

It is striking to see how the *direction* of the life of faith is *continually directed into testing situations*, the holy testing of our characters and our heart motivations:

And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.  
Deuteronomy 8:2

Of this kind of testing, the Puritan John Owen wrote:

God tests men (or tempts for holy purposes and not to incite them to sin) to *show* unto man what is in him ... that is, either grace or corruption. Grace and corruption lie deep in the heart; men often-times deceive themselves in the search after the one or the other of them. When we give vent to the soul, to try and discover what grace is there, corruption comes out; and when we search for corruption, grace appears. So is the soul of men kept in perplexity; we fail in our trials.

Then God comes with a gauge that goes to the bottom. He sends His instruments of trial into the bowels and the inmost parts of the soul, and lets man see what is in him, of what metal he is constituted.

Let us therefore with fear and trembling pray as we begin these Bible notes:

*Lord, help us not to shrink from the tests and trials you send into our lives. Though your gauge goes deep into the heart and soul of our spiritual condition, give us grace to know that your trials are meant to heal us, to humble us, and to drive us to deeper and more constant dependence on you. In Christ's Name we pray, Amen.*

**Mon/Tues: Read Judges 2:16-23 & 2 Kings 13:1-9**

**Probing Down Deep**

You will remember from last week's notes that Israel repeatedly failed the test of monotheistic commitment to the LORD. Even from the days of the Judges, "they broke God's covenant and did not listen to His voice" (Judges 2:20).

What would you do in God's place? See how blessed Israel had been: All the blessings of the "Land flowing with milk and honey;" safety throughout the forty years in the desert; their sandals and clothes did not wear out! God guarded them with the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night! They had all the covenant promises of the LORD; all the written testimony of the Law of Moses; the sacrificial system as a symbol of daily forgiveness; the Spirit of God as the One who joined them by faith to the LORD through sacrificial blood. All this! And they threw it away to serve the Baals. What should God do? What would you do?

But God is not like us. Oh, how blessed Israel was not to be placed into the hands of bloodthirsty men! Instead, as a loving, chastising Father, God did not abandon His people because of His Covenant of Grace. Instead, He tested Israel by leaving the Canaanites in the Promised Land in order to demonstrate "whether they will take care to walk in the way of the LORD as their fathers did, or not" (Judges 2:22).

In the same way, when the LORD placed on the throne of Israel many years later the sons of Jehu, even to the fourth generation of blessing (2 Kings 10:30), the LORD did so in order to "test" the royal house of Jehu, to demonstrate what was truly in their hearts.

The LORD sent “a savior” in answer to the prayer of the desperate son of Jehu, Jehoahaz (2 Kings 13:4-5), while at the same time humbling the kingdom of Israel by reducing their weaponry to the pathetic proportions of 2 Kings 13:7.

But where is the repentance? Is a humble heart that shows real, saving faith by its willingness to forsake sin the blessed result of such tests in the life of Jehu’s son? Alas, 2 Kings 13:2 says, “he would not depart from” the sinful calf-idolatry which the first king of Israel, Jeroboam son of Nebat, forced on Israel. So the first generation of Jehu’s dynasty fails the test.

**Meditate and Pray:** As you pray for our precious church family, would you join me in praying that God would grant all of us (young and old, single or married, widowed, elderly, or in the prime of life) the grace of a repentant heart? Use hymn # 534 in our red Trinity hymnal as your prayer, asking God to help us hate the sin that drove Him away from us.

1 O for a closer walk with God,  
a calm and heav'nly frame,  
a light to shine upon the road  
that leads me to the Lamb!

2 Return, O holy Dove, return,  
sweet messenger of rest;  
I hate the sins that made thee mourn,  
and drove thee from my breast.

3 The dearest idol I have known  
whate'er that idol be,  
help me to tear it from thy throne,  
and worship only thee.

4 So shall my walk be close with God,  
calm and serene my frame;  
so purer light shall mark the road  
that leads me to the Lamb.

### Wednesday: Read 2 Kings 13:10-13 & Acts 11:18

### Refreshing Repentance

How did Jehu’s grandson Jehoash do when it came to God’s testing his heart? Sadly, he also “walked in the ways” of the first wicked king of Israel, Jeroboam son of Nebat, refusing to forsake his sins of idolatry (2 Kings 13:11). This language gives us some clues to the nature of biblical repentance *by showing what happens when it is lacking*. So we focus on repentance and its importance by looking at yet another king who refused it.

