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Grace in a Grave II Kings 13:1-25

Intro: Last time we pointed out that, while the first few verses of **ch12** may look like the standard formula for announcing the reign of a Judean king, it was actually announcing a kingdom victory. What looks like bland repetition is anything but! It is a thrilling testament of the steady faithfulness of our God. I mention this again because we have a similar situation in Israel **ch13**. In the previous chapter, Yahweh was upholding His promise to David of an everlasting dynasty of kings. In today's text, Yahweh is again upholding His promise, though it's not as long lasting.

1 – On the surface, this is nothing but another dry-as-dust formula. To the casual reader, there doesn't appear to be any dramatic or scandalizing information here so you blah-blah through the names that are difficult to pronounce and move on to the more exciting parts of the narrative. But to do so would do the text a great disservice. There's a small phrase that should catch and hold our attention – Jehoahaz son of Jehu. This little phrase is meant to conjure up the memory of **10:30** in our minds. Because Jehu came to the throne of Israel fulfilling the will of God by carrying out His extermination program on Ahab's dynasty, Yahweh promised him a royal dynasty that would last for 4 generations.

This is just the first installment of that promise – Jehoahaz follows his father Jehu as king of Israel. This is not God upholding His Davidic Covenant in Judah; this is idolatrous, rebellious Israel. Yes, it is a dry formula but it is also a solid faithfulness. In fact, despite their stubborn insistence on worshipping the true God in a completely wrong way, Yahweh's underlying faithfulness is the stitching that holds Israel's history together during these days. They had separated themselves from the house of David many years ago but they are still Yahweh's people and He is still faithful to them. God's faithfulness to His people holds true to this day; so much so that we sing about it still!

2-9 – Our text covers the reign of 2 of Jehu's descendents; Jehoahaz being the first. And what is the first thing we learn about Jehoahaz and his reign? He was an ardent follower and devotee of the Jeroboam bull cult. This is no

surprise, of course. We are used to hearing this by now. It seems to be the favorite folly of the northern kingdom; at least when they can't have Baal. What may be surprising is Jehoahaz's stubbornly faithful commitment to it (2b). Why is his faithfulness to calf worship surprising? It's surprising in light of what happens in v3-7.

We're not surprised that Yahweh's wrath flares up against Israel and that He gives them over to the power of the Syrians. This isn't a surprise because just as Yahweh was faithful to His word in 10:30, so He is faithful to His word in 8:12! Yes, we love to be encouraged by God's faithfulness to His promises of grace and blessing but how often do we forget or simply disregard His words of warning and promised judgment? So it's no surprise that Hazael & Son come knocking on Israel's door; God warned them and promised judgment but Israel couldn't be bothered to listen; at least, not until it became painful.

It's the pain of this correction that leads to our first surprise – Jehoahaz pleads with Yahweh (4a). I guess even that's not really a surprise because even the worst heretic and most ardent atheist will cast about in anguish and false hope if the fire gets too hot or the pain too sharp. No, what is really surprising is the very next phrase – and the Lord listened to him! What! He listened to a calf-worshipper? Why on earth would Yahweh do that? Hadn't He read Prov 28:9 or Ps 66:18? The reason for Yahweh's attentive ear is given in the very next phrase – He saw the oppression of Israel. The same language appears in Yahweh's words in Ex 3:9 where He says that He has seen the oppression of the Egyptians against Israel.

The author of Kings is reminding Israel (& us) that Yahweh is still the same God of the Exodus who not only sees Egyptians but Syrians squeezing the life out of His people. Yahweh still has the same power and still holds the same expectations for His people but the use of this language in our text seems to imply that sometimes Yahweh's pity over the distress of His people supercedes the wickedness of the one seeking Him for relief. Sometimes the painful consequences of our rebellious sin moves God to work on our behalf. Does this mean we can just do what we want in life? Only if you love living under painful circumstances! God isn't obligated to change our circumstances but He can bring relief in the midst of them.

How did Yahweh answer Jehoahaz's prayer? He gave Israel a deliverer...a

savior. This means Israel enjoyed deliverance and a new period of security. Of course, scholars debate who this particular savior was. Some say it was Elisha and others believe it was the immediate descendants of Jehoahaz but it doesn't really matter. One doesn't need a great name to do a great work for the Lord. What does matter is that Yahweh gave Israel a savior, not the precise identity of the savior. And boy, did Israel need one! After Hazael and Ben-Hadad worked Israel over, they left them with a skeleton crew for an army. They had pretty much knocked the wind out of Israel.

But the great disappointment of the text is revealed in **v6**. In the aftermath of God's unmerited favor and unguessable compassion we come face-to-face with Israel's unfathomable rebellion and entrenched ingratitude. The warmth of God's pity did nothing to soften the hardness of their unfaithfulness. There was no memory carryover that won their gratitude or encouraged their repentance. God had revealed and acted on His pity for Israel and it was a pity that should have changed them but mercy didn't melt them. We see the same spirit around us today. Israel wanted relief from trouble not a relationship with God. She craved therapy not a transformation.

