

I hope you're enjoying this study of the Divided Kingdoms as much as I am! Go ahead, admit you wish the names of those kings would come back into vogue. "Like, hey you, Jehu!" And aren't you glad you don't live in a country that's as *sinful* as Judah and Israel? We see nations deteriorating and heading towards spiritual and physical death; claims that righteousness isn't important; people not wanting to live by God's commandments. I could be describing today's world, but that was what was happening in Israel and Judah.

The nation God created had one King, with a capital K, and He never resigned from His throne. God's people, however, wanted human kings and abandoned the covenant they had with the Lord. It was a downhill slide from then on.

In our lesson, there were three outright evil kings and one who began good, then took a nose dive. God used only one metric to judge if a king was good and that was if "he did what was pleasing in the sight of the Lord." And the same measure was true for a bad king, if "he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord." Proverbs 29:2 states: "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when a wicked man rules, the people groan." There must have been a lot of groaning in Israel.

Yet, in spite of the kingdoms turning away from their Creator, we must marvel at God's amazing patience with them. I like this example of patience. A little boy was standing at the bottom of the escalator in a department store. A sales lady asked, "Son, are you lost?" The little boy said, "No ma'am. I'm just waitin' for my chewing gum to come back."

Because of God's patience and compassion, time after time, He provided opportunities for His people to repent. We too have the same patient and merciful God. But woe to those who think, "I can wait to make a decision about God". God is sovereign and delaying judgement is something He may choose to do, or not to do. It's *His* plan. He wrote the book.

In this lesson, God taught me the following about the lives and kingdoms of these four kings.

- 1) Sin: Don't let it be your legacy.
- 2) Punishment: It's for our own good.
- 3) Half-hearted? Don't be.

Beginning with King Jehoahaz of Israel, he "did evil in the eyes of the Lord." No one does evil behind the Lord's back, right? He always sees it! As did his predecessors before him, Jehoahaz followed the sins of Jeroboam I - the worship of gold cows. Jeroboam I plunged the entire nation into the sin of idolatry and his

successors followed. Because the people persisted in worshiping idols, the Lord kept them under horrible oppression by the pagan nation of Aram. God's reason for allowing the Arameans to oppress Israel was redemptive in nature - to move the people to repentance.

Israel's suffering led King Jehoahaz to call upon the Lord and He sent a "deliverer" for Israel – believed to have been the nation of Assyria. While Assyria attacked the Arameans, the Arameans left Israel alone – at least for a time.

Without Aram breathing down their necks, the Israelites were able to return to their homes and live in peace, however, after the danger passed, Jehoahaz and the people's dependence upon God didn't last and Israel returned to their dumb cows. Charles Spurgeon wrote, "Israel's repentance was only half-hearted; they repented because they suffered, rather than because of the sin. They went back to the sin after they escaped from the sorrow."

Sadly, for many people that's the type of relationship they have with God. When things are going well in their life – no worries, no money problems, no health issues – they feel they don't need God. But if tragedy hits, that's when they call out to Him. How much better to walk with God *all* the time. Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full." (John 10:10b)

Israel suffered as a nation because of their stubborn refusal to turn from the sins of Jeroboam. The unceasing wars with Aram left King Jehoahaz's kingdom with a depleted army, unable to defend Israel.

The record of Jehoahaz concludes with the reason why the Lord intervened and sent a "deliverer", even though Jehoahaz committed detestable sins. It was not the Israelites' goodness that motivated God to be merciful and compassionate. It was God's covenant promise to bless Abraham's descendants. As a descendant of Abraham, Jesus Christ fulfilled that promise. Jesus atoned for the sins of the world, established a *New Covenant*, giving *all* people the opportunity to receive eternal salvation. Wow, we can't get much more blessed than that!

Jehoahaz's son, Jehoash, succeeded his father as king of Israel. And just as his father did, Jehoash - let's say it all together - "did evil in the eyes of the Lord." He too followed the sins of Jeroboam I. He was another cow worshipper.

The account of Jehoash's reign included a fascinating interaction between him and God's great prophet, Elisha.

Elisha was fatally ill when King Jehoash visited him. Seeing Elisha on his deathbed, the king wept over him and he cried out the same words Elisha exclaimed as the prophet *Elijah*, was taken into heaven. "My father! My father! The

chariots and horsemen of Israel!" (2 Kings 13:14) His expression of emotion seemed strange having just read about the sin that marked Jehoash's reign. Commentators tell us the reason.

