories. How many times have we observed the fulfillment of God's word in Kings? Even though Israel is slip, sliding away, God speaks truth to them.

Kimberly and I have been watching this series, Prison Break. Like many television series, one of the reoccurring themes is that you cannot trust anyone. The characters continue to get played by different people, and sometimes they play others. But it is not so with God's word. It is a rock. How wonderful is it to know that God keeps his promises? Have you ever been disappointed with those who never keep their word? We do not have a God like this. We have an immutable God, that is, a God whose character never changes. He can be trusted for he never changes. His word is trustworthy, his compassions are higher than the heavens, and his power is unlimited.

The Son of David

Is there hope for the rebellious? Yes! God delays his judgment because in his mercy he is offering rebels to opportunity to repent and trust in the ultimate Son of David. Will you look to the risen Christ for salvation? He is mighty and merciful to save. Micah's book concludes with an amazing vision of God's compassion on sinners:

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity
and passing over transgression
for the remnant of his inheritance?
He does not retain his anger forever,
because he delights in steadfast love.
He will again have compassion on us;
he will tread our iniquities underfoot.
You will cast all our sins
into the depths of the sea.
You will show faithfulness to Jacob

and steadfast love to Abraham,
as you have sworn to our fathers
from the days of old.
(Micah 7:18-20 ESV)

This God “delights” in steadfast love. Will you look to him for pardon? Will you come to him and have your sins cast into the depths of the sea? Then, look to Jesus, who traded places with sinners, on the cross, whose blood covers the worst of sinners, who provided the ultimate display of love and mercy.

If you are a believer, will you look to Christ for strength and hope today? Paul told Timothy, in a passage on endurance, “Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David” (2 Tim 2:8). Do not take your eyes off of Jesus. He is the better Elisha, the risen one, who empowers us for obedience. He is the offspring of David, the one who occupies the throne. Because the tomb is empty and the throne is occupied, we can rejoice, and persevere, as we seek to shine as lights in a dark world.