10-13 – Now we're given a very brief description of the reign of Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz. Brief though it is, this is the entire summary of the reign of Jehoash. We have his coronation announcement, religious observation, bibliographic reference and obituary. So, in 4 verses Jehoash, from beginning to end, is off the scene. This tells us that there wasn't much of vital importance to his reign since he can be disposed of with nothing but formulas in 4 vs. But, in the rest of **ch13**, we're given 2 scenes that occurred during Jehoash's reign, one in which he takes a starring role and an important theological principle is revealed. The fact that this doesn't appear in **v10-13** means Jehoash came out on the wrong side of the principle. So he's not totally worthless; we can still use him as a bad example!

14-19 – If you're counting, Elisha has been around for quite a long time: he's seen kings come and go in both Israel and Judah but now it's his time to go and it appears that the current king of Israel, Jehoash (Joash) is beside himself with grief (**14**). We might question the sincerity of Jehoash's tears in this scene but remember; he honestly believes he's worshipping the true God but he just refuses to worship Yahweh in the manner He has prescribed in His law. In effect he's saying, "I love Yahweh but I'll worship Him as I see fit." This mindset had persisted to the present day.

Despite his bad theology, Jehoash seems to value Elisha's presence and ministry in Israel. His words in 14 suggest that with Elisha's death, he believes Israel will be left undefended. He seems to believe that the presence of Elisha and his ministry of the prophetic word has been a shield to Israel and he is certainly correct. You only need to turn back to ch6 to see just how much Elisha was a shield to Israel. But this only goes to show another deficiency in the king's theology. He has no problem trusting in the power of Elisha, the man of God, but sees no need in trusting in the God of Elisha for himself. The king's sorrow, if it's real, is sorely misplaced. This is the sad result of bad theology.

Despite this, Elisha – on his deathbed – still seeks to encourage the king and he will do so through the use of an acted oracle. Notice how the prophet is in total control throughout the scene: he gives the orders and the king obeys. Elisha tells the king to pick up a bow and draw back with an arrow. He then places his hand on the king's hand and together they shoot the arrow out of the east window. Then Elisha interprets the oracle so that its significance will be unmistakable to the king (17b). The arrow signified the victory (salvation) Yahweh would give Israel over Syria.

Now that Jehoash knows what the arrow means, Elisha seeks to see how much it means to him. Will the king appropriate this word from Yahweh with gusto? Elisha orders the king to take the remaining arrows and strike the ground, rather – shoot them out of the window into the ground. Jehoash shoots 3 arrows and then stops. Elisha is furious with him – he should have shot 5 or 6 times! You knew what the arrows represented! Syria has literally destroyed your kingdom; do you want to eliminate them or not? Elisha has just given Jehoash the equivalent of a blank check of Yahweh's word and the king seems to have said, "Thanks, but I'll just take a little bit for now."

Now, because of the king's halfhearted response, Elisha seems to qualify the promise of victory. In v17 he told the king that Syria would be destroyed but in v19, because of Jehoash's less than faithful response, Syria won't be completely destroyed but merely defeated 3 times. Now, if v10-13 summarizes Jehoash's entire reign then v14-19 captures his most crucial moment – standing before the word of God. The text makes a value judgment: how a man responds to the Word of God is more significant than all the achievements and honors of a lifetime.

How does Jehoash stack up here? In Elisha's view (the only one that matters) the king's response to Yahweh's word was obviously inadequate. He had Yahweh's promise of complete victory and he should have grabbed on to it with both hands! But Jehoash was content to be just a 3 victory man. "Let's not destroy Syria, let's just contain them!" It could very well be that Jehoash saw Syria as an effective buffer state between Israel and the horrid Assyrian Empire but that is beside the point. The God that can deliver you from Syria can also deliver you from the Assyrians. The king was content with containment; that was plenty enough for him. The promise of God didn't stir him enough.

How foolish; how short-sighted; how...unfaithful! We are quick to condemn Jehoash's folly yet fail to realize how prevalent it is in the lives of many a believer. God has promised us in His word that we are no longer under the power of sin ([Rom 6:14](#)). Our new life in Christ has brought about a regime change and we now live under the power of grace which provides us with substantial liberty from the bondage of sin: it no longer has the power to rule over us.

But yet many believers still give the Jehoash response. We're somehow convinced that our condition is so depraved and that we're still bound to certain habits, behaviors and reactions that even though we claim to belong to Jesus, there's really no hope for change or transformation. If that is true then grace is just a word, the Holy spirit is just a theory and the gospel is nothing more than propaganda for all we expect from it. We have God's promise but we don't expect much from it. The spirit of Jehoash lives on in many hearts in the church today.