Repentance is, first of all, a grace that God alone can grant. It is impossible for man to repent of his sins naturally or by his own effort. Does not the whole history of Israel show us this? *Even when they knew that their sinful way of life would lead to destruction and judgment, they would not forsake their sin! In exactly this way, Jehu and his sons lacked the grace of repentance.*

Scripture clearly illustrates this in Acts 11:18, when New Testament church leaders rejoice at Peter’s report that the Gentiles too have turned to Christ, they declare that God has also “granted them repentance unto life.” That is the first fact to remember about repentance: *It is a saving grace.*

Second, repentance is no morose or merely negative hatred of sin. In other words, it is not merely feeling guilty. It is a turning away from the deadliness of sin and finding new life by a saving view of Christ. True repentance, in short, always involves turning for new life and hope to Christ.

This is why Peter's sermon at Solomon's Colonnade in Jerusalem (Acts 3:12-26) urges the crowd *who had crucified the Lord of life* (Acts 3:15) to turn back to God to find times of refreshing (Acts 3:19). How would this new, refreshing life come to those sinners? It is by God "sending the Christ, who has been appointed for sinners" (Acts 3:20). In this way, the Risen Lord Jesus would by His Spirit pour out a spirit of repentance on the lost, and new life would begin as they turned to Christ as their Savior and Lord.

**Meditate and Pray:** Ask God to pour out such a spirit of refreshing repentance upon us. There is no hope for new life in Christ without heart-felt repentance. Or to put it more accurately, let us *especially give thanks* that, when we turn to Christ as poor, helpless and lost sinners, we turn because Christ has given us eyes to behold and ears to hear Him. As He opens the eyes of our hearts to believe, so His grace then gives us a new will to hate sin and turn to Christ. As Acts 11:21 puts it, "And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord." There it is. Give thanks that what follows real faith is a *turning unto the Lord and a turning away from sin*. Sadly, this is what Jehu's sons refused to do. They would not forsake their sinful idolatry to turn to the LORD in saving faith.

**Thurs/Fri: read 2 Kings 13:14-19**

**Empty the Quiver**

The writer of 2 Kings records Joash's emotional encounter with Elisha as the aged prophet lay on his death-bed. As Professor Dale R. Davis says, in 2 Kings 13:14, Joash weeps in the knowledge that "with Elisha's death Israel will be left undefended, seeing that the presence of the prophet and the ministry of his word had been a shield to the nation."

The dying Elisha seeks to strengthen Joash as king and give him a promise of complete victory over Israel's archenemy Syria (2 Kings 13:17). Elisha takes the king's hands in his own to guide an arrow shot to the East towards the Promised Land across the river that has been captured by Syria (as 2 Kings 10:32-33 makes clear). He then commands Joash to shoot additional arrows into the ground and empty the quiver – as a symbolic way for the king to show that he believed the prophet's promise that Syria was to be destroyed. Ask yourself: what does a father-figure do when he is given the chance to destroy a devil of a man, one who made Elisha weep (2 Kings 8:12) and whose war-like behavior ripped open pregnant women and destroyed innocent villages of God's people. God's prophet offered a way these arrows to embrace a prophesied destruction of such a foe. Joash should have emptied the quiver to claim as many victories as possible!

But No. Joash pulls back and refuses to commit to the spiritual warfare required to destroy such a foe. He reasoned that it was much easier to have a treaty with such a fearful foe, to treat him as a brother, since you never know when you might want his help. It is an expression of a gentleman's club of royalty – the interactions between these mighty kings. See Ahab do the same thing in 1 Kings 20:32-33. Much easier to appease or buy off your foes, like Joash did to the same Hazeal when he threatened Jerusalem in 2 Kings 12:17-18.

In this worldly reasoning, Joash ceased the deed of faith of shooting arrows for total victory. He stood still; he "stayed" his hand; he stopped moving in command to the prophet's words; he became inattentive to the first priority of any king after God's own heart: to defend God's kingdom and to subdue and defeat "all his and our enemies."

**Meditate and Pray:** No wonder Elisha erupts in anger at Joash in 2 Kings 13:19. God now would only grant a partial victory over the Syrians. Joash shows that his obedience in this arrow exercise was only to please the prophet outwardly, rather than to defend God's people out of a willingness to lay down his life for the protection of God's inheritance.

Give thanks that we have a Savior who was willing to *empty His arsenal* to redeem and defend us. He spent all the energy that He had; His victory over sin and evil is complete. Sing about Christ's total commitment to us, and of the urgent need for us to be totally committed to Him, using this English hymn (by Thomas Hornblower Gill):

1 Lord, in the fulness of my might,  
I would for Thee be strong;  
While runneth o'er each dear delight,  
To Thee should soar my song.

2 I would not give the world my heart,  
And then profess Thy love;  
I would not feel my strength depart,  
And then Thy service prove.

