THE LORD’S ARROW OF VICTORY

2 Kings 11:1-13:25

Key Verse: 13:17

“’Open the east window,’ he said, and he opened it. ‘Shoot!’ Elisha said, and he shot. ‘The Lord’s arrow of victory; the arrow of victory over Aram!’ Elisha declared. ‘You will completely destroy the Arameans at Aphek.’”

Chapters 11 and 12 are about Joash king of Judah. He became king because of Jehoiada the priest. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord while Jehoiada lived. But after Jehoiada’s death, Joash did evil in the eyes of the Lord and worshiped idols. In the end he was assassinated by his officials. We can learn from this the proper role of a mentor. Chapter 13 is the story of Jehoahaz and Jehoash the kings of Israel. At that time, the king of Aram oppressed Israel severely. Israel was miserable and powerless. Then Elisha, who was now a senior citizen, taught King Jehoash the secret of victory. The Lord gave Israel victory through Elisha’s faith and shepherd’s heart for his people. We can learn the secret of victory in a time of crisis. Everybody wants a victorious life. How can we have one? Let’s learn in this passage.

I.  Jehoiada made Joash king in a time of crisis (11:1-21)

Chapter 11 tells us how the priest Jehoiada raised Joash as king of Judah. In this way he defeated the wicked Athaliah and saved his country.

Verses 1-3 tell the story of Athaliah’s reign. Athaliah was a daughter of the Baal worshipers, Ahab and Jezebel, who ruled the northern kingdom. How did she come to be a queen in Judah? To understand, we must return to the time of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. He made a critical mistake. He arranged a marriage between his son Jehoram and Athaliah. When Athaliah first came into Judah, she must have been quiet, pretending to worship the Lord. But after her husband Jehoram became king, she began to reveal her true colors. Athaliah influenced her husband Jehoram, and her son Ahaziah, to do evil in the eyes of the Lord. (8:18,26-27) She brought Baal worship to Judah. Though Jehu had destroyed Baal worship in northern Israel, it had now infiltrated Judah. After Ahaziah died, Athaliah seized power and became a dictator in Judah. Then she proceeded to destroy the whole line of David.

David’s line had already been weakened through various events. Jehoram had put to death six of his own brothers, sons of Jehoshaphat, due to the evil influence of Athaliah. (2 Chr 21:2-6) Moreover, some Arab raiders had come into the camp of Judah and killed all the sons of Jehoram except the youngest son Ahaziah. (2 Chr 22:1) Then Ahaziah was killed by Jehu, (2 Ki 9:28) along with 42 of his relatives, some princes of Judah. (10:14; 2 Chr 22:8) Now Athaliah was destroying what was left of David’s line. She killed her own grandsons, granddaughters, nephews and nieces. How could she do so? It was the work of Satan. She was vulnerable to Satan’s work through her sin of idol worship. Satan wanted to destroy David’s family line in order to prevent the Savior from coming into the world.

At this critical moment, the Lord intervened through a pious woman, Jehosheba. She was the daughter of King Jehoram, the sister of Ahaziah, and the wife of Jehoiada the priest. (2 Chr 22:11) She stole away Joash, a son of Ahaziah, and her nephew. She hid him with his nurse in a bedroom in the temple. There he stayed hidden until an opportune time.

As Athaliah ruled the land, Judah became spiritually bankrupt. Yet the Lord was working secretly to raise Joash through Jehosheba and Jehoiada. They must have adopted Joash as their own son and taken care of him for six years, providing everything he needed, especially instruction in the word of God. It must have been difficult to bring up a baby in the temple without being noticed. Jehoiada and Jehosheba must have prayed diligently every day for Joash. In dark times, it is most important to raise one spiritual leader. This is the goal of many UBF house churches.

Jehoiada not only raised Joash, but gained supporters to make him a king. He made a covenant with the commanders of units of hundreds, the Carites, one by one. They were bodyguards of the king, also known as Kerethites, and were very faithful. They had been used to lay the foundation of the kingdoms of David and Solomon. (2 Sam 8:18; 1 Ki 1:38) Most likely, they were supposed to guard Athaliah. However, her demonic behavior offended them, while Jehoiada’s godly life earned their respect and loyalty.

