



Jehoahaz and Joash: Faltering Faith

Lesson 14

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

James 2:17

This lesson will bring us back to the northern kingdom of Israel. Syria in the north continues to be a threat, as they have been since the days of Ahab. Jehu's bloody revolution has overthrown the house of Ahab and has solidified his family line as the ruling dynasty, and God has promised him that the next 4 kings will be descendants of Jehu. In the following accounts, we learn about two of his sons, and see similar patterns emerge that we have seen elsewhere. We also see an unusual story of a wicked king who looks to the prophet for guidance. Why would a king who looks to God's prophet go down as wicked? Why would a wicked king go to a prophet?

Jehoahaz (2 Kings 13:1-9)

I. Summary of Jehoahaz (1-2)

Jehoahaz followed the strong rule of his father Jehu with a short but respectable sixteen-year reign. Sadly, we see that with Jehoahaz we have more of the same when it comes to Jeroboam's sins.

What was Jeroboam's sin? Why did it matter to God so much?

II. God's judgment and grace (3-5)

In anger over Israel's sin, we see a pattern repeated that we have seen repeated over and over in the book of kings, and Judges, and the rest of the Bible. God brings judgment and in response to his judgment, those whom he judges humble themselves and seek his favor.

God uses the northern neighbor to Israel, Syria, to bring his discipline. Yet Jehoahaz seeks God's favor, and God graciously sends a deliverer so that the nation is rescued from their dangerous position. We don't know exactly who the savior was, some speculate that it was a general or his son or grandson who both led successful campaigns, but the point remains that God responded in mercy to Jehoahaz's repentance.

III. Israel's continually hard heart (6)

Sadly, despite God's goodness and grace, Jehoahaz and the people of Israel continue in the very same sins that they had at the beginning that brought God's anger in the first place. In addition, we are told that the worship of Asherah/groves continued in the land.¹ Not only was there an idol supposedly representing the Lord in the land, but other pagan deities were being worshipped as well. Even though God had shown mercy, Israel refused to finally turn from their wicked ways.

¹ From Lesson 5: "As was noted in a previous lesson, the KJV translated the Hebrew *'asherah* (pl. *'asherim*) as grove(s), whereas modern translations believe this was the specific name of pagan deity. Recent archeological discoveries have uncovered the religious texts of the Canaanites, and Asherah was the name of one of the wives of Baal."

Why would God deliver his people when they refused to turn from their sin?

What would be the long-term consequences of this sin?

What warning can we take from this?

IV. Conclusion to Jehoahaz (7-9)

The sins of Jehoahaz left a deep scar on the nation. The war with Syria, although Israel had eventually regained their freedom, left them with a decimated army. The northern kingdom was hanging on by a thread at this point. But things were about to start looking up for the nation and Israel was about to experience one last season of success and prosperity before the end.

Joash (2 Kings 13:10-25)²

I. Introduction to Joash (10-13)

What we find in the evaluation of Joash is fascinating when compared to the story which is about to follow. Scripture pulls no punches in describing Joash as doing evil in the sight of the Lord. There is no qualification to this in the summary of his reign: he was an evil king. Yet the story that follows gives us a somewhat complicated picture that makes that simple judgment get a whole lot more complicated.

² We have here another king with a long form of his name (Jehoash) and a short form of his name (Joash). In this lesson, we will refer to him as Joash since that's how this passage normally refers to him. Again, this is not to be confused with Joash of the southern kingdom, whom we talked about in our previous lesson.

Let's read the next section in its entirety, and as we do ask yourself this question: "How is it that someone who goes to the prophet for help and is promised victory from the Lord can be remembered by God as evil?"

II. Joash and Elisha (14-25)

This brief story gives us a window into the relationship of the prophet and the king. We see here an episode that paints for us a profound picture of the kings and, too often, many of us: a picture of faltering faith.

A. The context of the meeting (13:14)

Elisha is on his death bed. The king comes to him and says to him the very words which Elisha said to Elijah when he was about to leave (2 Kings 2:12).

Why did Elisha say this phrase to Elijah, and why did Joash say it to Elisha? What does it mean?

This expression honored the prophet by pointing out that as the representative of God, he was the true hope of the nation's military. Chariots were the tanks of ancient warfare, and so it would be like saying today "The tanks of Israel and the shells thereof." The point is that Joash is recognizing that the hope for Israel's future came from God, and that losing the prophet of God would be a huge blow to the nation.

B. The instructions for Joash (13:15-18)

Elisha understands that Joash is in a bad place militarily, and so he decides to honor the king's faith in recognizing God as the true source of hope for the nation. He tells him to grab a bow, shoot an arrow out the window, and then hit the ground with the arrows. Elijah makes it clear that as Joash hits the ground with the leftover arrows, so God will give victory and allow Joash to strike the Syrians.

What happens next is important. Joash takes the arrows and pounds the ground with them three times, and then we get this interesting detail: he stayed (or stopped). This seemingly insignificant detail (of course he stopped, every activity that someone does they do until they stop) demonstrates something deeper going on in the story. It points to the fact that he stopped when he could have gone further.

There was a certain point where the faith of Joash ran out. "Can God give you a victory against Syrai?" "Sure" *Bang*. "How about two?" "Yeah, he could do that." *Bang*. "Three?" "I mean, I guess so." *Bang*. "Four?" "I think that seems like a bit much." *Stop*. And Scripture points his out by reminding us that he hit the ground three times, and then he stopped. He stopped intentionally, because any more than 3 victories seemed a little far-fetched.

Why would Joash think God could win 3 victories, but not 4? How might we think similarly today?

C. The results for Joash (13:19-19, 24-25)

Elisha gets quite upset at Joash. Joash had played along but at a certain point his faith crumbled and he gave up.

Why do you think Elisha reacted so strongly against Joash's failure?

Elisha tells Joash what could have been, and what he will instead receive. Whereas God gave Joash an open door to ask for the end of Syria, Joash had failed to have enough faith to ask for it. For this reason, Elisha will give Joash exactly what he asks for... and nothing more. Later in the chapter we indeed find out that things happened exactly as Elisha had predicted: God gave Joash three victories against Syria.

How might we be guilty of the same sin as Joash, and how would we face similar consequences?

It's hard to say that Jehoahaz and Joash had no faith at all. Jehoahaz sought the favor of God and found it! Joash likewise recognized that the true power of Israel lay in the Lord and sought out the prophet Elisha on his deathbed to ask for his help one last time.

But it wasn't enough. The things these kings knew about God didn't sink down to the level of heart belief. Their view of who he was and what he was capable of doing didn't really shape the way they lived, and so we are brought to the question of whether they really believed it in the first place. Was he big enough to take care a few of their problems? Perhaps. Was he

big enough to give up everything, tear down century old idols, and tell everyone to go back to Jerusalem for worship? No, no he was not.

There are many believers today who live with a faltering faith. They believe that God can do great things, or at least they say they do. But their life betrays a different view of God. They understand in their minds that God is capable of doing great things and that he is high, holy, and totally worth living for. But they don't ask him to do great things for them, and if they do they ask not really expecting to get it. This weak faith in prayer translates into a weak faith in life. James tells us that real faith will produce real works, and people who don't live for God don't believe the things they say about God.

So the question we find ourselves faced with in this lesson is this: how big is your God? Say whatever you will in answer to that question, but the answer will truly be seen both by what you pray for and by how you live.

What does it look like for Christians to have a faltering faith?

What are things we don't ask for because they seem too big for God to actually do?

What will be the results in our life if we live with a small views of God?