Chariots and horsemen symbolized the power of military defenses. Just as Elisha recognized that *Elijah* was Israel's *real* protection, Jehoash believed *Elisha* was used by God to protect Israel. When Jehoash called Elisha "the chariots and horsemen of Israel," he recognized Elisha had been a constant reminder of God's presence and protection over Israel.

Elisha then gave the king an object lesson. He had Jehoash take hold of a bow and arrow. Elisha placed his hands onto Jehoash's hands and told him to shoot the arrow out the east window. The enemy, Aram's army, was to the east of them. As he shot the arrow, Elisha delivered his last prophesy. He told Jehoash the Lord would give him victory over Aram. The symbolism of Elisha putting his hands upon Jehoash's hands likely meant he would have power from the Lord through Elisha.

Elisha's next instruction was to "strike the ground" with arrows, or more accurately, to send the arrows *earthward* as the Hebrew states. Jehoash shot only three more arrows, then stopped. Elisha was angry. He told Jehoash the arrows represented victories God would give him over the enemy, so when Elisha told him to strike the ground with more arrows, he expected Jehoash to empty his quiver of every last arrow. God was inviting Jehoash, through Elisha, to claim as many victories as he had arrows to shoot.

Just three arrows meant the Lord would give Jehoash just three victories over Aram. He would *not* completely conquer them. Author Dale Ralph Davis wrote about Jehoash, "God gave him a blank check but he only cashed half of it." The king missed a golden opportunity to annihilate Israel's enemy.

Commentators believe the king lacked enthusiasm to shoot more arrows. He wasn't completely committed to the symbolism of Elisha's instruction. One could say Jehoash was "half-hearted" towards God's plan.

Does the word "half-hearted" hit close to home sometimes? Maybe half-hearted prayer life? Half-hearted giving? Half-hearted serving? God wants hearts that are fully devoted to Him. Jehoash would have been taught the Torah which read, "And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to Him, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." (Deuteronomy 10:12) Jehoash didn't put his whole heart into that type of devotion.

In the book *Christ-Centered Exposition*, we're challenged not to be just a "three strikes Christian." Instead of just the minimum effort in obedience, we are encouraged to shoot every arrow we have. For sure trust God's Word, but we're to *act* on it too. The Apostle James wrote, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." (James 1:22). I don't want to strike the ground with only *some* arrows. I want to live God's Word and shoot all the arrows He's given me for all the victories He has planned for me!

In Jackie's lecture on Lesson 8, we learned about Elisha's life as a powerful man of God. His ministry spanned 60 years and God worked powerfully through him to prophesy and perform spectacular miracles – twice as many as his mentor and predecessor – the prophet Elijah. Elisha's death in 2 Kings was recorded simply as, "Elisha died and was buried." Elisha left no one to take his place and his death was a great spiritual loss to Israel. Following the statement of his death, the author of 2 Kings recorded a demonstration of life-giving power of the God Elisha represented. It was a fascinating and unique miracle.

Most Israelites who died, Elisha included, were buried in caves or tombs hewn out of rock. Quite some time after Elisha's death, pallbearers were in the process of burying a man's corpse. In doing so, a group of robbers from Moab came upon them. To escape harm, the burial party tossed the dead body into a nearby tomb and fled. It wasn't just anyone's tomb - it was the prophet Elisha's. "When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet." (2 Kings 13:21)

No one knows if there was inherent power in the bones of Elisha to resurrect dead people, but we *do* know this was a unique miracle of God. The Lord may have chosen to demonstrate His power to bring honor to the memory of His great prophet and to provide Israel hope for their future. Elisha was dead, but God was not.

The author of 2 Kings closed the record of Jehoash's reign stating that he won three battles against Aram - just as Elisha prophesied – and it resulted in the recovery of towns Israel had lost.

Only seven verses in 2 Kings 14 deals with Jehoash's successor – his son Jeroboam II. Jeroboam's reign was the longest, most prosperous in the history of the northern kingdom. Unfortunately, he followed in the sinful footsteps of his predecessors. He too, "did evil in the eyes of the Lord." He continued the worship of gold cow gods and throughout Israel he perpetuated the sins of Jeroboam I. Although a prosperous kingdom, Israel continued to abandon the one true God.

In this lesson, both the kings and the people of Israel were unfaithful to Jehovah. God's first two Commandments are, "You shall have no other gods before Me" and "You shall make no idols" (Exodus 20). Ruler after ruler broke those commandments so God allowed Israel's enemies to oppress them. Still, the Lord didn't want them eradicated from the face of the earth and because of His amazing grace, He provided relief from their suffering. God granted Jeroboam II, a sinful king, military victories over Aram, which resulted in the restoration of Israel's borders. Yet Jeroboam II's legacy he left to the next ruler, his son Zachariah, was so *spiritually* corrupt that in just over 2 decades, Israel will be erased from the map.