In the seventh year, Jehoiada sent for the commanders of units of a hundred and had them brought to the temple of the Lord. There, Jehoiada made a covenant with them. Then he showed them Joash, the king’s son, and the rightful heir to David’s throne. Jehoiada shared his detailed plan to remove Athaliah. (5-8) It would be done on a Sabbath day. Three companies of soldiers going on duty were to be deployed: one at the palace, another at the Sur Gate—which was an important entrance to the temple, also known as the Foundation Gate (2 Chr 23:5)—and another at the gate behind the guards—which is called the Upper Gate. Another two companies, whose shift of duty had just ended, were to stay at the temple and guard the king.

The commanders of hundreds did just as Jehoiada ordered. (9-11) Then Jehoiada brought out the king’s son and put the crown on him. He presented him with a copy of the covenant and proclaimed him king. They anointed him, and people clapped, shouting, “Long live the king.” Upon hearing this noise, Athaliah went to the temple. She saw the king and the rejoicing people. Then she tore her robes and shouted, “Treason! Treason!” Actually she had committed treason. She was an idol worshiper, a murderer, and a traitor. At last, she died miserably, and people were happy.

Look at verse 17. “Jehoiada then made a covenant between the Lord and the king and people that they would be the Lord’s people. He also made a covenant between the king and the people.” Jehoiada’s purpose was to confirm that they were the Lord’s people. They needed to restore spiritual order by serving God first. In the time of Athaliah, the people of Judah were steeped in Baal worship. They lived according to the sinful nature, and threw off restraint. Jehoiada wanted them to live by the word of God, including the Ten Commandments. They needed to renew their covenant with God. The real King of Judah was the God of Israel. King Joash needed to know this, and to obey the words of God. Jehoiada also wanted to establish order between the young king and his people through a covenant. Then they destroyed the temple of Baal. They smashed the altars and idols to pieces and killed the priest of Baal (18a). Then the king went to the royal palace. All the people of the land rejoiced. And the city was quiet, because Athaliah was slain.

Here we learn from the priest Jehoiada. First, he raised Joash. If he had had his own ambition, he could have tried to become king. But he raised Joash as king, because he was a descendant of David. It was his love for God and obedience to God. To raise spiritual leaders, one must love God more than his ambition. Second, Jehoiada gained coworkers in doing God’s work. He knew that he could not accomplish the mission by himself. So he did his best to gain coworkers. However, it was not easy. If Jehoida was betrayed, he would have lost his life. It was risky. We need coworkers in doing God’s work—not those with just a human tie, but those who share God’s purpose and heart. For this, we must step out in faith and take risks like Jehoiada did. Third, Jehoiada established spiritual order, which had been broken by Athaliah. We must seek to restore spiritual order by loving God first and helping others love God first through deep and sincere Bible study.

When Jehoiada’s motive was pure, and he had courage and wisdom, he was useful to the Lord. The Lord kept the lamp of David through his family. Most of all, we learn that the Lord was faithful to his promise to David. In dark times, he preserved a seed of David in a most unexpected way. God is faithful. God fulfills his redemptive purpose without fail.

II.  Joash reigns over Judah (12:1-21)

Joash became king at the age of seven and ruled over Judah for 40 years. Look at verses 2-3. “Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the years Jehoiada the priest instructed him. The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there.” The high places were used for idol worship by the Canaanites. The Jews used them to worship the Lord. It was more convenient than going to Jerusalem. This kind of worship did not please God. It was syncretism.

Verses 4-16 tell how Joash repaired the temple. Perhaps while he lived there for six years, he found many places that needed repair. Now he had the authority to do so. He told the priests to collect all the money for sacred offerings—the money collected in the census, the money received from personal vows and the money brought voluntarily—and to use it to repair the temple. However, by the twenty-third year of Joash the priests still had not done so. So King Joash summoned Jehoiada and the other priests and told them to hire laymen to repair the temple. They agreed. The laymen worked hard and honestly to repair the temple. This was Joash’s expression of restoring the spiritual life of his nation. It was his expression of love for God. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, while Jehoiada was alive.

