

Route Sixty-Six

Part Twelve

2 Kings

(John 5:39; Galatians 2:20)

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501*

212-6999

pastorpaul@integrity.com

www.branchofhope.org

4/7/2019

310)

Route Sixty-Six

Part Twelve

2 Kings

(John 5:39; Galatians 2:20)

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

Introduction

I've always enjoyed documentaries of historical events and period piece non-fiction cinema. At the same time, I find the poetic license taken by many productions borders on the promotion of falsehood. Having watched a documentary or historical account of an event, I am occasionally motivated to do a little research of my own to see how accurate it was.

In a recent *Noah* movie, the director apparently thought it would be a good idea to introduce giant rock creatures (think *Never Ending Story*) who would help cut down the trees for the ark. That is not in the Bible. More subtle errors I have noticed, even as a youngster, had to do with fashion. TV westerns that were popular when I was a child (*Bonanza* or *Gunsmoke*) would certainly don their actors with boots and a cowboy hat. But their hairstyles were often more suited to *That 70s Show* than the old west.

But one of the most difficult things to capture from generation to generation might be called socio-psychological-anthropology. Or, to put it simply, what were people actually like? It is a mistake to assume that all people from all generations from all lands are similar to the neighbors who live on my cul-de-sac in evangelized American suburbia.

And this is a critical mistake for two reason: first, it tempts me to believe and promote an inaccurate understanding of history. We should not read history anachronistically (from the wrong time). Today we might reckon it a horrible thing to hang someone for merely stealing a horse. But

in a certain historical context, to steal someone's horse was to impose a death penalty on them. They needed the horse to live.

Second, if I think all people in all lands in all of history are the same, I become unaware of what I am capable of if left to my own human, carnal, sinful inclinations. Sociologists, psychologists and anthropologists are still scratching their heads as to how otherwise ordinary people in the 1930s and 40s were convinced that it was acceptable to exterminate innocent men, women and children. We all are firmly convinced we would never do such a thing. But the vast majority of people who pulled the triggers or turned the levers had been teachers, accountants and mailmen.

I open with this because 2 Kings is one of the most tragic books in the Bible. In a relatively short period of time (as far as history is concerned) we have transitioned from deliverance from slavery in Egypt to the magnificent reign of David as king, to the division of the kingdom due to Solomon and his son, Rehoboam to the captivity of both those kingdoms (generally called the *Dispersion* and *Exile*).

It would do us well to be reminded that the Israelites were God's covenant people and His sole redemptive contact with humanity. Think of a nation or a world with just one church. But what we learn in 1 Kings is how that one church (now divided into two churches) became as corrupt as the world by which it was surrounded. It is not without cause that Jude found it "**necessary to write**" that those who have been "**called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ...**

...contend (*epagonizesthai*-to agonize) earnestly for the faith (Jude 1, 3).

We are not to coast, ever. The advancement of the kingdom, either in our hearts individually or as a church or its affects in the world, can be compared to a shark. The shark moves forward or it dies. Israel and Judah died.

A Survey of 2 Kings

Briefly surveying 2 Kings we see at the onset how the king (Ahaziah, the son of Ahab) of the always ungodly northern kingdom, having injured himself seeks help from Baal-Zebub (lord of flies/dung/demons, take your pick Matthew 12:24, 27). Elijah intercepts the messengers and calls out the

king on his ungodliness. The unhappy, evil king three times sends fifty men to Elijah. The first two groups were consumed by fire. The third group was a bit more respectful. It is worth noting that when James and John came up against resistance on the journey to Jerusalem thought it might be a good idea to bring fire down **“just as Elijah did” (Luke 9:54)**. But the immediate and primary mission of Jesus is summed up in His very ministerial response,

For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them (Luke 9:56).

Beware of people who seek to don themselves with the mantle of Elijah!

Time does not allow us to address the number of miracles recorded in 2 Kings. Elijah and Elisha both split the Jordan. Elijah becomes one of only two people (Enoch being the other) taken up to heaven without dying. Elijah and Elisha are not merely partners in ministry, they are clearly devoted in loving fellowship. The prophetic ministry of Elijah is given to Elisha.

