



## Unlocking the Bible (18)



### *Mediocrity Reigns: Lessons from 2 Kings*

After the post-grandeur of 1 Kings we now come to a Second Kings with its scenario of dissipation and mediocrity. It begins with a futile attempt by Ahaziah to rid himself of an incurable disease by seeking ‘magical’ help from the prophet Elijah. Later, Naaman the Syrian is disappointed that he is not given a spectacular treatment when seeking healing. In their eyes God is reduced to a dispenser of miracles, on request, and with due deference to human status.

Early in the book Elijah is taken up to heaven and his mantle falls on Elisha, a powerful prophet who effects a large number of minor miracles; but no longer the great challenge that Elijah posed. Even the notorious Jezebel meets an ignominious end. The glory days are gone: this book is a collection of small scenes and inconsequential actions.

This book outlines the existence, and very little more, of a series of kings of both Israel and Judah. Most of them were non-descript, guilty of not pleasing the Lord, adopting heathen practices; and subject to petty – often fatal – intrigue and treason. There was a distinct lack of leadership and commitment. More than one surrenders the Temple treasures in an effort to appease their oppressors. That is a dismal picture. It suggests complete abandonment of any uniqueness that was to characterize them as the People of God.

There are some positives, however. The prophet Elisha, different from his predecessor Elijah, was able to bring God’s power into ordinary situations. Another feature is that there were some of the kings, particularly of Judah, who decided to go against the tide of decline and tried to restore the worship of God as being central in the Temple. One of these, Hezekiah, withstood the mighty Sennacherib and the Assyrian host.

It is significant that any such action arose out of personal conviction about diligence: making sure the Temple dues were paid and, more importantly, used. In Josiah’s case this led to the discovery of the Book of the Law and subsequent reforms.

But though temporarily effective, none of these was lasting and this book – which provides the background to the Prophets - records the Captivity of both Israel and of Judah. To all intents and purposes they have disregarded God and are now punished by being absorbed by invading Powers.

It is a sad episode and shows what can happen when there is an abandonment of following the Lord, the absence of a prophetic voice, and weak leadership in things of God.

Yet that history, with the apparent loss of the distinctive People of God to become prisoners of another nation can be seen in a different light - the light of Providence. The books of Chronicles cover the same history as Samuel and Kings but portray them within a Divine, Providential, perspective and demonstrate that, as the prophets foretold, judgement leads to blessing.

We will look at that next time.