

II KINGS

Introduction:

J. Sidlow Baxter, in his book *Explore the Book*, introduces Second Kings with: “This Second Book of Kings, which opens with the translation of Elijah to heaven, and closes with the transportation of the captive Jews to Babylon, is more tragic than all which have preceded it. Nay, more than that, it is the most tragic national record ever written. The elect people, through whom the gracious purposes of God were to have been developed for the enlightenment and regeneration of the whole race, become more and more steeped in infidelity and moral degradation, until finally the measure of their wickedness is full, judgment falls, pitiless foes wreak vengeance on them, and drag them from their own land into humiliating captivity.”

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1. Stories about Elijah and Ahaziah

a. Elijah and Ahaziah (2 Kgs 1:1-8)

1 After Ahab's death, Moab rebelled against Israel.

2 Now Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria and injured himself. So he sent messengers, saying to them, "Go and consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, to see if I will recover from this injury."

3 But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Go up and meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and ask them, "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?"

4 Therefore this is what the Lord says: "You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!" "So Elijah went.

5 When the messengers returned to the king, he asked them, "Why have you come back?"

6 "A man came to meet us," they replied. "And he said to us, "Go back to the king who sent you and tell him, 'This is what the Lord says: Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending men to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!'"

7 The king asked them, "What kind of man was it who came to meet you and told you this?"

8 They replied, "He was a man with a garment of hair and with a leather belt around his waist." The king said, "That was Elijah the Tishbite."

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: "The clash between Elijah, with his belief in the LORD God (Yahweh) as supreme, and the Israelite monarchy who still relied primarily on other deities, continues. Ahaziah is reprovved for consulting a foreign god (v. 2 -8) and his attempt to reverse the judgment pronounced by Yahweh upon him is shown dramatically (vs. 9-17a)."

The messenger Elijah was to meet was the one King Ahaziah had sent to the priests of Baal-Zebub to enquire about the recovery of his injuries. We don't read any details about the accident that had caused these injuries. Some Bible commentators believe that Ahaziah may have fallen from the roof, others that he fell through a window. We don't know either whether the king had broken any bones or merely hurt a muscle. But, evidently he had difficulty recovering. So he wanted to consult an idol to find out whether he would recover and how long it would take.

The god he wanted to consult is called Baal-Zebub. We know him elsewhere as Beelzebub. The name means literally "lord of the flies." That is the name Jesus gives to Satan in the New Testament. We read: "If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!"¹

The idea to consult a foreign god in order to require about healing sounds strange. Baal-Zebub was an idol worshipped in Ekron, not in Israel. It is puzzling to know why King Ahaziah would go there.

¹ Matt. 10:25

Elijah meets the envoy on the road and tells him that Israel has his own Deity to consult, the God of heaven and earth, the Creator of the universe, the God who had covenanted Himself to Israel.

Elijah gives the king's messengers a Word from the Lord: "You will not leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!" This makes the messenger return to the king, who is amazed that his servant returns in such a short time. Obviously, the king's servant did not know Elijah, but the king recognized Elijah from the description given to him.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "The swift return of the messengers assured the king that they had not had time to go to Ekron, about seventy-two kilometers from Samaria, and return, hence the question. God intervened yet again through his servant to keep the messengers from their destination, for if Ahaziah had obtained a verdict from Baal-Zebub it might have belittled Yahweh in the popular estimation."

In explaining his swift return the messengers report that they were met by a man, whom they evidently had not met before, describing him as someone dressed in a hairy coat and with a leather band around his waist. The Hebrew text calls him "a hairy man," which is the way the KJV and NKJV reads it. It seems more reasonable to interpret the text the way the NIV does it, since the belt goes with the coat and not with the head.

The king recognizes Elijah from the description the messengers give him. Having heard the message Elijah had for him, he decides to kill the prophet. How that would change the divine verdict is not clear. He must have believed that if Elijah died his "magic" or divine power would die with him also.

b. Elijah and the fate of the army captains (2 Kgs 1:9-17a)

9 Then he sent to Elijah a captain with his company of fifty men. The captain went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, "Man of God, the king says, 'Come down!'"

10 Elijah answered the captain, "If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!" Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men.

11 At this the king sent to Elijah another captain with his fifty men. The captain said to him, "Man of God, this is what the king says, 'Come down at once!'"

12 "If I am a man of God," Elijah replied, "may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!" Then the fire of God fell from heaven and consumed him and his fifty men.

13 So the king sent a third captain with his fifty men. This third captain went up and fell on his knees before Elijah. "Man of God," he begged, "please have respect for my life and the lives of these fifty men, your servants!"

14 See, fire has fallen from heaven and consumed the first two captains and all their men. But now have respect for my life!"

15 The angel of the Lord said to Elijah, "Go down with him; do not be afraid of him." So Elijah got up and went down with him to the king.

16 He told the king, "This is what the Lord says: Is it because there is no God in Israel for you to consult that you have sent messengers to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron? Because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!"

17 So he died, according to the word of the Lord that Elijah had spoken.

Ahaziah must have thought that capturing and killing Elijah would have cancelled Elijah's prophecy. Consequently he sent a group of fifty soldiers under the command of a captain to arrest, and probably execute Elijah. It is important to realize that Elijah's life was at stake here. Some New Testament Christians have problems with the justification of Elijah's reaction to the groups that came to arrest him, believing that it could not have been God's will to annihilate a whole platoon of soldiers in order to save the life of one prophet.

Elijah is addressed by the captain of the first and second group as "Man of God." We may interpret this as if King Ahaziah, who had declared himself against the God of Israel, addresses God as the worshipper of an idol, implying that the Almighty was not the God of Israel, but that the idol of Ekron was superior to him. The title "Man of God" was not given to Elijah as a badge of honor.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: "The morality of the act has often been misunderstood as the 'inhumanity of the destruction of the innocent captains of fifties.'" It is insufficient to dismiss this as a later addition to verses 2-8, for verse 17b would read abruptly if it followed verse 8 directly. Nor should this be measured solely by New Testament standards, for Jesus rebuked his disciples for wanting a similar demonstration of fire (Luke 9:54-55) though the circumstances differed. It must be noted that the demand made of Elijah was wrong. A king had no right to ask such allegiance and his actions should always be subordinate to God's word (cf. I Sam. 10:25). God was protecting his word and his servant. Contradiction of this passage must imply denial of other similar Old Testament judgmental events. Elijah acted not out of private vengeance but for the Name of God and such divine judgment is clear in the New Testament also (Heb. 12:29; Rev. 11:t; 2 Thess. 1:7-9)."

The fact that God validated Elijah's words by making fire from heaven come down and consume the group that came to arrest His prophet is proof in itself that this was not merely Elijah's personal revenge. In principle this event was a repeat on a smaller scale of the massive demonstration of God's superiority over Baal that was evinced on Mount Carmel when fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice Elijah had prepared. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: "The Lord God confirmed Elijah's word and proved himself the victor in the conflict."

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "Some recognition of Elijah's superhuman power would seem to have led Ahaziah to send so large a body. His doing so was a sort of challenge to the prophet to show whether Ahaziah or the God whom he represented was the stronger. The circumstances recall those of the 'band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees' (... John 18:3), which was sent, 'with swords and staves,' to arrest another righteous Person." But in the case of Elijah God did send the "twelve legions of angels," which He withheld from His Son at His arrest and crucifixion.²

It is amazing that Ahaziah sent another two groups of his military men with their captain after the annihilation of the first one. He demonstrated a complete lack of understanding Who his real opponent was.

After Elijah dismissed the first two military attachments that came to arrest him, the captain of the third group was wise enough not to command but to plead with Elijah. Instead of ordering Elijah to come down and surrender, the captain pleaded: "Man of God, please have

² See Matt. 26:52-54.

respect for my life and the lives of these fifty men, your servants! See, fire has fallen from heaven and consumed the first two captains and all their men. But now have respect for my life!”

At this the angel of the Lord says to Elijah: “Go down with him; do not be afraid of him.” The last few words of this command suggest that there had been fear in Elijah’s heart, which made him use such extreme actions against the first two groups that came to arrest him. This pictures Elijah as more human than the super-human image we had seen of him earlier. It is interesting to observe how often angelic messages to people begin with the words “fear not!” So Elijah goes with the king’s delegation and meets King Ahaziah personally, repeating the divine message he had given before to the king’s delegations. We don’t read Ahaziah’s reaction to this announcement. There is no account of any regret or repentance. We don’t know either how soon Ahaziah died after this announcement.

c. Concluding formula for Ahaziah’s reign (2 Kgs 1:17b-18)

17b. Because Ahaziah had no son, Joram succeeded him as king in the second year of Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah.

18 As for all the other events of Ahaziah’s reign, and what he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “The concluding formula differs from the standard format. The evaluation of Ahaziah’s reign has already been given (I Kgs 22:52-43). Joram, a shortened form of J(eh)oram, possibly Ahaziah’s brother (so LXX, Syr.), came to the throne in 852, synchronizing with the second year of Jehoram’s co-regency with Jehoshaphat in his eighteenth year in Judah (3:1).”

(i) Elijah leaves with his successor appointed (2:1-25)

d. A farewell tour (2:1-6)

1 When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal.

2 Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here; the Lord has sent me to Bethel.” But Elisha said, “As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So they went down to Bethel.

3 The company of the prophets at Bethel came out to Elisha and asked, “Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master from you today?” “Yes, I know,” Elisha replied, “but do not speak of it.”

4 Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here, Elisha; the Lord has sent me to Jericho.” And he replied, “As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So they went to Jericho.

5 The company of the prophets at Jericho went up to Elisha and asked him, “Do you know that the Lord is going to take your master from you today?” “Yes, I know,” he replied, “but do not speak of it.”

6 Then Elijah said to him, “Stay here; the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.” And he replied, “As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So the two of them walked on.

The story of Elijah's ascension to heaven is one of the most remarkable ones in the Old Testament, if not in all of Scripture. There are only two human beings of whom it is stated that they left this world without dying. We read about Enoch: "Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away."³

Both Enoch and Elijah were included in the consequences of Adam's fall. They both inherited Adam's sinful nature. Yet, they did not taste death as Adam and all his other descendants did. Theirs was not a physical resurrection after death, but a supernatural transformation from corruptible to incorruptible.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: "Elijah took his young student on a farewell visit to the groups of prophets at Bethel (v.1), Jericho (v.4) and Gilgal by Jordan (v.6). His coming departure was reiterated (vv.3, 5), as was his assurance that the LORD had sent him on the journey (vv. 2, 4, 6). Elijah wished to face the experience alone unless the command to *stay here* (v. 2) was a test of Elisha's faithfulness which was answered by the threefold refusal of Elisha to leave his master."

Dr. Wiseman's observation that "Elijah took his young student on a farewell visit to the groups of prophets at Bethel," etc. does not seem to be exactly what the Scriptures record. At the onset of every visit mentioned, Elijah advises Elisha to stay behind, but the latter insists in following his master all the way, invoking the Name of the Lord in each instance. The journey leads to Bethel, Jericho and the Jordan. At every one of these places Elijah visits a group of prophets, who had received information that Elijah would be taken up to heaven. Whether they had learned this by divine revelation or because Elijah had informed them, we are not told.

Bible scholars are divided about how these groups of prophets had received the word about Elijah's departure. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* states: "It appears that God had revealed this intended translation, not only to Elijah himself, but also to Elisha, and to the schools of the prophets, both at Beth-el and Jericho, so that they were all expecting this solemn event." But *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* writes: "God had revealed to Elijah that he was soon to depart. And Elijah had made known the revelation in order to prepare both Elisha and the sons of the prophets for his going."

e. The divided waters (2:7-10)

7 Fifty men of the company of the prophets went and stood at a distance, facing the place where Elijah and Elisha had stopped at the Jordan.

8 Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up and struck the water with it. The water divided to the right and to the left, and the two of them crossed over on dry ground.

9 When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?" "Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit," Elisha replied.

10 "You have asked a difficult thing," Elijah said, "yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours — otherwise not."

Elijah and Elisha are accompanied by a group of fifty member of the school of prophets, who witness the miracle of Elijah's crossing of the Jordan River. It is difficult to miss the symbolism of this act. In subsequent church history death has often been described in terms of Elijah's crossing of the Jordan River. The hymn writer sings: "When I tread the verge of Jordan,

³ Gen. 5:24

Bid my anxious fears subside; Death of death, and hell's destruction, Land me safe on Canaan's side."⁴

Matthew Henry's Commentary observes: "When God will take up his faithful ones to heaven death is the Jordan which, immediately before their translation, they must pass through, and they find a way through it, as safe and comfortable way; the death of Christ has divided those waters, that the ransomed of the Lord may pass over. O death! where is thy sting, thy hurt, thy terror?"