The first ten chapters of 2 Kings is largely devoted to the northern kingdom. One of the recurring themes of this kingdom and their kings is how they **“persisted in the sins of Jeroboam...who made Israel sin”**. Jeroboam was the first king of the northern kingdom. And this indictment is said of fifteen of the eighteen kings who followed him.

Many were the sins of Jeroboam, but we would do well (especially in light of our current Christian culture) to recall one of his great sins was devising a worship service **“in his own heart” (1 Kings 12:33; Numbers 15:39)**. We should all consider what shadows we are in and what shadows we are casting. The dark shadow of Jeroboam extended for hundreds of years.

In these first ten chapters everything bright and life-giving revolves around Elisha. One great and encouraging moment comes in chapter six when Elisha’s servant wakes up early to find that he and Elisha are surrounded by a massive Syrian army. **“Alas, my master! What shall we do” (2 Kings 6:15)?** cries the servant. Elisha answered with the counter-intuitive words, **“Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them” (2 Kings 6:16)**. Then Elisha prayed. But he didn’t pray that things change. He prayed that his servant might have the

eyes to see what it would almost appear that Elisha always saw (or at least was aware of, based upon his courage and very settled heart).

Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain *was* full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:17).

Oh, that we might all have the eyes to see.

It is difficult for the twenty-first century western Christian to get his/her arms around just how evil-how monstrous-people can become. Stories become almost unreadable. Ahab's seventy sons are killed. Ahaziah's forty-two brothers are killed. After king Ahaziah dies his mother, Athaliah, kills all the potential heirs, which likely included some of her own relatives. Zedekiah's sons are all killed before his eyes then his eyes are put out.

We read of numerous accounts of divination, witchcraft, soothsaying and human sacrifice. In the midst of this is the very odd statement,

They feared the Lord, yet served their own gods – according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away (2 Kings 17:33).

These words should not be viewed as an endorsement of some sort of syncretism (an amalgamation of various religions). This marked the beginning of the end. The camel's nose was in the tent and soon it would be torn asunder.

Again, let us beware of the shadow in which we stand. Is our own shadow making it even darker? If there is to be one non-compromising people, it is to be the Christian. If there is to be one non-compromising institution, it is to be Christ's church. And there is only one way the shadow is lifted:

Your word *is* a lamp to my feet And a light to my path (Psalm 119:105).

Conspicuously absent from the covenant people who were to find themselves "**removed**" from the "**sight**" of God (2 Kings 17:18) was word and sacrament. There had been no "**Passover...since the days of the judges**" (2 Kings 23:22), which is hundreds of years and the "**Book of the**

Covenant” (2 Kings 23:2) was more or less inadvertently **“found”** by the high priest (2 Kings 22:8). One might have a chicken or the egg discussion regarding this. Was Israel’s neglect of word and sacrament the cause of their apostasy or the consequence? Not to over-simplify, but since word and sacrament is safely and biblically said to be the means by which God saves and sanctifies, we must view such a neglect as the heart of the problem.

Although there were a few shining lights toward the end of Judah, King Josiah and Hezekiah, in their efforts to reinstate the Passover, the reading of the word of God and the tearing down of the **“high places”** (places for pagan worship), the hearts of the people had waxed cold and they would be cast off (2 Kings 23:27).

Heaven forbid God give us what we want, as an individual, a church, a nation or a world. It is a great judgment which follows the person or people who deny the knowledge of God which He plants in our very minds and shows us by His very creation. It is a judgment of letting us do what we want (Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

Our statesmen of today could do nothing more profitable than to study the principles of God’s disposings among the earth’s peoples as revealed in the Scriptures, and as exemplified in the nation Israel.¹

In the place of “statesmen” one can easily place, person, church, all the earth.