While Jehoash is worshiping gold cows in the north, we move to the southern kingdom of Judah where Amaziah took the throne. Unlike kings Jehoahaz, Jehoash and Jeroboam II, Amaziah "Did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not wholeheartedly." (2 Chronicles 25:2) Amaziah allowed the places to remain where people worshipped idols and committed wicked acts.

He did what was pleasing in the sight of God – *but* not with his whole heart. Amaziah's relationship with Jehovah, was also "half-hearted."

I don't like to admit but there have been times in my spiritual walk when my commitment to the Lord was a little half-hearted. Can anyone else relate – no hands please! Francis Chan said, "Following Christ isn't something that can be done halfheartedly. It must be central to everything we do and are." Half-hearted faith can mean wanting our will instead of God's will and half-hearted or partial obedience to Him can cause us to miss out on blessings God wants to give to us. 2 Chronicles 16:9 says, "The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him."

We learned that Amaziah *was* wholehearted – in his desire to conquer Edom. He needed to "beef up" his Judean army so he hired 100,000 mercenaries from Israel. These were tough, professional warriors. He paid them up-front for their services which was over 3 tons of silver. But the problem in using Israelite fighters to fight for Judah was that Israel was unfaithful to God and to make an alliance with an ungodly nation was against God's law. God sent a prophet to remind Amaziah, "It's God who has the power to help you or overthrow you. Get rid of those mercenaries or you will lose God's favor." Amaziah was given an opportunity to correct what he'd done, but his concern was, "What about the money I'll lose if I obey?" Just another example Amaziah was not whole-hearted in his desire to obey God.

His concern about losing wealth if he “did right in the eyes of the Lord”, made me think about two of my favorite establishments; but they’re ones I can’t go to on Sundays: Hobby Lobby and Chi-Fil-A.

Hobby Lobby’s web site states why they’re closed Sundays, “We chose to close on the day most widely recognized as a day of rest in order to allow employees and customers more time for worship and family. We realize that this decision may cost us financially, yet we also realize that ‘there are things more important than profits.’” Chic-Fil-A’s owner said they’re closed Sundays because he wants to give his employees a day off “to rest and to worship if they chose to do so.” It’s been estimated that decision costs Chick-fil-A about \$1 billion per year. Both companies have chosen to honor God instead of padding their purses.

Amaziah needed to be re-focused on God and His power instead of on his lost silver so the man of God told him, “The Lord can give you much more than your silver.”

The Apostle Paul, imprisoned for his love and service to the Lord Jesus, wrote, “I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.” (Philippians 3:8) When Jesus’s disciples asked Him what there would be for them who left everything to follow Him, basically Jesus told them regardless what they had given up for Him, they would “receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life”. (Matthew 19:29). Can you think of anything better than that?

If we choose to be guided by the Spirit of God instead of by the flesh, we’ll gain more than we might lose. What we will gain is not always material - it’s better - peace, joy, and righteousness.

Although Amaziah may not have had a whole heart to receive the prophet’s correction, he obeyed and fired the hired guns. Unfortunately, the ramifications of hiring them in the first place brought destruction to Judah. The canned mercenaries weren’t happy. They couldn’t receive lucrative plunder without going to war, so they attacked Judean villages, slaughtered, and pillaged to make up for extra wages they were denied.

God gave Amaziah a decisive victory over Edom, but then Amaziah did something incredible. He took Edom’s lifeless wood and stone idols and worshiped them! What part of God’s Law did Amaziah not understand? “Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves, and do not place a carved stone in your land to bow down before it. I am the Lord your God.” (Leviticus 26:1) This was yet *another* example Amaziah was not wholehearted for the Lord.

The man of God asked Amaziah, "Why would you worship Edom's worthless gods? They couldn't even save their own people." Infuriated, Amaziah wouldn't let him finish speaking and threatened to kill him. He would have done it too. His father, Joash, set an example for him by killing the prophet Zechariah. Looks like Amaziah made a U-turn and went all the way to the dark side. The man of God's last words before leaving Amaziah were that he would come to know God's punishment for idolatry and for rejecting his counsel - God would destroy him.

Proof of Amaziah's far less than whole heart for the Lord was his determination to go to war with King Jehoash of Israel. Amaziah's advisors told him what he wanted to hear - challenge Jehoash. Proverbs 21:30 states, "There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord." Amaziah rejected God's counsel in favor of the counsel of men.