So Elijah's division of the water, like Moses' and Israel's crossing of the Red Sea, has become an image of what Christ will do for the believer at the moment of his "home going."

On the other side of the river, Elijah tells Elisha that he wants to give him a farewell gift, one of his own desire. Elisha's request is that Elijah not merely leaves to him the Spirit of God which inspired his life, but "a double portion," meaning twice as much. Elisha does not merely ask for what Elijah had, but he wants twice as much. Only the Spirit of God could have given such a desire in Elijah's heart. In this Elijah became a type of Christ, who said to Nicodemus: "For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit."⁵

Elijah was not sure whether it was in his power to bequeath to Elisha what he requested. His last prophetic words were: "You have asked a difficult thing, yet if you see me when I am taken from you, it will be yours — otherwise not." It has been observed that Elisha performed twice as many miracles as Elijah did during his life, which may be proof of the fact that his request was granted.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: "The request for a double portion (v.9, "share," RSV, NEB, JB), was not that he might excel his master but that he should receive the eldest sons' share according to the law (Deut. 21:17). Such a son had the responsibility to carry on the father's name and work. The 'hard thing' (RSV, NIV *difficult thing*) for Elijah was that since God alone can give the gift of his Spirit to anyone (cf. John 3:34; I John 3:24; 4:13) it was impossible for him to meet Elisha's request. The test would be to see if Elisha had 'the ability to see and comprehend the spiritual word ... and of a visionary to penetrate the heavens.'"

f. Elijah's ascension (2:11-12)

11 As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.

12 Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them apart.

The "vehicle" that took Elijah up to heaven defies any description. It must have been an angelic host that came to take Elijah home, but they appeared to Elisha as a royal carriage, drawn by heavenly creatures.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "God's "angels are spirits, and his ministers a flaming fire" (... Psalm 104:4). When the eyes of Elisha's servant were opened, and he saw the angelic host that protected his master, it appeared to him that "the mountain was full of horses

⁴ "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah" by William Williams.

⁵ John 3:34

and chariots of fire round about Elisha” (... 2 Kings 6:17). Material fire is, of course, not to be thought of. But the glory and brightness of celestial beings, when made visible to man, has some analogy with fire, or at any rate brings the conception of fire before the mind.”

Gordon J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “Elijah was taken up to heaven in the *whirlwind*, not in the *chariot of fire and horses of fire* which merely “came between to the two of them” (Heb.) and cut him off from human sight. These chariots and horsemen symbolized strong protection as well as the forces of God’s spiritual presence which were the true safety of Israel.”

The Hebrew does indeed allow for Dr. Wiseman’s interpretation, which means that Elijah did not board the chariot, but that the chariot and horses were the means of separation between the two. It was the whirlwind that took Elijah up and brought him home.

It seems that Elisha’s exclamation: “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” is not a description of the way Elijah went up, but a definition of his ministry. Elijah had been Israel’s real protection of the enemy. He embodied the army that kept Israel’s enemy at bay.

A nation’s protection is not in the strength of its military regiments or in the size of its armament, but in the number of its righteous citizens. Ten righteous people would have saved Sodom and Gomorrah from destruction.⁶ Actually only one person would have been enough to save the cities. The angel that came to destroy told Lot: ““I cannot do anything until you reach it.” (That is why the town was called Zoar.)”⁷

As Elijah was taken up to heaven, he left his cloak behind. It may have fallen off as he went. That could be considered symbolic; Elisha picked up Elijah’s cloak and began to wear it. In the process, he tore up his own clothing.

Adam Clarke’s Commentary observes: “His having the mantle was a proof that he was invested with the authority and influence of his master.” *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* adds: “It was an outward token to others of the spirit of Elijah resting upon him.”

g. Elisha takes over (2:13-25)

h. The striking of the waters (2:13-15)

13 He picked up the cloak that had fallen from Elijah and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan.

14 Then he took the cloak that had fallen from him and struck the water with it. “Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?” he asked. When he struck the water, it divided to the right and to the left, and he crossed over.

15 The company of the prophets from Jericho, who were watching, said, “The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha.” And they went to meet him and bowed to the ground before him.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “There was no need to show that the same Spirit controlling Elijah was Elisha’s also. Following an expression of mourning shown by deliberately ripping up his clothes (v. 12b), he dropped the symbol of his prophetic office and used it to repeat Elijah’s miracle (v. 14, cf. v. 8) in the presence of a host of witnesses (v. 15).”

⁶ Gen. 18:32

⁷ Gen. 19:22

But Elisha's question "Where now is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" may suggest a trace of doubt whether his request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit had really been imparted to him. The Lord gave him proof in the answer to his prayer by parting the water for him.

It often happens that one person's fellowship with God becomes a model for others to follow Christ. The love, joy and peace,⁸ fruits of the Holy Spirit in one's life, will attract people to follow the God who imparts that fruit. Elisha had seen the miracle Elijah had performed in parting the water of the Jordan. What he prayed for was not merely a repetition of the miracle, but a demonstration of the presence of the God who works them.

The parting of Jordan's water was not only proof to Elisha that his prayer for the Spirit that was on Elijah was now on him, but also to the group of prophets who were watching on the other side.

(i) The unsuccessful search for Elijah (2:16-18)

16 "Look," they said, "we your servants have fifty able men. Let them go and look for your master. Perhaps the Spirit of the Lord has picked him up and set him down on some mountain or in some valley." "No," Elisha replied, "do not send them."

17 But they persisted until he was too ashamed to refuse. So he said, "Send them." And they sent fifty men, who searched for three days but did not find him.

18 When they returned to Elisha, who was staying in Jericho, he said to them, "Didn't I tell you not to go?"

The members of the prophet school could not believe that Elijah had been taken up to heaven without going through the process of death. That, in itself, should not amaze us. Elijah's home-going was highly exceptional, to say the least. Not even Moses had gone to heaven without dying first and being buried by God.⁹ But the idea that Elijah had died and that God had dropped his body somewhere without burial was most preposterous. There even seems to be a suggestion that Elijah had not died at all, but that God had simply moved him to another place.

Barnes' Notes suggests: "The words "cast him upon some mountain," rather imply that they expected to find the prophet alive."

The student-prophets tell Elisha that they want to go and search for Elijah's body. Elisha, who had seen Elijah being taken up, refused. But the young men kept on insisting to the point where it became embarrassing. The Hebrew text of v.17 reads literally: "And he said, when they urged him till he was ashamed, Send." The Hebrew word, rendered "ashamed" is *buwsh*, which literally means "to pale." In some contexts it is used in the sense of "delay," as in the verse: "When the people saw that Moses was *so long* in coming down from the mountain..."¹⁰ Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: "Until ashamed (v. 17) has been rendered 'beyond measure' (cf. its only other occurrences in 8:11; Judg. 3:25). Others interpret it as 'until he had not the heart to refuse' (REB)."

The party searched for three days and returned without results. Elisha said: "I told you so!"

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "It is always a hard thing for one man to refuse the repeated and earnest request of a multitude. When Elisha said, "Send," he had not in the least

⁸ Gal. 5:22

⁹ Deut. 34:5,6

¹⁰ Ex. 32:1

changed his mind; he only meant to say, ‘Send, then, if you insist upon it, to satisfy yourselves, not me. There is no harm in your sending.’ They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not. The result bore out the advice and anticipations of the prophet. It was simply nil. No trace was found of the aged seer who had been translated from earth to heaven.”

(ii) The healing of the waters (2:19-22)

19 The men of the city said to Elisha, “Look, our lord, this town is well situated, as you can see, but the water is bad and the land is unproductive.”

20 “Bring me a new bowl,” he said, “and put salt in it.” So they brought it to him.

21 Then he went out to the spring and threw the salt into it, saying, “This is what the Lord says: ‘I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.’”

22 And the water has remained wholesome to this day, according to the word Elisha had spoken.

We are told in the previous text that Elisha was in Jericho. The people of that city, acknowledging him as a prophet, evidently expected that Elisha was able to solve their water problem. The citizens were proud of their city and had, evidently, reason to be. Jericho of that time has been described as beautiful and well situated. The problem was in the water supply of the city. The Hebrew text reads literally: “The water [is] bad and the ground is barren.” The Hebrew word, rendered “barren” is *shakol*, which suggests that the water caused bareness or miscarriages. Job uses the word in that sense, saying: “Their bulls never fail to breed; their cows calve and do not *miscarry*.”¹¹

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, explains: “The explanation of the water as bad (JB ‘foul’; Heb. ‘evil’) rather than non-existent (AV ‘naught’) usually given is that Jericho still experienced the covenant curse (Deut. 28:15-18; Josh. 6:26). It has been suggested that the spring (modern ‘Ain es-Sultan near ancient Jericho, now known as ‘Elijah’s Spring’) led to sterility from its contact with radioactive strata and the sudden clear-up was due to a geological shift, or from some infection. Whether it was the land that was *unproductive* or (as MT, NEB, JB) ‘the country suffers miscarriages’ is open to question; the Hebrew (*mesakkelet*) is usually used of person or livestock, except in Malachi 3:11.”

Elisha requested that he be given a new bowl with salt. He went to the spring and threw the salt in the water, saying: “This is what the Lord says: “I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.”“

The story reminds us of a similar incident during Israel’s journey through the desert from Egypt to the Promised Land. We read: “For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, “What are we to drink?” Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.”¹² Some have drawn a progression of spiritual application from the two stories. The wood Moses used to heal the water has been compared to the cross of Christ and its healing power. The salt Elisha used has been seen as symbolic for the Holy Spirit. We must be careful, however, not to over-spiritualize these stories.

¹¹ Job 21:10

¹² Ex. 15:22-25

(iii) Elisha mocked (2:23-25)

23 From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some youths came out of the town and jeered at him. “Go on up, you baldhead!” they said. “Go on up, you baldhead!”

24 He turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths.

25 And he went on to Mount Carmel and from there returned to Samaria.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: “This passage is often cited as a major moral problem in the Old Testament or dismissed as “in every respect a puerile tale ... There is no serious point in the incident, it does not reflect much to the credit of the prophet ... at the best the memory of some catastrophe which happened to coincide with Elisha’s visit to Bethel.” It does, however, show the continuing opposition to a true prophet in Bethel, the chief center of pagan calf-worship. The main objection lies in the curse ... in the name of the LORD (v.24). In the Deuteronomic doctrine of retributive justice (Deut. 7:10) this was a requirement against anyone mocking a prophet, an act which was the equivalent of belittling God himself (Deut. 18:19; Lev. 24:10-16). The word for *jeered* (NIV, REV, JB) occurs in Habakkuk 1:10; cf. “insult” in Jeremiah 20:8. To deride God’s representative (cf. 2 Chr. 36:16) as God himself (Gal. 6:7) or his city (Ezra 22:5)¹³ inevitably incurs judgment.”

A superficial look at the story tends to lead to the impression that Elisha overreacted and that the punishment was not in accordance with the crime. The young people who shouted the insults at Elisha are described as “some youths.” The Hebrew uses the words *na`ar qatan*, which may refer to teenagers. Whatever their age, their disrespect reflected the opinion of the parents. They must have overheard their parents’ conversations when speaking about Elijah and Elisha. Their twice repeated taunt “Go on up, you baldhead!” may suggest that Elisha should be taken away from the earth as Elijah was. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: “While Elisha was probably not yet bald, the epithet shows that the youths considered him as an “outcast,” like a leper. They despised God’s prophet.”

The Pulpit Commentary states: “But it is not at all apparent that the lads even knew who Elisha was — they would probably have jeered at any aged person with whom they had fallen in; and by “Go up” they merely meant “Go on thy way; “the force of their jeer was not in the word” *aleh*, but in the word *kereach*, “bald head.” Baldness was sometimes produced by leprosy, and that made a man unclean (... Leviticus 13:42-44); but the boys probably flouted the mere natural defect, in which there was no “uncleanness” (... Leviticus 13:40, 41), but which they regarded as a fit subject for ridicule. Their sin was disrespect towards old age, combined, perhaps, with disrespect for the prophetic order, to which they may have known from his dress that Elisha belonged.”

Whether Elisha was bald or not cannot be determined from the text and that is not the point. If we don’t see Elisha’s invoking of a curse as a reply to the disrespect of the idolater parents toward the worship of the God of Israel, whom Elisha represented, the story becomes definitely more problematic.

¹³ This Scripture reference is obviously a mistake; it is non-existent.