2 Chronicles 24:17-22 tell us how Joash did not keep his faith, but became an idol worshiper. After the death of Jehoiada, many wicked officials gathered around Joash. They deceived him to gain favor. They might have said, “You are free from the priest Jehoiada. Don’t follow his advice. Do as you please.” When Joash listened to them, he changed completely. Once he had been eager to repair the temple out of love for God. But now he forsook the Lord and worshiped idols. The Lord sent Zechariah, son of Jehoiada, to warn him. But Joash did not listen. Rather, he ordered that Zechariah be stoned to death in the courtyard of the Lord’s temple. In this way, Joash murdered the priest and prophet, shedding innocent blood. He desecrated the court of the Lord’s temple. He did not remember the kindness of Zechariah’s father, Jehoiada. Instead, he killed his son. After one year, the Lord punished him by sending the army of Aram. Although the Arameans had come with only a few men, the Lord delivered into their hands a much larger army, because Judah had forsaken the Lord. Furthermore, Joash was severely wounded. His officials conspired against him and assassinated him.

Why did Joash finish his life in such a miserable way? Verse 2 says that Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the years Jehoiada the priest instructed him. However, after Jehoiada died, he abandoned the instruction of Jehoiada. Then he became quite a different person. He started his life of faith well, but ended as an idol worshiper. When he had a spiritual mentor he was okay. But without his spiritual mentor, he fell into disaster. We need a mentor in order to live a victorious life. However, a mentor cannot live forever. We must take our mentor’s instructions to heart, and learn to practice them when he or she is not present. We cannot remain as permanent sheep. We must grow to be shepherds who have personal decisions to obey God’s word and take initiative to serve God. Though we may stumble, God will warn us through his servants. We should be humble enough to listen. Then the Lord will help us to live by faith to the end.

III.  The reigns of Jehoahaz and Jehoash in Israel (13:1-25)

Chapter 13 is about the northern kingdom. Verses 1-9 and 22-23 cover the reign of Jehoahaz. Verses 10-21 and 24-25 cover the reign of Jehoash.

First, the Lord had compassion on Israel. (1-9; 22-23) In the twenty-third year of Joash, king of Judah, Jehoahaz son of Jehu became king of Israel in Samaria. He reigned 17 years. But he did evil in the eyes of the Lord by following the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat. He did not turn away from them. Although Jehu brought religious reformation by destroying Baal worship, he did not turn away from the sin of Jeroboam. His son Jehoahaz also did not turn away from the sin of Jeroboam. Therefore, the Lord’s anger burned against Israel. For a long time he kept Israel under the power of Hazael king of Aram, and Ben-Hadad III his son. Still, they did not turn away from the sin of Jeroboam. Moreover, they let an Asherah pole, a symbol of idol worship, remain standing in Samaria. God’s punishment was severe. Nothing was left of Israel’s army except fifty horsemen, ten  chariots and ten thousand foot soldiers. The king of Aram had completely destroyed the rest. (7) If a nation serves the Lord wholeheartedly, she will prosper. But if a nation forsakes the Lord, she becomes weak and will be destroyed. This principle also applies to a family and to individuals. Israel almost vanished.

When Jehoahaz faced trials, he repented and sought the Lord’s favor. The Lord had mercy on him and listened to him because the Lord saw how severely the king of Aram was oppressing Israel. Look at verses 22-23. The Lord had mercy upon Israel. The Lord was gracious to them, had compassion for them, and showed concern for them. It was because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Even though they did evil in the eyes of the Lord, God was unwilling to destroy them or banish them from his presence. God is the God of compassion, not based on emotion, but based on his covenant promises. God is faithful. This faithful God wants to save mankind. Ezekiel 33:11 says, “Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?” 1 Timothy 2:3-4 says, “…God our Savior…wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” The Lord provided a deliverer for Israel, and they escaped the power of Aram. (5) Who is the deliverer? Most likely he was Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz (19,24,25).