Puffed up with pride over his victory over Edom, Amaziah challenged Jehoash to war. Using a parable, Jehoash warned Amaziah he would not like the outcome. Jehoash compared Israel to a mighty cedar tree. The mighty tree was confronted by a little, thorny weed - Judah. And the little weed would be trampled by a wild beast - Israel. To further the insult, Jehoash told Amaziah he was arrogant and proud which was ironic coming from an evil king. Jehoash also told him to stay home; celebrate his victory over little Edom, but don't take *him* on because both he *and* the people of Judah were going to lose!

Amaziah ignored his threat, went to war, and Judah was overwhelming defeated. God used a sinful king to defeat Amaziah for bringing Edom's idols into Judah and worshipping them. God made His punishment plan perfectly clear. Amaziah should have thought twice about worshipping cow gods.

Amaziah's army was decimated - unable to protect Jerusalem. Jehoash tore down a large portion of the city's wall for his troops to enter and overthrow the city. They looted the temple and palace of its treasures. Amaziah was captured. He and hostages, likely his own family, were taken to Israel. Amaziah remained there as a prisoner for many years until Jehoash died and then Amaziah was released to return to Judah.

It's believed that from the time Amaziah turned from the Lord, those who remained faithful to Jehovah, plotted to kill him. He fled to the city of Lashish where his conspirators found and murdered him. Exit Amaziah. For the second time in a row, a king of Judah was assassinated.

Amaziah's legacy? He propagated the worship of idols instead of the one true God; he started an unsuccessful and disastrous war with Israel; Jerusalem was left

in a tragic condition; temple treasures were plundered; he and others were imprisoned; and the loss of the people's respect led to his killing.

His death placed his son, Azariah, on the throne. Initially Azariah was faithful to the Lord, however, "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18) And that's all I'm going to say about that because lesson 18 has, as Paul Harvey would say, "the rest of the story."

Let's review what stood out to me in our lesson.

Sin: Don't let it be your legacy.

The kings of Israel followed the sins of their ancestors. Amaziah started out doing right, but he didn't follow the righteous example of King David. Later in his reign, Amaziah followed his father, Joash's example, by threatening to kill a man of God.

For those of us who raised, are raising, or are training children, they are influenced by us. Their little eyes watch how we relate to our spouse, the grocery store clerk - *everyone* they see us interact with. They notice how, or if, we pray, what our walk with Christ is like. They hear and often repeat our words and will likely grow up reflecting our attitudes, actions, and mannerisms. How we influenced others is part of our legacy. What a huge responsibility!

Some of us may relate to what cartoonist, Charles Schultz, once wrote: "Sometimes I lie awake at night, and I ask, 'Where have I gone wrong?' Then a voice says to me, 'This is going to take more than one night.'"

May we *not* reach the closing of our lives wondering where we went wrong, rather, may we leave a legacy of obeying the Word of God to, "Bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4). The Apostle Paul was an example to his young assistant, Timothy, of how to become a man of God. Timothy observed Paul's "teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, and endurance." (2 Timothy 3:10) May we leave a legacy of godliness.

Punishment: It's for our own good.

Ever hear these words growing up: "This is for your own good"? Maybe it was medicine needed on a skinned knee or being grounded for disobeying. My brothers heard that phrase a *lot* for - well, they're not here to defend themselves. Growing up, my sister used to call me "goody two shoes", but I still heard "This is for your own good" *plenty* of times from my loving parents who expected and deserved obedience.

For their own good, God's children - the kings and people of Israel and Judah - received punishment for their disobedience and sin. And still, over and over again,

we read that because of His great love, mercy and compassion, God gave them opportunities to repent and avoid judgment.

I hope no one here can relate to this Proverb: "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates correction is stupid." (Proverbs 12:1) The Lord God is a loving Heavenly Father and He corrects His children – us – for our benefit and to prove we belong to Him, and since we belong to Him, we must expect His discipline when we disobey Him.

Half-hearted? Don't be.

We learned that following the Lord with half a heart can be spiritually unhealthy. When Scripture talks about the heart, it means not just our feelings, but our mind, our will, our entire spiritual nature. Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (Matthew 22:37)

Our Father in heaven wants our whole heart – our entire being. He is worthy of that and nothing less. Psalm 86 says it perfectly: "Teach me your way, Lord, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name." (Psalm 86:11)

God can give us a wholehearted kind of heart for Him because He is an expert at doing heart transplants. We just need to ask Him because this is His promise: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." (Ezekiel 36:26)

What an amazing promise from an amazing Lord!