We read that Elisha “called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord.” The Hebrew word used for “curse” is *qalal*, which literally means “to make light.” In some cases it is used in the sense of “to despise,” as in the story of Sarah and Hagar, of whom we read: “When she knew she was pregnant, she began to *despise* her mistress.”¹⁴ But, obviously, in the case of Elisha the word has the meaning of a divine curse. Elisha did not call for bears to come and devour the boys; that was God’s doing. In cursing them he took them, so to speak, out from under the umbrella of God’s blessing upon Israel. And, as suggested above, we could see this as God’s punishment upon those who had turned from His worship to the service of idols.

(iv) War against Moab (3:1-27)

i. Moab revolts (3:1-12)

1 Joram son of Ahab became king of Israel in Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned twelve years.

2 He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, but not as his father and mother had done. He got rid of the sacred stone of Baal that his father had made.

3 Nevertheless he clung to the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit; he did not turn away from them.

4 Now Mesha king of Moab raised sheep, and he had to supply the king of Israel with a hundred thousand lambs and with the wool of a hundred thousand rams.

5 But after Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.

6 So at that time King Joram set out from Samaria and mobilized all Israel.

7 He also sent this message to Jehoshaphat king of Judah: “The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me to fight against Moab?” “I will go with you,” he replied. “I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses.”

8 “By what route shall we attack?” he asked. “Through the Desert of Edom,” he answered.

9 So the king of Israel set out with the king of Judah and the king of Edom. After a roundabout march of seven days, the army had no more water for themselves or for the animals with them.

10 “What!” exclaimed the king of Israel. “Has the Lord called us three kings together only to hand us over to Moab?”

11 But Jehoshaphat asked, “Is there no prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of the Lord through him?” An officer of the king of Israel answered, “Elisha son of Shaphat is here. He used to pour water on the hands of Elijah.”

12 Jehoshaphat said, “The word of the Lord is with him.” So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

Although Joram is not complimented for his relationship with God, he is not condemned in the same severe terms as his parents, Ahab and Jezebel, were. He did not follow the idolatrous service of Baal, but removed the objects of the Baal worship from the country. His sin is described in his following the sins of Jeroboam. This means that he did not seek to worship God in accordance with God’s revelation. Jeroboam had chosen to worship the God of Israel, not

¹⁴ Gen. 16:4

where and how God wanted to be worshipped, but according to his own will and way. The sin of Jeroboam consists in a disregard of God's revelation.

Joram reigned from 854-843 BC over the Northern Kingdom. That was almost one century after the reign of Jeroboam, who was on the Israel's throne from 933-911 BC. Israel had already followed the ways of Jeroboam for almost one hundred years.

We have already learned that Moab rebelled against Israel after Ahab's death.¹⁵ They had been subjected to Israeli rule since the days of King David.¹⁶ They had been forced to pay a tribute to Israel, consisting of "a hundred thousand lambs and with the wool of a hundred thousand rams." As Joram ascended to the throne, Moab ceased to pay.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, sees these numbers as symbolic, not as literal. We read: "Mesha *rebelled* against his subordinate role as a vassal in which he would need his skill as a "sheep-breeder" (*noqed*, so NEB) to supply the uncounted mass (a hundred thousand) of yearling lambs and rams annually or "regularly" (NEB, the verb is frequentative) rather than as a one-off tribute."

Barnes' Notes explains: "Moab, the region immediately east of the Dead Sea and of the lower Jordan, though in part suited for agriculture, is in the main a great grazing country. Mesha resembled a modern Arab Sheikh, whose wealth is usually estimated by the number of his flocks and herds. His tribute of the wool of 100,000 lambs was a tribute in kind, the ordinary tribute at this time in the East.

Mesha is the monarch who wrote the inscription on the "Moabite stone" The points established by the Inscription are:

- 1. That Moab recovered from the blow dealt by David (2 Sam 8:2,12), and became again an independent state in the interval between David's conquest and the accession of Omri;***
- 2. That Omri re-conquered the country, and that it then became subject to the northern kingdom, and remained so throughout his reign and that of his son Ahab, and into the reign of Ahab's son and successor, Ahaziah;***
- 3. That the independence was regained by means of a war, in which Mesha took town after town from the Israelites, including in his conquests many of the towns which, at the original occupation of the holy land, had passed into the possession of the Reubenites or the Gadites, as Baal-Meon (Num 32:38), Kirjathaim (Num 32:37), Ataroth (Num 32:34), Nebo (Num 32:38), Jahaz (Josh 13:18), etc."***

Joram mobilized the Israeli army to re-establish control over Moab and he contacted King Jehoshaphat of Judah to join him in the effort.

The Pulpit Commentary states: "Jehoshaphat had originally allied himself with Ahab, and had cemented the alliance by a marriage between his eldest son, Jehoram, and Athaliah, Ahab's daughter (... 2 Kings 8:18; ... 2 Chronicles 18:1). He had joined Ahab in his attack on the Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead (... 1 Kings 22:4-36), and had thereby incurred the rebuke of Jehu the son of Hanani (... 2 Chronicles 19:2). This, however, had not prevented him from continuing his friendship with the Israelite royal house; he "joined himself with Ahaziah" (... 2 Chronicles 20:35), Ahab's successor, and though their combined naval expedition met with disaster (... 1 Kings 22:48), yet he still maintained amicable relations with the Israelite court. Jehoram,

¹⁵ 2 Kings 1:1

¹⁶ 2 Sam 8:11-12

therefore, confidently sought his active help when he made up his mind to engage in a war with Moab.”

Jehoshaphat agreed to join Joram, among other things because he would have considered Moab to be Judah’s enemy also. We are not told who asked the question “By what route shall we attack?” It is most likely that Jehoshaphat asked Joram, since the latter was the one who initiated the war. *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary*, however, assumes that it was Joram who asked. We read: “In reply to Joram’s question, “By which way shall we advance (against Moab)?” Jehoshaphat decided in favor of “the way through the desert of Edom.”“

Regarding the reason for the choice of that route, *Barnes’ Notes* comments: “The readiest and most natural “way” was across the Jordan near Jericho into the Arboth-Moab, and then along the eastern shore of the Dead Sea to Moab proper, the tract south of the Arnon. But the way chosen was that which led to the Edomite country, namely, round the southern extremity of the Dead Sea, and across the Arabah, or continuation of the Jordan and Dead Sea valley. Thus would be effected a junction with the forces of Edom, which had resumed its dependence on Judah, though the year before it had been in alliance with Moab (2 Chron 20:22); and they would come upon the Moabites unprepared.”

The desert route that was chosen had the disadvantage that it was longer and water supply was non-existent. So, before that actual attack could be made the army had run out of water, both for man and animal. Interestingly, it was the king of Israel who exclaimed: “What! Has the Lord called us three kings together only to hand us over to Moab?” The Hebrew word, rendered “what” by the NIV is “*ahahh*, which literally means “alas.”

King Jehoshaphat suggests consulting God about the matter. We could say that he said: “Why don’t we pray about it?” The way to consult God was by consulting a prophet. So Jehoshaphat asks if there is any prophet of the Lord nearby. He receives the answer that Elisha is the closest one. He is described as the one who “used to pour water on the hands of Elijah.” According to a footnote in the NIV, this means that is, he was Elijah’s personal servant. It was decided to go to Elisha and ask him for a counsel.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: “J(eh)oram may well have consulted his own prophets. But under the stress their different characters are shown up. Jehoram despairs while Jehoshaphat looks to God. The lessons of the encounter at Ramoth-Gilead were remembered (I Kgs 22:7-20) and Jehoshaphat demands assurance from his God. In ancient warfare it was customary to enquire (“consult”) the divine will (v. 11) by oracle at different stages. Some think Elisha was acting on behalf of Elijah who had previously written to Jehoram (2 Chr. 21:12-15). Certainly here he is portrayed as that aged prophet’s servant. The pouring of water to provide running water for ablutions was a menial task. This time the kings go to the prophet rather than summon him to them (cf. I Kgs 22:9). Jehoshaphat supports Elisha as the true prophet, i.e. the one who has and fearlessly tells out God’s word (v. 12).”

j. Victory over Moab and abundant water promised (3:13-19)

13 Elisha said to the king of Israel, “What do we have to do with each other? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophets of your mother.” “No,” the king of Israel answered, “because it was the Lord who called us three kings together to hand us over to Moab.”

14 Elisha said, “As surely as the Lord Almighty lives, whom I serve, if I did not have respect for the presence of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would not look at you or even notice you.

15 But now bring me a harpist.” While the harpist was playing, the hand of the Lord came upon Elisha

16 and he said, “This is what the Lord says: Make this valley full of ditches.

17 For this is what the Lord says: You will see neither wind nor rain, yet this valley will be filled with water, and you, your cattle and your other animals will drink.

18 This is an easy thing in the eyes of the Lord; he will also hand Moab over to you.

19 You will overthrow every fortified city and every major town. You will cut down every good tree, stop up all the springs, and ruin every good field with stones.”

Elisha tells king Joram that he would not be willing to consult the Lord in his behalf, if it weren't for the fact that King Jehoshaphat of Judah were present. He tells Joram to consult Baal through his own prophets.

Joram's answer, as it is rendered in the NIV sounds confusing: “because it was the Lord who called us three kings together to hand us over to Moab.” The first “us” should be read as “against us.” The Hebrew text reads literally: “Nay: for the Lord has called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hands of Moab.”

The Adam Clarke's Commentary somewhat clarifies the text by stating: “The Chaldee adds here, I beseech thee, do not call the sins of this impiety to remembrance, but ask mercy for us; because the Lord hath called, etc. The Arabic has, I beseech thee, do not mention of our transgressions, but use kindness toward us. It is very likely that some such words were spoken on the occasion; but these are the only versions which make this addition.”

Elisha's way of consulting the Lord is rather unusual. We would suppose that, being a true prophet of Yahweh, Elisha could simply ask the Lord for an answer. But on this occasion he has to go into a trance in order to hear the Word of God.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary comments: “The rabbis, and many Christians suppose that Elisha's mind was considerably irritated and grieved by the bad behavior of the young men at Beth-el, and their tragical end, and by the presence of the idolatrous king of Israel; and therefore called for divine psalmody, that it might calm his spirits, and render him more susceptible of the prophetic influence. To be able to discern the voice of God, and the operation of his hand, it is necessary that the mind be calm, and the passions all in harmony, under the direction of reason; that reason may be under the influence of the divine Spirit.”

The Pulpit Commentary concurs, stating: “Music was cultivated in the schools of the prophets (... 1 Samuel 10:5; ... 1 Chronicles 25:1-3), and was employed to soothe and quiet the soul, to help it to forget things earthly and external, and bring it into that ecstatic condition in which it was most open to the reception of Divine influences. As David's harping refreshed Saul, and tranquillized his spirit (... 1 Samuel 16:23), so the playing of any skilled minstrel had a soothing effect on those possessing the prophetic gift generally, and enabled them to shut out the outer world, and concentrate their whole attention on the inward voice which communicated to them the Divine messages.”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “The request for a *harpist* (Heb. ‘one who plays a stringed instrument’), a minstrel playing a portable small lyre (I Sam. 16:15), does not mark Elisha out as an inferior type of ecstatic or dervish or distinct for Elijah. Music was one means of the *hand* (Heb. ‘hand, power’) of the LORD coming upon a person, whether to calm or to control (as with Saul in I Sam. 16:16, 23).”

It may not have been a matter of being inferior, but Elijah's request was unusual, to say the least, and the suggestion that the prophet's spirit may have been irritated by the presence of the king of Israel, may have been one of the main reasons.

The Word of the LORD was that the two kings ought to cut ditches across the valley where the battle with the Moabites was to take place. This would divert the river that flowed through the valley.

The Pulpit Commentary explains: "What Elisha promises is a heavy storm of wind accompanied by violent rain, which, however, will be at such a distance that the Israelites will see nothing of it, but whereof they will experience the effects when the torrent-course that separates them from the Moabite country suddenly becomes a rushing stream as the rain flows off down it. Their "pits," or trenches, will retain a portion of the water, and furnish them with a sufficient supply for their wants. It was necessary that the storm should be distant, that the Moabites might know nothing of it, and so fall under the delusion (ver. 23), which led to their complete defeat."

Elisha says that God would not only give them the victory over Moab, but also allow them to completely destroy the countryside. This seems to contradict what Moses told the people to do in case of war. We read: "When you lay siege to a city for a long time, fighting against it to capture it, do not destroy its trees by putting an ax to them, because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down. Are the trees of the field people, that you should besiege them? However, you may cut down trees that you know are not fruit trees and use them to build siege works until the city at war with you falls."¹⁷

Barnes' Notes, however, notes: "This is not an infringement of the rule laid down in Deut 20:19-20. The Israelites were not forbidden to fell the fruit trees in an enemy's country, as a part of the ravage of war, when they had no thoughts of occupying the country. The plan of thus injuring an enemy was probably in general use among the nations of these parts at the time. We see the destruction represented frequently on the Assyrian monuments and mentioned in the inscriptions of Egypt."

k. The defeat of Moab (3:20-27)

20 The next morning, about the time for offering the sacrifice, there it was — water flowing from the direction of Edom! And the land was filled with water.