Jesus in 2 Kings

So where do the Scriptures testify of Jesus in 2 Kings (John 5:39)? One almost feels remiss in duty to so briefly pursue such a grand subject. And a sermon or an entire book be written on how if Elijah is a type of John the Baptist, in what respect in Elisha a type of Christ? Could it be in Elisha’s willingness to be a servant? As Christ washed the disciples feet (John 13), Elisha was a servant to Elijah, washing his hands (2 Kings 3:11).

We could observe Elisha’s gentle and warm intimacy toward Elijah and his own family (1 Kings 19:20). Or we can point to Elisha’s strong

¹ Baxter. P. 155.

desire to serve in the power of the Spirit, requesting a double portion of Elijah's spirit. We also see the multiplying of barley loaves similar to Christ feed the 5000. We see the healing of a foreigner similar to centurion's servant. We read of Elisha weeping over the evils of Israel as did Jesus and the numerous life-giving illustrations of Elisha making deadly water the source of sustenance and deadly stew harmless and nourishing. We also see him raising the son of a Shunammite woman and much more.

But what struck me was that which was accomplished after the death of Elisha. Having been placed in his tomb, it happened that another man had died who they were seeking to bury. But they were interrupted by a **"band of raiders"** so, in apparent haste, they placed the man in the tomb with Elisha and his dead body, having touched **"the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet"** (2 Kings 13:21).

The similarities here are numerous yet the difference eternally significant. It is similar in that neither the dead man, nor those burying him, were contributors to the man's revival. We may find God but it is not because we have been looking. **"I was found by those who did not seek Me"** (Romans 10:20) is beautifully and powerfully portrayed by this incident at the tomb.

It is similar in that a setting of mourning becomes a habitation of life and joy. Meditate upon the joy of Marth at the loss of her, Lazarus. How marvelous the words of Jesus.

And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this (John 11:26)?

Oh, how the mood must have shifted at the raising of Lazarus! It is similar in that one must be dead in order to truly live. The man being buried was not partially alive. We are posed with a similar call.

And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (Matthew 10:38, 39).

Taking up the cross does not (at least in a primary sense) mean having a difficult day. If someone was carrying a cross, they were walking toward their death.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

The dead man was not revived until he “**touched the bones of Elisha**” (2 Kings 13:21). Similarly, we are not regenerated until and unless we eat of His “**flesh**” and “**drink His blood**” (John 6:53). This is no mere external call by Christ. We are to eat and drink in faith. The instrument by which we are revived and stand on our feet is faith-faith in Christ. The final similarity (and I don’t doubt more can be found) is how victory is found in Elisha’s death. In Elisha’s death, life is given to another.

But there is one great dissimilarity. And that is that the man who touched the bones of Elisha, would later die again. He was rescued only temporarily from the death. He would die again, and then face the second death-the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8). Unique to the redeeming victory of Christ is deliverance from that death-the eternal and severe death. To be touched by Christ-to know God-“**or rather**” to be “**known by God**” through faith in Christ (Galatians 4:9), mean life, life everlasting. It is something which begins the moment we first believe.

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life (John 6:47).

The bones of Elisha cannot atone for our sins. The death and victory of Christ most assuredly does.

Questions for Study

1. What does it mean to read the Bible anachronistically? What errors can we fall into (pages 2, 3)?
2. Jude writes that we must “contend” for the faith. What does that look like (page 3)?
3. 2 Kings opens with a story about the king singing counsel from Baal-Zebub. What does that tell us right up front about where Israel was as a nation (pages 3, 4)?
4. Elijah brought fire from heaven, but Jesus told His followers not to? Why (pages 3, 4)?
5. What were the “sins of Jeroboam”? How long did they persist? How do you ever notice how you’ve been influenced by those before you? What are some good or bad examples (page 4)?
6. How are you challenged or comforted by the story of Elisha and the chariots of fire (pages 4, 5)?
7. Were the people we read about in 2 Kings the same as our current neighbors? How or how not (page 5)?
8. What is the only way to lift the shadow of our own darkness (page 5)?
9. Two things had disappeared during the period of 2 Kings. What were they and why did it matter (pages 5, 6)?
10. List the similarities between the bones of Elisha and Jesus. What is the biggest dissimilarity (pages 7, 8)?