20-25 – Elisha died... You know, it's too bad that Yahweh didn't send Elisha a name-it-and-claim-it theologian when he needed one most. I'm sure that if they had been there, they could have convinced Elisha that it is never God's will that any of His children be sick. They could have instructed Elisha in the mystical art of making a positive confession in order to enjoy continuing health uninterrupted by death. Why didn't Yahweh send one of these great men of God to Elisha? Because, they and their ridiculous false doctrine didn't exist at that time. These charlatans are a fairly recent scourge that's cropped up in the middle of the 20th century but in that short time, their false doctrines have permeated nearly every area of the church to disastrous effect.

Now, this is one of the most strange and unusual miracles found in the Bible. The scene is so bizarre to some that they can't accept it as a record of fact. And yet, here it is and the author clearly had a reason for placing this incident at this point. What might that reason be? There could be more than one but, while these verses may be strange and unexpected, they really shouldn't be. When Elijah was taken from the scene he went with quite a splash so why would we not expect something similar at Elisha's passing. After all, he did have a double portion of Elijah's spirit so something phenomenal seems appropriate. We don't really expect a prophet of Elisha's stature to rot away quietly!

The placement of this scene also provides a clue to its theological significance coming, as it does, on the heels of v14-19. It appears these 2 passages depict Elisha's legacy to Israel because, through Elisha – servant of the Word – Israel receives both deliverance (14-19) and life (21-21) or, both victory and vitality. Even when the prophet is about to die, or is already dead, these gifts are still available to Israel. So, there's no inherent power to give life in Elisha's bones but a dead man was given new life by coming in contact with Elisha's bones because God desired to show a rebellious Israel that the divine energy which had been active in Elisha had not been taken from Israel by his death.

Israel still has hope! This scene shows that the word of God that Elisha had carried so faithfully was still mighty and powerful even though the prophet had died. Of course, this scene depicts an individual benefit while the previous passage describes a national benefit (Syria defeated). It's fitting that the last 2 stories dealing with Elisha report his role in the destruction of enemies – both the great national enemy of the time: Syria; and the greatest personal enemy of all time: death.

Elijah didn't die; he was carried to heaven in a whirl-wind. This tells us that though death holds sway over humanity, it doesn't hold sway absolutely. God made an exception for Elijah. Now, at the end of Elisha's life we see a similar testimony. But, just so we don't think that Yahweh's power over death is only for His revered prophets, He rebukes death for an anonymous, Joe-Schmoe Israelite. It's as if the last word for both Elijah and Elisha is: Don't think that death has dominion over you.

The next provision our text reveals is the blessing of God's covenant. V22-25 send us back to the time of Jehoahaz and parallel the events of 3-7. They mention Hazael's oppression of Israel under Jehoahaz and then tell us why Israel still exists. For all of their stubborn rebellion and insensitive ingratitude, why is Israel still around? Why all this grace, this compassion, this provision? It's simply because Yahweh had made a covenant with Abraham; He promised to give his descendents a home. He wrapped this promise up in a binding covenant to make Abraham more sure of it and then He reaffirmed the same with Isaac and Jacob.

But this northern kingdom has been steeped in idolatry from the word go and the vengeance of the covenant was long overdue. By this time Israel should have been banished from her land and carried off into captivity but she's not – because of the covenant. That's because the covenant combines both the firmness of promise and the warmth of grace. To be sure, there is such a thing as vengeance for the covenant and Israel will experience it eventually but behind the covenant stands the Giver of the covenant and He delights in mercy (Mic 7:18). So, when hope should be gone, it's not. But this grace from God calls for gratitude, not indifference. It calls for repentance, not presumption.

The 3rd provision is revealed in v25. Hazael is replaced by his son Ben-Hadad and he meets Jehoash in battle and is defeated 3 times; and Jehoash recovers much territory that had been taken from his father by Syria. This tells us that the acted out prophecy of 16-17 has come to pass just as Elisha had said. Yahweh promised 3 victories and here they are. Yahweh has been true to His word for the umpteenth time. Never mind that Jehoash is a calf-worshipping Jeroboam clone (11) or that he's less than enthusiastic over Yahweh's promises (18). In spite of the worthiness of the recipient, Yahweh will still deliver the goods as promised. In the middle of Israel's slide to ruin she still has a God who speaks truth to her. Israel hadn't had a lick of royal faithfulness in some 135 years yet God still deals with them in his truth

Now abide hope, covenant and truth, these 3. These are the provisions that will haunt Israel - or any who profess to be God's people. As Israel plunges toward her ruin, God isn't depriving or impoverishing her. In the midst of her apostasy and infidelity He places hope, covenant and truth. So, they will go to judgment weighted down with mercies! 😊