21 Now all the Moabites had heard that the kings had come to fight against them; so every man, young and old, who could bear arms was called up and stationed on the border.

22 When they got up early in the morning, the sun was shining on the water. To the Moabites across the way, the water looked red — like blood.

23 "That's blood!" they said. "Those kings must have fought and slaughtered each other. Now to the plunder, Moab!"

24 But when the Moabites came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and fought them until they fled. And the Israelites invaded the land and slaughtered the Moabites.

25 They destroyed the towns, and each man threw a stone on every good field until it was covered. They stopped up all the springs and cut down every good tree. Only Kir Hareseth was left with its stones in place, but men armed with slings surrounded it and attacked it as well.

¹⁷ Deut. 20:19,20

26 When the king of Moab saw that the battle had gone against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through to the king of Edom, but they failed.

27 Then he took his firstborn son, who was to succeed him as king, and offered him as a sacrifice on the city wall. The fury against Israel was great; they withdrew and returned to their own land.

The battle began, as our text states, at the time the morning sacrifice was offered at the temple in Jerusalem. That was at the time the sun would rise over Israel. It was at the early morning light. Miraculously, the ditches, which had been dug by the soldiers of Israel and Judah, began to fill with water and the rising sun reflected in it. Since there had been no ditches before, nor any water to reflect the rising sun, the Moabites, when coming to the battlefield, thought that they were witnessing a bloodbath. They believed that the kings of Israel and Judah had begun to slaughter one another. So they rushed in to collect the plunder. That was their undoing. They were met with soldiers from both camps who were ready to fight them. The Moabite army was slaughtered and their country was invaded and ravished.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “The Wady-el-Ahsy drains a portion of Southern Moab, and also a considerable tract of Northern Edom. The nocturnal storm had burst, not in the Moabite country, where it would have attracted the attention of the Moabites, but in some comparatively distant part of the Idumaeen territory, so that the Moabites were not aware of it. Josephus says that the storm burst at a distance of three days’ journey from the Israelite camp; ... but this can only be his conjecture.”

When the king of Moab realized that he was losing the battle, he made a last and extreme effort to save the situation by making a human sacrifice to his idol. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “The Hebrew here is difficult. The king of Moab tried to fight to break out *through to* (RSV ‘opposite’) or against the king of Edom, perhaps choosing the weakest point of those attacking. There is little textual support (Old Latin) for reading Aram (‘*rm*’) for Edom (‘*dm*’) here, since that distant northerly state is not involved.

The human sacrifice of the crown-prince publicly on the wall of the capital was a rare practice (Judg. 11:31, 39) used to appease the notional god Chemosh ‘who was angry with his land’ ... and had shown his displeasure in their calamitous defeat. The subsequent great *fury against Israel* could be taken as the Moabites’ angry reaction which caused Israel to return (so Josephus ...), the wrath of God turned against the alliance who had provoked such an action or, more likely, Israel’s horror and dismay made them withdraw.”

2. Stories about Elisha (4:1 – 8:15)

a. The widow’s oil (4:1-7)

1 The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.”

2 Elisha replied to her, “How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?” “Your servant has nothing there at all,” she said, “except a little oil.”

**3 Elisha said, “Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few.
4 Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.”
5 She left him and afterward shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring.
6 When all the jars were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another one.” But he replied, “There is not a jar left.” Then the oil stopped flowing.
7 She went and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.”**

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: “The enslavement of defaulting debtors or their families was common throughout the ancient Near East (cf. I Kgs 2:39-40; Lev. 25:39; Isa. 50:1; Neh. 5:5; Laws of Hammurabi §§ 117, 119, 213). To avoid misuse the Hebrew law set a time limit (Exod. 21:2-3, 7).”

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “There is a Jewish tradition, or legend, that the woman’s husband was the Obadiah of ... 1 Kings 18:3-16, but no dependence can be placed on it. Obadiah, the ‘governor of Ahab’s house,’ can scarcely have been one of the “sons of the prophets.”

In primitive communities, men borrowed upon their personal credit, and the primary security for debt was regarded as being their own persons, the value of their labor, and that of those dependent on them. In Greece and Rome, originally, as in the Hebrew community, borrowers ordinarily raised money by pledging their persons, and, if they could not pay when the debt became due, went into servitude with their children. The Mosaic Law presupposes this state of things, and permits its continuance, but in two respects interferes to modify it: (1) by requiring that the service exacted shall not be severe (... Leviticus 25:43, 46), but such as was commonly rendered by hired servants (... Leviticus 25:39, 40); and (2) by limiting the period of service to the date of the next jubilee year (... Leviticus 25:40, 41). In the instance brought here under our notice, it would seem that the creditor had not proceeded to claim his rights until the debtor died, when he enforced them against the man’s children (comp. ... Nehemiah 5:1-8).”

We may assume that the scene took place at Jericho, where Elisha had visited the school of prophets and performed the miracle of cleaning the drinking water. The woman who addresses him here was the widow of one of the former students.

The cruel feature of this story seems to be that the creditors had waited till their debtor died before coming and claiming payment. They must have figured that the widow would be an easier target and that they would collect more if they could take her two sons and sell them as slaves.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary states: “A Hebrew was permitted by the law (Lev 25:39; Deut 15:12) to sell himself, with his children, and another Hebrew to buy them, until the year of jubilee should set them free; but the purchaser was restricted from subjecting them to the rigorous service of a slave (Lev 25:39-40). A thief might be sold, in order that by his service he might repay his theft (Ex 22:2-3). But the law did not confer upon a creditor the power of selling an insolvent debtor. The practice had crept in through time; and to such an extent had it grown, that the sons and daughters of the debtor (Neb. 5:5), his wife, as well as his children (Matt 18:25), nay, even the sons of a deceased debtor, were liable to be sold. The practice existed in the countries bordering on ancient Israel; and acts of cruelty similar to that which is related in

this passage are frequently done in the East at the present day; for at Damascus, Bagdad, and Bokhara, the sons are taken as bondmen by the creditors of their father.”

Bible scholars believe that the amount of oil the widow had in her possession was a flask used for anointing people. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “The ‘pot’ (*asuk*) of oil’ AV, NIV a little) is a unique word here, possibly for a small anointing flask. Relief often begins with the little we have at hand. Elisha elicits faith and action by questions, encouragement (‘not a few’) and word. The quantity of oil was only limited by the woman’s lack of faith in failing to ask for more *empty jars* (AV ‘vessels,’ *kelim*) – a general word for utensils irrespective of type and size.

The need for privacy is stressed to show the ability of God to work through his servant at a distance, to mark the personal nature of God’s action and to emphasize the power of God.”

The point of the story is obviously to show God’s love for under-privileged people. As David writes in one of his psalms: “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.”¹⁸ In this case, God defended this poor widow from the greed of her creditors, who had hoped to find an easy target. These people were, evidently, members of the same group Jesus would later condemn when He said to the Pharisees: “They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.”¹⁹

The widow went home and did as Elisha had told her. She and her sons gathered empty jars and pots, borrowing some from their neighbors and began to pour the little bit of oil they had into the jars. The oil kept flowing and pot after pot was filled till there were no more vessels left.

We are not told how many pots and jars were filled, but when the oil stopped, she went and told Elisha, asking him what to do next. He told her to sell her supply of oil, pay off her debts and live of the rest of the money, together with her sons.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “She did not feel entitled to make use of the oil which she had got by his instrumentality without first telling him and receiving his directions respecting it. The prophet gave them with all plainness and brevity. *And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.* The oil in the vessels was more than sufficient for the discharge of the debt. The prophet directs the woman to sell the whole, and, after satisfying the claim of her creditor with part of the money, to support herself and her children on the remainder.”

Corrie ten Boom tells the story of a bottle of multi-vitamin oil she had while incarcerated in a Nazi concentration camp. She distributed a spoonful of the vitamins to all the women in her barrack and the oil never ran out during the whole time she was there.

The story is a good illustration of Jesus’ comment on God’s concern for our daily needs. “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that

¹⁸ Ps. 68:5

¹⁹ Mark 12:40

you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”²⁰

Very few people have had supernatural experiences like that, but many who believed that God provides for our daily needs have experienced the truth of Jesus’ words.

Paul advises: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”²¹ He must have based this on his personal experience.

b. The Shunammite’s son (4:8-37)

8 One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat.

9 She said to her husband, “I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God.

10 Let’s make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us.”

11 One day when Elisha came, he went up to his room and lay down there.

12 He said to his servant Gehazi, “Call the Shunammite.” So he called her, and she stood before him.

13 Elisha said to him, “Tell her, “You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?”“ She replied, “I have a home among my own people.”

14 “What can be done for her?” Elisha asked. Gehazi said, “Well, she has no son and her husband is old.”

15 Then Elisha said, “Call her.” So he called her, and she stood in the doorway.

16 “About this time next year,” Elisha said, “you will hold a son in your arms.” “No, my lord,” she objected. “Don’t mislead your servant, O man of God!”

17 But the woman became pregnant, and the next year about that same time she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had told her.

18 The child grew, and one day he went out to his father, who was with the reapers.

19 “My head! My head!” he said to his father. His father told a servant, “Carry him to his mother.”

20 After the servant had lifted him up and carried him to his mother, the boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died.

21 She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, then shut the door and went out.

22 She called her husband and said, “Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can go to the man of God quickly and return.”

23 “Why go to him today?” he asked. “It’s not the New Moon or the Sabbath.” “It’s all right,” she said.

24 She saddled the donkey and said to her servant, “Lead on; don’t slow down for me unless I tell you.”

²⁰ Matt. 6:25-34

²¹ Phil. 4:6,7

25 *So she set out and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel. When he saw her in the distance, the man of God said to his servant Gehazi, “Look! There’s the Shunammite!*
26 *Run to meet her and ask her, “Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is your child all right?”* “Everything is all right,” she said.
27 *When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, “Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me why.”*
28 *“Did I ask you for a son, my lord?” she said. “Didn’t I tell you, “Don’t raise my hopes?”*
29 *Elisha said to Gehazi, “Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy’s face.”*
30 *But the child’s mother said, “As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” So he got up and followed her.*
31 *Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the boy’s face, but there was no sound or response. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, “The boy has not awakened.”*
32 *When Elisha reached the house, there was the boy lying dead on his couch.*
33 *He went in, shut the door on the two of them and prayed to the Lord.*
34 *Then he got on the bed and lay upon the boy, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands. As he stretched himself out upon him, the boy’s body grew warm.*
35 *Elisha turned away and walked back and forth in the room and then got on the bed and stretched out upon him once more. The boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.*
36 *Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, “Call the Shunammite.” And he did. When she came, he said, “Take your son.”*
37 *She came in, fell at his feet and bowed to the ground. Then she took her son and went out.*

According to *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, Shunem “was in the tribe of Issachar, to the south of the brook Kishon, and at the foot of Mount Tabor.” Elisha made frequent visits to Shunem. We are not told the reason for his visits. But a well-to-do woman, recognized him as a man of God and, after consultation with her husband, she opened her home for the prophet. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “The recognition of Elisha as a holy man of God is unique and implies a special quality.”

The implication is that the woman personally had a relationship with God and had a desire to serve Him in serving His servants. She suggested to her husband to build a room on the flat roof of their house, where Elisha could stay and have enough furniture to make it a comfortable place. She went to quite a bit of trouble to receive Elisha. It wasn’t merely a matter of providing hospitality.

Evidently, Elisha availed himself frequently of this hospitality and one day, while relaxing on the bed in the room, he told his servant to call the woman. He asked her how he could repay her for her kindness. He offers her to use his influence in government circles, (speak to the king, or to the supreme commander of the army) for anything she might want to get done. The woman answers that she has everything she could wish for and that there is no need to compensate for the hospitality. Her answer is “I dwell among my own people,” implying that she could count on her neighbors and family members to help her out in case any need would occur.

Consulting his servant Gehazi again, he is told that her husband is old and she has no son. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “If the woman will suggest nothing herself, can Gehazi suggest anything? Has he heard her express any wish? Does he know of any boon that would be

welcome to her? Evidently the woman's disinterestedness has increased the prophet's desire to do something for her. It does not appear that the woman had made any complaint or exhibited any special anxiety on the subject of offspring. But Gehazi knows, that to be barren is regarded by all Hebrew women as a re-preach, that it exposes them to scorn and contumely (... 1 Samuel 1:6, 7), and that offspring is universally, or all but universally, desired. He therefore assumes that the Shunammite must wish for it. And Elisha accepts his suggestion without a moment's hesitation."