Second, Elisha taught faith in the Lord to Jehoash (10-21;24-25). Look at verses 10-11. In the thirty-seventh year of Joash king of Judah, Jehoash became king of Israel in Samaria. He reigned sixteen years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam. Still, the Lord, in his great mercy, used him to deliver Israel. Verses 14-21 show how Jehoash won victory over the king of Aram. Elisha appears again in these verses, for the first time since anointing Jehu in chapter 9. There is no mention of Elisha during Jehu’s reign or Jehoahaz’s reign, a time of about 45 years. Elisha had lived long, but the time came for him to leave this world.

Look at verse 14. “Now Elisha was suffering from the illness from which he died. Jehoash king of Israel went down to see him and wept over him, ‘My father! My father!’ He cried. ‘The chariots and horsemen of Israel!’” The words “My father! My father!” show that the king had respect for Elisha as his spiritual father. The words “the chariots and horsemen of Israel” show that Elisha had been the defender of Israel. Jehoash did not know how they would survive without Elisha. At this moment, Elisha taught him the secret of victory over Aram. It was not a secret of military power, but spiritual power.

Look at verses 15-17. Elisha said, “Get a bow and some arrows,” and Jehoash did so. Then Elisha said, “Take the bow in your hands.” When he had done so, Elisha put his hands on the king’s hands. The hands of Elisha were the hands of love, the hands of power, the hands of prayer for the king, and the hands of victory. The king may have felt the power and love of God through Elisha’s hands. Then Elisha said, “Open the east window.” That was the direction of Aram. “Shoot!” Elisha said, and Jehoash shot, without knowing why. Elisha explained, saying “This is the Lord’s arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram!” And Elisha declared, “You will completely destroy the Arameans at Aphek.”

Through this audio-visual education, what did Elisha want to teach Jehoash? Thus far, Jehoash did not exercise personal faith in God. He had depended on Elisha. Now the king had to learn how to depend on the Lord himself. He had to shoot the arrows with his own hands. If the king relied on the Lord, the Lord would give him victory. Victory belongs to the Lord. Still, Jehoash had to open the east window and shoot the arrow with his own hands. If he did not, the Lord’s arrow of victory would be useless. The Lord’s arrow of victory brings victory as long as we use it by faith. Having the arrows of victory in our hands is not enough. We must open the window and shoot the arrow. Then the Lord can carry out his work of salvation.

After planting faith in the Lord, Elisha tested the king. Look at verses 18-19. Elisha said, “Take the arrows.” And the king took them. Elisha told him, “Stike the ground.” The king struck it three times and stopped. Why did he stop? Maybe he thought three times was enough, and he felt silly to continue. Most of all, it was because he lacked a shepherd’s heart for his people and zeal to destroy their enemies. He did not fully trust the words of the Lord’s prophecy. Then the man of God was angry and said, “You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times.” Jehoash was blessed according to the measure of his faith. For striking three times, he would win three victories. But it was not complete victory.

Some people want to challenge hardship by faith. So they try two or three times and stop. But they do not challenge to the point of winning the complete victory. They think, “I won three battles. It is enough.” Some people grow weary of challenging enemies who return again and again. After a while, they stop challenging all together. Other people have developed a deep sense of failure. They have become complacent in their faith. We have to challenge continually. Five or six times is not just a number; it means until victory is won. We must challenge the impossible situation until God gives us complete victory. Victory is guaranteed. The problem is our attitude. Jesus said, “Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you.” (Mt 7:7) We have to ask, seek and knock.

Elisha’s power was revealed even after he died. Moabite raiders used to enter the country every spring. Once, while some Israelites were burying a man, suddenly they saw a band of raiders. So they threw the man’s body into Elisha’s tomb. When the body touched Elisha’s bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet. This shows that Elisha died but the spirit of Elisha didn’t die. The God of Elisha was still living. This reveals also that our dead bodies will be made alive when they are grafted into the body of Jesus.

God guarantees us victory through Jesus Christ. So Paul said, “But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” (1 Cor 15:57) Paul also said, “No. In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Ro 8:37) God guarantees the victory when we depend on him alone and keep challenging by faith. We must shoot our arrow and strike the ground by faith, persistently, by believing in God’s promise. Then God will surely give us victory and we can live a victorious life.