3 I would not with swift-winged zeal  
On the world's errands go,  
And labour up the heavenly hill  
With weary feet and slow.

4 O not for Thee my weak desires,  
My poorer, baser part!  
O not for Thee my fading fires,  
The ashes of my heart!

5 Accept me in my golden time,  
In my dear joys have part!  
For Thee the glory of my prime,  
The fulness of my heart!

6 I cannot, Lord, too early take  
The covenant divine;  
O ne'er the happy heart may break  
Whose earliest love was Thine!

### Sat/Sun: Read 2 Kings 13:19; 13:22-25 & Hebrews 10:35-39

### Successful Defeat

God kept His word of promise to Joash the King of Israel. He defeated the Syrians three times (2 Kings 13:25). Though the power of Hazeel was amazingly destructive, diminishing the army in the days of Joash's father to a mere handful of horsemen and chariots (2 Kings 13:7), the LORD showed Joash His Divine power to pull victory from the jaws of defeat. Indeed, Joash's prowess in warfare is at the fore in 2 Kings 14 as well as the chapter before us.

But how sad that Joash's royal success was not rooted in a personal commitment of faith in God's ways. When Joash refused to trust God fully and savingly, and died instead an unrepentant idolater, he serves as a warning to us – just as Hebrews 10:35-39 says:

Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For,

“Yet a little while and the coming one will come and will not delay;  
but my righteous one shall live by faith, **and if he shrinks back,**  
my soul has no pleasure in him.”

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

**Meditate and Pray:** What is the lesson from this examination of the sons of Jehu – especially Joash, who was given such a close relationship with Elisha and such clear signs meant to give him courage to trust the LORD fully? The lesson is about the danger of failing to persevere with the LORD and of turning back instead of closing with the LORD as our only hope and stay. Such “shrinking” from costly battle in God’s Name is the first step in apostasy for those who count the cost of discipleship too high.

But the lesson goes deeper, warning about *the folly* of letting our fears restrict our commitment to the LORD. Joash never lived to see what a completely revived nation of Israel would have looked like. Because he drew back, refusing to believe that the LORD could fully deliver His own from the deadly threat of Syria, he never saw the greater deeds of Resurrection which God accomplishes in a believer’s life – such as using *a dead Elisha to raise the dead* (2 Ki 13:20-21). Thus unbelief always misses out on the reviving power of God and does not live to see God’s power to raise our dead hopes and our dead bodies unto newness of life.

On the other hand, what glories of “life from the dead” do Christians experience in their homes, their workplaces, their vocations, their hopes and desires!

As the hymn says: “They who trust Him wholly, find Him wholly true.”

What a wonderful gamble; the Puritans called it “the venture of a life-time.” We are to stake everything we are and have on the LORD’s faithfulness! No one is disappointed in putting all our eggs in the Lord’s basket.

As our Sabbath reflection, I pray that these few stanzas from John Masefield’s poem, *The Everlasting Mercy* will be a beautiful picture of the new life that comes upon the hard, weedy field of our lives when Christ makes all things new. How much better than the dead, royal power of Jehu and his sons! Here is Masefield’s poem, as the newly converted narrator in the poem (Saul Kane) celebrates that now his eyes of faith see Christ in every hue and every part of creation. Saul starts these stanzas by describing Old farmer Callow coming up the hill:

Slow up the hill the plough team plod,  
Old Callow at the task of God,  
Helped by man's wit, helped by the brute,  
Turning a stubborn clay to fruit,  
His eyes forever on some sign  
To help him plough a perfect line.

At top of rise the plough team stopped,  
The fore-horse bent his head and cropped.  
Then the chains chack, the brasses jingle,  
The lean reins gather through the cringle,  
The figures move against the sky,  
The clay wave breaks as they go

I kneeled there in the muddy fallow,  
I knew that Christ was there with Callow,  
That Christ was standing there with me,  
That Christ had taught me what to be,  
That I should plough, and as I ploughed

My Savior Christ would sing aloud,  
And as I drove the clods apart  
Christ would be ploughing in my heart,  
Through rest-harrow and bitter roots,  
Through all my bad life's rotten fruits.

O Christ who holds the open gate,  
O Christ who drives the furrow straight,  
O Christ, the plough, O Christ, the laughter  
Of holy white birds flying after,  
Lo, all my heart's field red and torn,

And Thou wilt bring the young green corn,  
The young green corn divinely springing,  
The young green corn forever singing;  
And when the field is fresh and fair  
Thy blessed feet shall glitter there,

And we will walk the weeded field,  
And tell the holden harvests' yield,  
The corn that makes the holy bread  
By which the soul of man is fed,  
The holy bread, the food unpriced,  
Thy everlasting mercy, Christ.