Gehazi's mention that her husband is old, does not imply that he would be past the age where he could produce offspring, but that the wife would have no son to carry on her support and the family name. But the problem was, evidently, that she was unable to become pregnant. When Elisha calls her in and tells her that she will give birth to a little boy, she doesn't believe him. The Hebrew text reads tenderly: "About this season, according to the time of life, you shall embrace a son." She reacted rather rudely by answering: "Don't lie to me, man of God." The title "man of God" seems an oxymoron in connection to the accusation. But she did become pregnant and gave birth to a little boy.

From that point the story jumps ahead to the point where the boy has grown up sufficiently to join his father in the field during harvest time. While in the field, the boy was all of a sudden struck with sickness. He complained about a severe and unbearable headache. Bible scholars have suggested several possible causes. The most likely one seems to be that the kid suffered a sunstroke. The father orders one of the servants to take the boy home to his mother. Being occupied with harvesting, it would have been difficult for himself to leave the field. As the boy is carried to his mother, he dies shortly afterwards.

There must have been another lapse of time, because when the boy dies, the father seems to be at home. The woman's reason for going to Elisha is not immediately clear. Her words to the prophet sound more as an accusation than an expression of faith, although placing the dead body on Elisha's bed may have been an act of faith.

We are not told whether the father knew his son had died. His question as to why his wife would go and see Elisha could indicate that she had not told her husband. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments: "She was a very prudent woman; she would not harass the feelings of her husband by informing him of the death of his son until she had tried the power of the prophet. Though the religion of the true God was not the religion of the state, yet there were no doubt multitudes of the people who continued to worship the true God alone, and were in the habit of going, as is here intimated, on new moons and Sabbaths, to consult the prophet."

Elisha saw the woman coming as she was still at a certain distance. He must have considered this unusual, so he sent Gehazi to inquire what the reason of her coming was. But the woman did not tell him, saying that everything was all right.

When she meets Elisha, she falls down at his feet, grabbing his feet and bursting out in bitter complaint. We do not get the impression that she came with faith, trusting that Elisha would have the power to raise his dead son. What she says is that she had come to the point in her life where she had accepted the fact that she couldn't have children. That had been difficult, but it was not as difficult as having a child and then losing him.

We don't read that she tells him clearly that the boy had died, but she didn't have to; Elisha understood what had happened.

There are several questions that could be asked in the context of this story. Elisha had God's message when he had told the woman that she would conceive and have a son, but the

Lord had not told Elisha that the boy had died. Neither did the woman tell him this, although her actions spoke clearly enough.

Elisha's instructions to Gehazi to go and raise the boy back to life by laying Elisha's staff on his face is another strange feature in the story. This, however, did not happen, because the woman declares that she would not leave unless Elisha himself would accompany her.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: "Gehazi, with the prophet's staff a symbol of authority, as used by Moses to effect a miracle (Exod. 4:1-4; 17:5-6), went ahead to reassure the parents, but there was no sound or response (NIV, JB as I Kgs 18:29) or "sign of life" (NEB). The boy was dead."

Although Gehazi rushed to the woman's house and did as he had been told, the woman did not go with him. She insisted that Elisha come with her, because she would not leave him otherwise. In all this it appears that the mother had a clearer understanding of the Lord's leading than the prophet.

Elisha and the mother were probably on the way as Gehazi met them with the message that he had followed the prophet's orders, but without avail. The boy was still dead.

The way the dead boy was raised to life is another strange feature in the story. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "Although on some occasions it has pleased God to allow miracles to be wrought by the instrumentality of lifeless objects, as when Elisha's bones resuscitated a dead man (... 2 Kings 13:21), and when virtue went out from the hem of our Lord's garment (... Mark 5:25-34), and still more remarkably, when 'handkerchiefs or aprons from the body of Paul were brought unto the sick, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits were cast out of them' (... Acts 19:12); yet the instances are, comparatively speaking, rare, and form exceptions to what may be called the usual Divine economy of miracles. Miracles are, as a general rule, attached in Scripture to intense unwavering faith — faith, sometimes, in those that are the objects of them, almost always in those that are the workers of them. The present case was not to be an exception to the general rule, the circumstances not calling for an exception. The power of faith was to be shown forth once more in Elisha, as not long previously in Elijah (1 Kings 17:19-23); and Israel was to be taught, by a second marvelous example, how much the effectual fervent prayer of a faithful and righteous man avails with the Most High. The lesson would have been less had the staff been allowed to effect the resuscitation. It is clear from this, that Gehazi had expected an awakening; but there is nothing to show what the prophet himself had expected. We are certainly not entitled to conclude ... that 'Elisha did wrong in attempting to "delegate his power of working miracles to another; or even that "Elisha gave the command to Gehazi from over haste, without having any Divine incentive to it.'"

When Elisha arrives at the woman's home, he finds the dead child on his bed in the room that had been built for him. The first thing he does, after shutting the door, is to pray the Lord to restore the boy's life. It seems that this prayer is not answered.

What follows sounds like an effort to apply mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. But we may assume that this was not what brought the boy back to life, because that process can only be applied in cases where the heart is still beating, although breathing has stopped. We may assume that this could not have been the case as time had elapsed during the woman's travel to Elisha and back.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "The gradual revival of the boy differs from Elijah's method in I Kings 17 where there was instant response to the word (as to Christ in Mark 5:41-42; cf. Acts 9:48). This was no mere artificial respiration, and Gehazi was a witness both to the child being dead as well as to his revival which became widely known (8:5)/ Nor is it

overtly a case of communication of power by the extension of the individual. Elisha's faith in God, while not expressed directly here, is shown by his prayer (cf. Jas 5:17-18)."

The way the boy is brought back to life is by Elisha symbolically transmitting his own life to the boy. Although this, evidently, did not affect Elisha in his own physical health, it must have been a form of dying for the prophet.

That makes this healing similar to the healing of the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment. Jesus felt that healing power had been communicated to that woman by her touch. We read: "At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, 'Who touched my clothes?' 'You see the people crowding against you,' his disciples answered, and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.'"²²

It seems that Elisha's faith was being tested in this case. The fact that he stretched himself out upon the boy's body several times and walked around the room in between times, must indicate that the prophet felt he was not getting through to the Lord immediately. There may have been demonic opposition to this healing that had to be overcome first. But finally, the boy shows signs of life. He sneezed! *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comment: "He uses every natural means in his power to restore life, while praying to the Author of it to exert a miraculous influence. Natural means are in our power; those that are supernatural belong to God. We should always do our own work, and beg of God to do his."

But the dead boy is brought back to life by the divine power of resurrection. This story is an Old Testament prefiguring of God's power in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, through whose death and resurrection we live, even when we die. Jesus said to Martha, Lazarus' sister: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."²³ And to His disciples and us He says: "Because I live, you also will live."²⁴

c. Death in the pot (4:38-41)

38 *Elisha returned to Gilgal and there was a famine in that region. While the company of the prophets was meeting with him, he said to his servant, "Put on the large pot and cook some stew for these men."*

39 *One of them went out into the fields to gather herbs and found a wild vine. He gathered some of its gourds and filled the fold of his cloak. When he returned, he cut them up into the pot of stew, though no one knew what they were.*

40 *The stew was poured out for the men, but as they began to eat it, they cried out, "O man of God, there is death in the pot!" And they could not eat it.*

41 *Elisha said, "Get some flour." He put it into the pot and said, "Serve it to the people to eat." And there was nothing harmful in the pot.*

²² Mark 5:30-34

²³ John 11:25,26

²⁴ John 14:19

The scene is one of a famine. Evidently, a lack of seasonal rain had caused failed harvests over a period of time and the people went hungry. This affected the students of the school of prophets also. Although the wheat crop had failed, there must have been some vegetables available. What one of the students found growing in the woods was a kind of gourd. Scholars have argued about what kind of vegetable the Scripture presents us with here, but they have not come to a consensus. The student-prophet must have thought the gourd to be edible, otherwise he would not have picked it. It may have resembled something he had eaten before. But as it turns out, it was poisonous.

The way the students describe the taste of the food would be amusing if it were not so serious: “there is death in the pot.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments: “The familiar bitter taste warned them. They assumed that it was another similar plant, the colocynth, which also was poisonous and bitter tasting.” It is quite likely that, beside the bitter taste, the students also began to feel immediate ill effects in their stomach, which warned that the stew was not safe to eat.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “Either the bitter flavor alarmed them, or they began to feel ill effects from what they had swallowed, which, if it was colocynth, might very soon have produced stomachache or nausea. Rushing, therefore, at once to the worst possible supposition, they concluded that they were poisoned, and exclaimed, ‘O man of God, there is death in the pot!’ ‘If eaten in any large quantity,’ says [one Bible scholar], ‘colocynths might really produce death.’”²⁵

If Elisha’s remedy in adding some flour to the stew was not a miracle, it would not have been worth mentioning in Scripture. We may assume that normally, flour would not counteract poison. In a similar way Moses made bitter water into drinkable by throwing a piece of wood into it.²⁵

d. Feeding a multitude (4:42-44)

42 *A man came from Baal Shalishah, bringing the man of God twenty loaves of barley bread baked from the first ripe grain, along with some heads of new grain. “Give it to the people to eat,” Elisha said.*

43 *“How can I set this before a hundred men?” his servant asked. But Elisha answered, “Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the Lord says: ‘They will eat and have some left over.’”*

44 *Then he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the Lord.*

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: “This event may not be connected with the foregoing, though it equally shows the Lord’s care for his own. The acceptance by Elisha of the first fruits, normally offered to God through priests (as Lev. 23:10) and his sharing the gift for the benefit of all, may indicate recognition of him as the Lord’s representative. The whole incident is described as fulfillment of predicted prophecy. As a miracle it is to be compared with the later feeding of the five thousand by Jesus (Matt. 14:13-21).”

It could very well be, however, that this miracle occurred at the school of prophets and that the student body consisted of one hundred men, or a total of one hundred people, including wives and children.

²⁵ Ex. 15:23-25

The food was, apparently, brought to Elisha as a personal gift and he told Gehazi to give it to the students. Although twenty loaves of bread may sound like an amount enough to feed a crowd of one hundred, we assume that these were small rolls, rather than the large loaves we buy in our stores. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “Loaves in the East are exceedingly small, something like our penny rolls.”

The story is the Old Testament parallel to Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand in the New Testament. The “five loaves of bread” the disciples had available must also have been small rolls, enough to feed one or two people.²⁶

Elisha told his servant to serve the students on the basis of a revelation God had given him. Quoting the prophetic word the Lord had given, he said: “This is what the Lord says: ‘They will eat and have some left over.’” And that is what happened; one hundred people ate five small buns and there were leftovers!

e. Naaman healed (5:1-27)

1 Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.

2 Now bands from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman’s wife.

3 She said to her mistress, “If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.”

4 Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said.

5 “By all means, go,” the king of Aram replied. “I will send a letter to the king of Israel.” So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing.

6 The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: “With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy.”

7 As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, “Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!”

8 When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: “Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel.”

9 So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha’s house.

10 Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, “Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.”

11 But Naaman went away angry and said, “I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy.

12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn’t I wash in them and be cleansed?” So he turned and went off in a rage.

²⁶ Luke 9:13-17

13 Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, "Wash and be cleansed"!"

14 So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

15 Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept now a gift from your servant."

16 The prophet answered, "As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing." And even though Naaman urged him, he refused.

17 "If you will not," said Naaman, "please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the Lord.

18 But may the Lord forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I bow there also — when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord forgive your servant for this."

19 "Go in peace," Elisha said. After Naaman had traveled some distance,

20 Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said to himself, "My master was too easy on Naaman, this Aramean, by not accepting from him what he brought. As surely as the Lord lives, I will run after him and get something from him."

21 So Gehazi hurried after Naaman. When Naaman saw him running toward him, he got down from the chariot to meet him. "Is everything all right?" he asked.

22 "Everything is all right," Gehazi answered. "My master sent me to say, "Two young men from the company of the prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two sets of clothing."

23 "By all means, take two talents," said Naaman. He urged Gehazi to accept them, and then tied up the two talents of silver in two bags, with two sets of clothing. He gave them to two of his servants, and they carried them ahead of Gehazi.

24 When Gehazi came to the hill, he took the things from the servants and put them away in the house. He sent the men away and they left.

25 Then he went in and stood before his master Elisha. "Where have you been, Gehazi?" Elisha asked. "Your servant didn't go anywhere," Gehazi answered.

26 But Elisha said to him, "Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money, or to accept clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, or menservants and maidservants?"

27 Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever." Then Gehazi went from Elisha's presence and he was leprous, as white as snow.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings* introduces this section with: "In the Elijah-Elisha narratives here alone we have the healing of a leper and the conversion to, and worship of, Yahweh by a non-Israelite. The miracle is given its moral significance. This is an "apt example of a Biblical narrative in which art and theology are symbiotically related." The structure includes reversal of roles between servant and master, and the selfless and the selfish, a leper is cleansed and someone punished by leprosy imposed."

Naaman is described as "a great man," as "honorable" and "mighty in valor." *The Pulpit Commentary* states that all this together means that he was "a good soldier."

Naaman's problem was that he had leprosy. The Hebrew word used to describe Naaman's condition is *tsara'*, which the KJV consistently translates with "leper" or "leprosy." The NIV describes it as "a contagious skin disease."

Aram is the name for the present-day country of Syria. Evidently, the king of Aram had made raids into Israel and taken captives, among which a young girl who became the slave girl of Naaman's wife.

We are given no details about the girl but we understand that she believed Elisha to have supernatural powers. We do not read that she made a connection with the power of God, whose servant Elisha was. She must have known about some of the miraculous things Elisha had produced. She, therefore, mentions to her mistress that there was a prophet in Israel who had the power to heal.

It is obvious that the girl had not only accepted her own status as a slave girl to Naaman's wife, but she also had warm feelings toward Naaman and his wife. The Hebrew uses the word "*achalay*, which the KJV renders with "would (to) God." The word is merely an exclamation, as in the verse: "*Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!*"²⁷ The girl's testimony reached Naaman, who seemed to be desperate enough to try everything. So Naaman passes on the girl's words to his king, asking for permission to travel to Israel and find healing.

The king of Aram not only gave permission, he wrote a personal letter to the king of Israel, recommending his commander in chief to the monarch whose country he had raided. There was no mention of a prophet in Israel. The letter was addressed to the king. There was more than word power in this note; Aram's army stood behind it. The king of Israel was put in a most distressing position by being asked to perform a miracle of healing or else suffer the consequences.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "The letter made no mention of Elisha. Ben-Hadad assumed that, if the King of Israel had in his dominions a person able to cure leprosy, he would be fully cognizant of the fact, and would at once send for him, and call upon him for an exertion of his gift or art. He is not likely to have comprehended the relations in which Kings of Israel stood towards the Jehovistic prophets, but may probably have thought of Elisha 'as a sort of chief magus, or as the Israelitish high priest' ..., whom the king would have at his beck and call, and whose services would be completely at his disposal." As *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes, "The message went to the wrong person, for the Lord wished the healing to be a public matter."

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments on the letter the king of Aram sent to the king of Israel: "The King of Aram assumes that a prophet would be a member of the royal entourage, but Israel took the letter as a provocation to renewed war." We are not told who the king of Israel was at this time, but that does not make a difference in the story.

As we saw, Aram had occasionally raided the Northern Kingdom, but this request by the king of Aram to the king of Israel to see to it that Aram's commander-in-chief of Aram's army be healed of his leprosy, was received as a pretext for a complete takeover of the country.

The king of Israel never thought of Elisha, as someone who could bring about the miracle, although he must have known that Elisha had that reputation. Israel's king must have been steeped too deeply into idolatry to think of a prophet of the God of Israel.

²⁷ Ps. 119:5

Evidently, the matter of the letter Aram's king had sent to the king of Israel and the king's reaction of tearing his royal robe, must have become public knowledge. We don't read that Elisha received a divine revelation about this.

So Elisha sends word to the king, telling him to send Naaman to him. This word is passed on to Naaman. There is a note of embarrassment in the fact that the king of Israel had to refer the general of Aram's army to the prophet of God, whom the king of Israel did not actually serve or recognize.

Naaman arrives at Elisha's home, where he is not received as a guest of honor. Everything Naaman experienced in Israel seems to be meant to humiliate him. The king of Israel does not help him and Elisha does not even come out of his house to greet such an important person as the general of Aram's army.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "Elisha was at this time residing in Samaria, whether in his own house or not we cannot say. His abode was probably a humble one; and when the great general, accompanied by his cavalcade of followers, drew up before it, he had, we may be sure, no intention of dismounting and entering. What he expected he tells us himself in ver. 11. The prophet regarded his pride and self-conceit as deserving of a rebuke."

Elisha sent his servant to tell the general to go and wash himself seven times in the Jordan River, promising that that would bring about healing. This message was for Naaman "the straw that broke the camel's back." Naaman was quite aware of his own importance. He was the general of Aram's army. He surrounded himself with pomp, which was in accordance with his status in life. In Syria he was considered as one of the most important people of the country. In Israel he was treated as a non-person.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "As a "great man," the lord on whose arm the king leant, and the captain of the host of Syria, Naaman was accustomed to extreme deference, and all the outward tokens of respect and reverence. He had, moreover, come with a goodly train, carrying gold and silver and rich stuffs, manifestly prepared to pay largely for whatever benefit he might receive. To be curtly told, "Go, wash in Jordan," by the prophet's servant, without the prophet himself condescending to make himself visible, would have been trying to any Oriental's temper, and to one of Naaman's rank and position might well seem an insult. The Syrian general had pictured to himself a very different scene."

We read "he turned and went off in a rage." Naaman felt so insulted that he decided he rather remain a leper than submit to the humiliation of the treatment Israel's prophet prescribed.

At this point, Naaman's servants seem to be more clearheaded than their master. Addressing their master as "Father," they say that Naaman would have done anything if Elisha had given him something difficult to do. But now, as it was something simple, Naaman refused, because he felt himself humiliated. Naaman despised Israel's king, Israel's prophet, Israel's rivers and, ultimately, Israel's God.

But Naaman's servants prevail upon him and he does go to the Jordan and take seven dips in its water. After the seventh time Naaman comes out with a skin that looks as healthy and clean as a young boy's skin. Naaman's cleansing seems symbolic of what Jesus Christ does for us if we humble ourselves before him. In the words of Paul: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."²⁸

²⁸ Eph. 5:25-27

After being healed, Naaman goes back to the place where Elisha lived in order to express his gratitude and give Elisha a substantial present. This time he meets Elisha personally. The prophet refuses any kind of recompense. Naaman not only had experienced physical healing, he also realized that the God of Israel was the only real God. This implies that he recognized that the idols that were worshipped in Aram were no gods at all. The present was meant to be an act of worship to the God of Israel, of whom Elisha was the representative.

But Elisha refuses categorically to accept anything. The Hebrew text reads literally: “As the Lord, before whom I stand, lives I will receive nothing.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “Elisha regards it as best, under the circumstances, to refuse the offered recompense. It was not compulsory on him so to act; for the precept, ‘Freely ye have received, freely give’ (... Matthew 10:8), had not been yet uttered. Pious Israelites commonly brought gifts to the prophets whom they consulted (... 1 Samuel 9:7, 8; ... 1 Kings 14:3). But, in the case of a foreigner, ignorant hitherto of true religion, whom it was important to impress favorably, and, if possible, win over to the faith, Elisha deemed it advisable to take no reward. Naaman was thus taught that Jehovah was his true Healer, the prophet the mere instrument, and that it was to Jehovah that his gratitude, his thanks, and his offerings were due.”

Naaman’s request for two mule-loads of Israeli soil in order to erect an altar to worship the God of Israel seems to indicate that the God of Israel could not be worshipped “on foreign soil.” Bible scholars disagree about Naaman’s intentions as to what to do with the soil. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “Some suppose that he intended to make the earth into an altar upon which he might offer his sacrifices; comp. ... Exodus 20:24, where an altar of earth is spoken of But the more general opinion ... is that he wished to spread the earth over a piece of Syrian ground, and thereby to hallow the ground for purposes of worship. The Jews themselves are known to have acted similarly, transferring earth from Jerusalem to Babylonia, to build a temple on it; and the idea is not an unnatural one. It does not necessarily imply the ‘polytheistic superstition’ that every god has his own land, where alone he can be properly worshipped. It rests simply on the notion of there being such a thing as ‘holy ground’ (... Exodus 3:5) — ground more suited for the worship of God than ordinary common soil, which therefore it is worthwhile to transfer from place to place for a religious purpose.”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “The loads of *earth* were to prepare the base for a ‘sacred place’ on which an altar could be erected, and not because the LORD God could only be worshipped on Israelite soil. Naaman’s knowledge of God was as yet weak.”

The most interesting part of this request is that Naaman feels he needed Elisha’s permission to take the Israeli soil with him. His main concern, however, was that, although he acknowledged the God of Israel as the only One worthy of his worship, he would be obliged to bow before Aram’s idol Rimmon, when he accompanied the king of Aram. The fact that the king would lean on Naaman’s arm may not be meant literally.

Elisha’s answer “Go in peace,” in which the Hebrew word *shalom* is included, indicates that the Lord would forgive Naaman when he would bow to the idol in his service to his king.

Gehazi is depicted as being greedy by going after Naaman to ask for payment. He felt that, if Elisha did not want to accept anything for himself, he could have thought of his servant and asked something for him. He thought in terms of “clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, or menservants and maidservants,” as Elisha states in v. 26.

So Gehazi runs after Naaman’s caravan and catches up with him. When Naaman sees him he descends for his carriage, asking what the matter was. Gehazi was not only greedy, he was also a liar. He made up a story of two students of the school of prophets who had just arrived

and who were in need of some clothing and money. He asks for “a talent of silver and two sets of clothing.” A footnote in the NIV renders this as 75 pounds of silver. *The Living Bible* renders this as: “\$2,000 in silver and two suits.”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments on Gehazi’s deception: “Gehazi’s action broke the relationship when he sought to enrich himself. His attitude was one of avarice (v. 22), deception (vv. 23-25) and derogation of superiors (v. 20 ‘this *Aramean*’). Moreover he swore deceitfully by the LORD (v. 20, contrast Elisha, v. 16) and covered up for it and so was justly punished (Lev. 19:12; Acts 5:2-3). Naaman was more faithful to his new LORD than Gehazi was to his.”

Gehazi understood that Elisha would strongly disapprove of his actions, so he took measures to ensure that Elisha would be kept ignorant. Before getting back to Elisha’s residence, he took the booty from the servants he had taken along to carry the stuff and put everything away in his own place, thinking Elisha would not know.

There must have been a hill between the place where Elisha stayed and Gehazi’s place. The Hebrew uses the word *ophel*, which can either be rendered “hill” or “tower.” In any case, it must have been something that obstructed the view between the two places.

Back at Elisha’s house, his place of service, Elisha asks Gehazi where he went. He answers: “Your servant didn’t go anywhere,” his second lie in one hour. Elisha answers that he went with Gehazi and saw and heard everything. This was meant spiritually. The Hebrew text reads literally: “Did not my heart go with you, when the man turned from his chariot and meet you?” Elisha’s prophetic eye accompanied his lying servant.

Gehazi did receive all he needed to buy “clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, or menservants and maidservants,” but he would not be able to enjoy his riches because of his leprosy, which he also received from Naaman. His offspring would inherit, not only Gehazi’s vast possessions, but also his sickness. The whole family would be outcasts.

f. The floating axe-head (6:1-7)

1 *The company of the prophets said to Elisha, “Look, the place where we meet with you is too small for us.*

2 *Let us go to the Jordan, where each of us can get a pole; and let us build a place there for us to live.” And he said, “Go.”*

3 *Then one of them said, “Won’t you please come with your servants?” “I will,” Elisha replied.*

4 *And he went with them. They went to the Jordan and began to cut down trees.*

5 *As one of them was cutting down a tree, the iron axhead fell into the water. “Oh, my lord,” he cried out, “it was borrowed!”*

6 *The man of God asked, “Where did it fall?” When he showed him the place, Elisha cut a stick and threw it there, and made the iron float.*

7 *“Lift it out,” he said. Then the man reached out his hand and took it.*

This Scripture portion is particularly significant for me, because I heard the first sermon about it immediately after my conversion.

The scene was probably a kind of school for prophets. Prophecy is usually considered to be based on divine revelations given to people who have received a specific gift of interpretation. But the Apostle Paul defines prophecy differently, saying: “Everyone who prophesies speaks to

men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.”²⁹ Most preaching done by pastors in churches would be covered by this definition.

We can picture the scene as occurring at, what presently would be called, a Bible-training Institute. These were young men who were being taught to instruct the people into the Word of God, both the written Word and the one they received by personal revelation.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary observes: “The tenor of the narrative shows the humble condition of Elisha’s pupils. The place was either Bethel or Jericho—probably the latter. The ministry and miracles of Elisha brought great accessions to his schools.”

Barnes’ Notes comments: “Elisha visited the sons of the prophets in circuit, staying a short time at each place where a ‘school’ was established.”

Evidently, Elisha’s ministry had attracted young men to the “ministry,” indicating that, although the general spirit of the people was not drawn to worship of the God of Israel, the prophet’s influence was strong among the youth.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “The ‘school of the prophets’ at Jericho, whereof we heard in ... 2 Kings 2:5, 19, had increased so much, that the buildings which hitherto had accommodated it were no longer sufficient. A larger dwelling, or set of dwellings, was thought to be necessary; but the scholars would make no change without the sanction of their master. When he comes on one of his circuits, they make appeal to him.”

It is not clear what the actual building needs were. The Hebrew text reads literally: “Behold now, the place where we dwell with you is too strait for us.” This could refer to the “dormitory” accommodations or to the “chapel.” But this makes no difference as far as the point of the story, which is the miracle of the floating axhead.

The young men ask Elisha’s permission to cut poles for making new accommodations. The Hebrew word used is *qowrah*, which means “a beam,” but in one instance is used in the sense of a house, as in Lot’s answer to the men of Sodom, who wanted to rape the angels: “Don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.”³⁰

The building they envisioned must have been a kind of log cabin. When Elisha tells them to go, one of the young men asks Elisha to accompany them. The prophet agrees to this.

So the company leaves and the cutting begins. One young man loses his axhead as he is cutting away. It falls in the Jordan River and sinks in the deep. He cries out to Elisha, adding “it was borrowed.” Some joker once stated that certain preachers ought to write that above the sermons they preach! Replacing the axhead would probably have caused a financial burden to the young student. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: “The *iron axe-head* (Heb. “iron”) had been asked for, (MT *sa’ûl*), that is, begged or prayed for, and not necessarily “borrowed” (as EVV).”

It is one of the laws of nature that iron does not float on water. Humanly speaking the axhead was lost.

Elisha’s action is part natural and part supernatural. He had no divine knowledge as to the place where the axhead had fallen. But once he is shown the exact spot, he performs a supernatural act. Taking a stick, he throws it in the water at the place where the iron had fallen in and the steel floats to the top. This was a miracle of the same kind as Jesus’ walking on the water. Faith in the power of God can overrule the laws of nature. The standing still of the sun in answer to Joshua’s prayer is another kind of these miraculous divine interventions.³¹

²⁹ I Cor. 14:3

³⁰ Gen. 19:8

³¹ Josh. 10:12-14

g. The Arameans entrapped (6:8-23)

8 Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, "I will set up my camp in such and such a place."

9 The man of God sent word to the king of Israel: "Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are going down there."

10 So the king of Israel checked on the place indicated by the man of God. Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was on his guard in such places.

11 This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, "Will you not tell me which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?"

12 "None of us, my lord the king," said one of his officers, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom."

13 "Go, find out where he is," the king ordered, "so I can send men and capture him." The report came back: "He is in Dothan."

14 Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city.

15 When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked.

16 "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

17 And Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes so he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

18 As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, "Strike these people with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked.

19 Elisha told them, "This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for." And he led them to Samaria.

20 After they entered the city, Elisha said, "Lord, open the eyes of these men so they can see." Then the Lord opened their eyes and they looked, and there they were, inside Samaria.

21 When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, "Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?"

22 "Do not kill them," he answered. "Would you kill men you have captured with your own sword or bow? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master."

23 So he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory.

We could treat this story as a parable of Jesus' teaching about spiritual blindness. We read: "Jesus said, 'For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.' Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, 'What? Are we blind too?' Jesus said, 'If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but

now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.”³² But this does not mean that it is not a report of a real incident that happened in Israel’s relationship with Aram, which made raids into Israeli territory.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “The record of miraculous incidents with moral lessons continues, vision contrasts with blindness, spiritual resources with man-made tactics (vv 15-16), etc. It is a prelude to the dealings of Elisha with the court and his conduct in the Aramean war (6:24 – 7:20). Elisha had close relations with the unnamed king of Israel for whom he provided an efficient intelligence service. His knowledge was probably gained from informants (cf. 2 Kgs 5:3) rather than second sight. Hence the concern over betrayal.”

There is no reason to assume, as Dr. Wiseman suggests, that Elisha’s knowledge about the plans of the king of Aram was not a prophetic gift. The king’s officers thought it was, so why wouldn’t we?

Some details in the story seem to be missing. We do not read, for instance, what was involved in the raids the Aramean army made into Israel. Nor are we told what measures the king of Israel took against them. We assume that, wherever Aram invaded Israel, they found an Israeli army that prevented them from penetrating too deeply. The opposition was too strong and too frequent to suppose that it was coincidental. The king of Aram assumed that the king of Israel had a spy in Aram’s army.

The *Pulpit Commentary* states: “Recent commentators . . . mostly suppose this to mean that Jehoram sent troops to the place pointed out by the prophet, and anticipated the Syrians by occupying it. But it agrees better with the prophet’s injunction, “Beware that thou pass not such a place,” to suppose that he merely sent out scouts to see if the place were occupied or no, and finding, in each case, Elisha’s warning true, he avoided the locality.”

Barnes’ Notes explains about the phrase “Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom”: “The seclusion of the harem must be taken into account for the full appreciation of the force of the phrase. Probably the Syrian lord who answered Benhadad had received his intelligence from some of the Israelites.”

The king of Aram assumes correctly that Elisha was Aram’s greatest enemy and that if that prophet were captured, and probably executed, invading Israel would be easy. So he sends out his spies to find out where Elisha could be found. The answer he receives is Dothan.

He sends part of his army to Dothan and surrounds the city by night. The next morning Elisha’s servant, probably still Gehazi, sees Dothan surrounded by an enemy army. He was probably able to see the Armenian army from the roof of the house. He panicked and tells Elisha. Elisha’s answer is one of the golden statements in the Old Testament, if not in all of Scripture. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Elisha’s words remind us of Paul’s words: “If God is for us, who can be against us?”³³ Elisha had seen with his prophetic eyes that God had sent an army of angels to protect him from those who wanted to capture and kill him. Like David, he knew: “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.”³⁴ And the author of Hebrews writes: “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”³⁵

We know little about angels and their ministry. We may assume, however, that there is an angel that accompanies the believer on the way through life; there may be several ones. In the

³² John 9:39-41

³³ Rom. 8:31

³⁴ Ps. 34:7

³⁵ Heb. 1:14

case of Elisha and his servant there was a whole army, that was larger than the Aramean army that had come to capture Elisha. We are reminded of Jesus' words to His disciples: "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"³⁶

Most of us, like Elisha's servant, are blind to the spiritual realities that surround us. When Elisha prays the Lord to open his eyes, he sees Elisha surrounded by "horses and chariots of fire."

The Adam Clarke's Commentary observes: "Where is heaven? Is it not above, beneath, around us? And were our eyes open as were those of the prophet's servant, we should see the heavenly host in all directions. The horses and chariots of fire were there, before the eyes of Elisha's servant were opened." And *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: "The opening of the eyes, which Elisha prayed for, referred to the spirit, not to the body. The eye of faith sees the reality of the divine presence and protection where all is vacancy or darkness to the ordinary eye. The horses and chariots were symbols of the divine power ...; and their fiery nature denoted their supernatural origin; for fire, the most ethereal of earthly elements, is the most appropriate symbol of the Godhead."

Having prayed for his servant's eyes to be opened, Elisha then prays that God would strike the enemies, who came to capture him, with blindness. Then he goes to meet them and tells them that they are at the wrong address, offering to lead them where they ought to go. So he takes them from Dothan to Samaria. That journey must have taken them about four hours.

The question has been asked whether Elisha's lie was justifiable. Is it ever allowed to tell a lie? *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "This was clearly 'an untruthful statement' ..., if not in the letter, yet in the intent. Elisha meant the Syrians to understand him to say, 'This is not the way which ye ought to have taken if ye wanted to capture the Prophet Elisha, and this is not the city (Dothan) where you were told that he was to be found.' And so the Syrians understood him. In the morality of the time, and, indeed, in the morality of all times up to the present, it has been held to be justifiable to deceive a public enemy."

When the party arrives in Samaria, Elisha prays that the Lord would open their eyes. Thus the group of soldiers that came to capture Elisha finds themselves surrounded by Israeli soldiers who would be happy to kill them. The king of Israel shows his excitement in the twice repeated question "Shall I kill them?" There is divine humor in Elisha's answer to give them to eat instead of killing them. Elisha's suggestion is found in Proverbs where we read: "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you."³⁷ The Apostle Paul quotes this proverb in his Epistle to the Romans, adding: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."³⁸ Paul writes these words in the context of the human tendency to want to take revenge. In the verses preceding the quotation, we read: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."³⁹ Revenge is God's prerogative, not ours.

³⁶ Matt. 26:53

³⁷ Prov. 25:21,22

³⁸ Rom. 12:21

³⁹ Rom. 12:17-19

Repaying evil with good brings the greatest embarrassment upon those who want to harm us.

h. The siege of Samaria (6:24 – 7:20)

24 Some time later, Ben-Hadad king of Aram mobilized his entire army and marched up and laid siege to Samaria.

25 There was a great famine in the city; the siege lasted so long that a donkey's head sold for eighty shekels of silver, and a quarter of a cab of seed pods for five shekels.

26 As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried to him, "Help me, my lord the king!"

27 The king replied, "If the Lord does not help you, where can I get help for you? From the threshing floor? From the winepress?"

28 Then he asked her, "What's the matter?" She answered, "This woman said to me, "Give up your son so we may eat him today, and tomorrow we'll eat my son."

29 So we cooked my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, "Give up your son so we may eat him," but she had hidden him."

30 When the king heard the woman's words, he tore his robes. As he went along the wall, the people looked, and there, underneath, he had sackcloth on his body.

31 He said, "May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat remains on his shoulders today!"

32 Now Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. The king sent a messenger ahead, but before he arrived, Elisha said to the elders, "Don't you see how this murderer is sending someone to cut off my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door and hold it shut against him. Is not the sound of his master's footsteps behind him?"

33 While he was still talking to them, the messenger came down to him. And [the king] said, "This disaster is from the Lord. Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?"

1 Elisha said, "Hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Lord says: About this time tomorrow, a seah of flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria."

2 The officer on whose arm the king was leaning said to the man of God, "Look, even if the Lord should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?" "You will see it with your own eyes," answered Elisha, "but you will not eat any of it!"

3 Now there were four men with leprosy at the entrance of the city gate. They said to each other, "Why stay here until we die?"

4 If we say, "We'll go into the city"-the famine is there, and we will die. And if we stay here, we will die. So let's go over to the camp of the Arameans and surrender. If they spare us, we live; if they kill us, then we die."

5 At dusk they got up and went to the camp of the Arameans. When they reached the edge of the camp, not a man was there,

6 for the Lord had caused the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great army, so that they said to one another, "Look, the king of Israel has hired the Hittite and Egyptian kings to attack us!"

7 So they got up and fled in the dusk and abandoned their tents and their horses and donkeys. They left the camp as it was and ran for their lives.

8 *The men who had leprosy reached the edge of the camp and entered one of the tents. They ate and drank, and carried away silver, gold and clothes, and went off and hid them. They returned and entered another tent and took some things from it and hid them also.*

9 *Then they said to each other, “We’re not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us. Let’s go at once and report this to the royal palace.”*

10 *So they went and called out to the city gatekeepers and told them, “We went into the Aramean camp and not a man was there — not a sound of anyone — only tethered horses and donkeys, and the tents left just as they were.”*

11 *The gatekeepers shouted the news, and it was reported within the palace.*

12 *The king got up in the night and said to his officers, “I will tell you what the Arameans have done to us. They know we are starving; so they have left the camp to hide in the countryside, thinking, “They will surely come out, and then we will take them alive and get into the city.”“*

13 *One of his officers answered, “Have some men take five of the horses that are left in the city. Their plight will be like that of all the Israelites left here — yes, they will only be like all these Israelites who are doomed. So let us send them to find out what happened.”*

14 *So they selected two chariots with their horses, and the king sent them after the Aramean army. He commanded the drivers, “Go and find out what has happened.”*

15 *They followed them as far as the Jordan, and they found the whole road strewn with the clothing and equipment the Arameans had thrown away in their headlong flight. So the messengers returned and reported to the king.*

16 *Then the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans. So a seah of flour sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley sold for a shekel, as the Lord had said.*

17 *Now the king had put the officer on whose arm he leaned in charge of the gate, and the people trampled him in the gateway, and he died, just as the man of God had foretold when the king came down to his house.*

18 *It happened as the man of God had said to the king: “About this time tomorrow, a seah of flour will sell for a shekel and two seahs of barley for a shekel at the gate of Samaria.”*

19 *The officer had said to the man of God, “Look, even if the Lord should open the floodgates of the heavens, could this happen?” The man of God had replied, “You will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat any of it!”*

20 *And that is exactly what happened to him, for the people trampled him in the gateway, and he died.*

Although we do not read this specifically, we may assume that the siege of Samaria by the Aramean army was aimed specially for the purpose of capturing the prophet Elisha. This seems clear from the fact that the king of Israel blamed Elisha for the famine caused by the siege, saying: “May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat remains on his shoulders today!”

We are not told how long the siege lasted, but the fact that famine reigned in the city indicates that several months had gone by. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: “The siege brought the city to such dire straits that even the forbidden ass’s head (cf. Lev. 11:3) was eaten at exorbitant cost. A third of a liter (about half a pint; MT (*qab*) of carob beans (*harûbîm*; NIV seed pads) rather than “dove’s dung” (AV; MT *hîreyyônîm*) or “wild onions”

(JB) was sold for fifty-five grams of silver or more than a month's wages for a laborer (cf. Matt. 20:1-6 and famine rates of Rev. 6:6)."

The famine had affected the people's moral to the point where cannibalism became practiced. One of the strangest parts of this incident is that the two women, who had agreed to kill their own infants and eat them together, seemed to have no moral convictions about this. One of them appealed to the king when the other woman, who had eaten her friend's child, hid her own baby to keep him alive. The other party acted as if infanticide was a legal right in the nation!

We don't read who the king of that day was, but it is obvious that he had more moral convictions than the women in question had. Also the fact that he was wearing mourning garments (although not openly), indicates that he was under some conviction of sin.

The moral condition of the Northern Kingdom was the fruit of its idolatry. Moses had predicted what would happen if Israel would abandon the worship of YHWH. We read: "Because of the suffering that your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the Lord your God has given you. Even the most gentle and sensitive man among you will have no compassion on his own brother or the wife he loves or his surviving children, and he will not give to one of them any of the flesh of his children that he is eating. It will be all he has left because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege of all your cities. The most gentle and sensitive woman among you — so sensitive and gentle that she would not venture to touch the ground with the sole of her foot — will begrudge the husband she loves and her own son or daughter the afterbirth from her womb and the children she bears. For she intends to eat them secretly during the siege and in the distress that your enemy will inflict on you in your cities."⁴⁰

Up to this point the king had not considered arresting Elisha and handing him over to the king of Aram, which would have ended the siege. But being made aware of the incident of cannibalism in the city, he decides that that would be the only solution.

There are several unanswered questions about this king's attitude. He was obviously not serving YHWH. But instead of blaming himself and his idolatry for the trouble Samaria was in, he blamed it on Elisha and ultimately on the God of Israel. He was mourning as a sign of contrition, but there was not confession of sin. Whether he really believed that Elisha's capture and probable execution by the Arameans would solve the nation's troubles is questionable. Making Elisha the scapegoat was the easiest thing he could do.

There is another strange mixture of supernatural and natural elements in the story. It seems that the Lord warned Elisha of the king's plan to hand him over to the enemy. As the prophet was meeting with the elders of the city, and before the king's messenger had arrived, Elisha announcement the king's plan to them. But in order to protect himself from being captured, Elisha asks the elders to shut the door and hold it shut. He calls the king "this murderer."

Verse 33 presents some difficulty of interpretation. Bible scholars disagree about who is saying the words "This disaster is from the Lord. Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" Most interpreters put these words in the king's mouth. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments: "It is difficult to know whether it be the prophet, the messenger, or the king, that says these words. It might be the answer of the prophet from within to the messenger who was without, and who sought for admission, and gave his reason; to whom Elisha might have replied: 'I am not the cause of these calamities; they are from the Lord; I have been praying for their

⁴⁰ Deut. 28:53-57

removal; but why should I pray to the Lord any longer, for the time of your deliverance is at hand?””

Barnes' Notes believes it is the kings speaking. We read: “Jehoram bursts into the prophet’s presence with a justification of the sentence (2 Kings 6:31) he has pronounced against him. ‘Behold this evil-this siege with all its horrors-is from Yahweh-from Yahweh, Whose prophet thou art. Why should I wait for Yahweh-temporize with Him-keep as it were, on terms with Him by suffering thee to live-any longer? What hast thou to say in arrest of judgment?’”

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary states: “That utterance is apparently a response to an exhortation of the prophet to wait the Lord’s way and time of deliverance; and the import of the king’s answer is, that while he could not but acknowledge this evil, so heavily scourging the land, was from the Lord, he thought the condition of the kingdom was beyond remedy desperate, since mothers were appeasing the pangs of hunger with the flesh of their own children.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments: The narrative is very compressed and elliptical. Some suppose words to have fallen out ... but this is unnecessary. The reader is expected to supply missing links, and to understand that all happened as Elisha had predicted and enjoined — that the messenger came, that the elders stopped him, and that the king shortly arrived. The king was, of course, admitted, and, being admitted, took the word, and said, Behold, this evil is of the Lord; what — rather, why — should I wait for the Lord any longer? Jehoram had, apparently, to some extent repented of his hasty message, and had hurried after his messenger, to give Elisha one further chance of life. We must understand that they had been in communication previously on the subject of the siege, and that Elisha had encouraged the king to ‘wait for’ an interposition of Jehovah. The king now urges that the time for waiting is over; matters are at the last gasp; “this evil” this terrible suffering which can no longer be endured — ‘is of the Lord,’ has come from him, is continued by him, and is not relieved. What use is there in his “waiting” any longer? Why should he not break with Jehovah, behead the lying prophet, and surrender the town? What has Elisha to say in reply?”

Elisha answers the king that the siege would be over by the next day and that food would be sold cheaply at “the gate of Samaria.” *The Living Bible* puts this in modern terms, reading: “Elisha replied, “The Lord says that by this time tomorrow two gallons of flour or four gallons of barley grain will be sold in the markets of Samaria for a dollar!”“

One of the king’s officers answers Elisha that, even if the Lord would perform a miracle, this would be impossible. Elisha answers the man with a prediction of punishment that would befall the king’s officer. Not only would he see it, but he would not eat of it. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: “Elisha had made a prophetic utterance (*had said*) that was fulfilled in the successful outcome of the siege ... which would lead to the price of basic commodities falling well below the normal price. Such a prophecy was the more effective since no crops could grow in time to restore supplies.”

Most Bible scholars agree that the division of chapters in this book is unfortunate and illogical. Chapter seven simply continues the story of the previous chapter.

V. 3 introduces us to the events that would lead to the fulfillment of Elisha’s prediction, not only of the end of the siege and famine, but also to the underpriced sale of food.

The heroes are two lepers who lived outside the city of Samaria because of their illness. They decided that they would both die, whether they stayed outside the city gate or at the enemy camp. They hoped that they would be treated as prisoners of war by the Arameans if they showed themselves to them. The city was besieged but, evidently the Arameans did not keep any

guards close by the city gates to prevent people from escaping. The lepers reasoned that if the Arameans would kill them, it would be a shorter death than dying from starvation. But there was a slight possibility that they would not be killed. So they waited for dusk and walked toward the enemy camp in dark.

The Arameans had heard the noise of a great army with chariots and horses in the middle of the night. They believed that the king of Israel had hired the Hittites or Egyptians to attack them and in their panic they had fled for the lives, leaving everything behind: food and weapons.

There may have been an army of angles that caused the noise and frightened the Arameans. It is also possible that they merely imagined that they were being attacked.

Barnes' Notes writes about "The kings of the Hittites": "The Hittites, who are found first in the south (Gen 23:7), then in the center of Judea (Josh 11:3), seem to have retired northward after the occupation of Palestine by the Israelites. They are found among the Syrian enemies of the Egyptians in the monuments of the 19th dynasty (about 1300 B.C.), and appear at that time to have inhabited the valley of the Upper Orontes. In the early Assyrian monuments they form a great confederacy, as the most powerful people of northern Syria, dwelling on both banks of the Euphrates, while at the same time there is a second confederacy of their race further to the south, which seems to inhabit the anti-Lebanon between Hamath and Damascus. These southern Hittites are in the time of Benhadad and Hazael a powerful people, especially strong in chariots; and generally assist the Syrians against the Assyrians. The Syrians seem now to have imagined that these southern Hittites had been hired by Jehoram."

The two starved lepers found an abundance of food, with which they filled their stomachs. No one can blame them for doing this. They also found other booty in the form of gold, silver and clothing, which they took and hid. They must have had places where they spent the night regularly. There may have been some caves in the area that provided them protection.

But after a while their conscience started bothering them. They were celebrating and the people in the city were still starving. They pronounce words that contain Gospel truth: "We're not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves." The Hebrew text reads literally: "Then they said to one another, we do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us."

So they decided to go to the city to the royal palace and proclaim the good news. Being lepers, they were not allowed to enter the city, but the guards of the gates passed on the information to the king. It was still night at this point and the king had to be woken up.

His majesty's reasoning does not sound logical. If, as he thought, this was an Aramean ruse, how could the inhabitants of Samaria find out that the Armenian camp had been abandoned? If it hadn't been for the lepers' discovery, the empty camp could have remained for quite a while without anyone knowing.

Barnes' Notes, however, finds it logical. We read: "The suspicion was a very natural one, since the Israelites knew of no reason why the Syrians should have raised the siege." And most Bible scholars seem to agree with him.

One of the reasons for the king's disbelief must have been that he didn't take Elisha's prophecy seriously. Elisha had predicted that there would be an abundance of food, but the king did not accept this as a message from heaven.

The Pulpit Commentary states: "Jehoram, knowing of no reason for the flight of the Syrians, suspected a not uncommon stratagem. He supposed that the enemy had merely gone a little way from their camp, and placed themselves in ambush, ready to take advantage of any rash movement which the Israelites might make."

The Matthew Henry's Commentary observes: "He feared that they had withdrawn into an ambush, to draw out the besieged, that they might fall on them with more advantage. He knew he had no reason to expect that God should appear thus wonderfully for him, having forfeited his favor by his unbelief and impatience. He knew no reason the Syrians had to fly, for it does not appear that he or any of his attendants heard the noise of the chariots which the Syrians were frightened at. Let not those who, like him, are unstable in all their ways, think to receive anything from God; nay, a guilty conscience fears the worst and makes men suspicious."

There is a textual problem in verse 13 that has made Bibles scholars argue about the interpretation. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: "One of his servants answered and said ... The sentence which follows, as it stands in our version, is very obscure. Literally rendered it is thus: 'Let, then, I pray thee, five of the horses remaining, which are left in it (namely, the city), behold them like all the multitudes in Israel left in it, behold them like all the multitudes in Israel which are consumed.' The meaning seems to be, that those horses which still survive will, in all likelihood, soon share the doom of all others in Israel; wherefore, if we should employ them in this inquiry, and they should be surprised and killed, their fate will be no harder, in being cut down by the sword, than if they remained here to die of famine. The Septuagint represents the five horses as the whole stock remaining, which the people in their extremities had not killed and eaten."

The king decides to follow his officer's suggestion and sends two chariots with horses and riders, instead of five, to find out what happened. If those were captured by the Armenians they would not be worse off than if they starved to death in the city.

What this exploratory team finds is sufficient proof that the enemy army has left in a panic. We read: "They found the whole road strewn with the clothing and equipment the Arameans had thrown away in their headlong flight."

When they came back and reported their findings to the king, the people went out of the city and looted the abandoned camp. Those who remained in the city were able to buy food supplies for the price Elisha had quoted to the king the day before.

We can understand what the stampede of starving people must have looked like. The king's army tried to maintain some order, but they were unsuccessful. The officer, who had the previous day declared that Elisha's prophecy could not be fulfilled, was put in charge of the city gate. He was trampled to death by the stampeding crowd, thus fulfilling Elisha's prophecy.

i. The Shunammite regains her land (8:1-6)

1 Now Elisha had said to the woman whose son he had restored to life, "Go away with your family and stay for a while wherever you can, because the Lord has decreed a famine in the land that will last seven years."

2 The woman proceeded to do as the man of God said. She and her family went away and stayed in the land of the Philistines seven years.

3 At the end of the seven years she came back from the land of the Philistines and went to the king to beg for her house and land.

4 The king was talking to Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, and had said, "Tell me about all the great things Elisha has done."

5 Just as Gehazi was telling the king how Elisha had restored the dead to life, the woman whose son Elisha had brought back to life came to beg the king for her house and land.

Gehazi said, “This is the woman, my lord the king, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life.”

6 The king asked the woman about it, and she told him. Then he assigned an official to her case and said to him, “Give back everything that belonged to her, including all the income from her land from the day she left the country until now.”

During one of his visits to the home of the woman who had prepared a prophet's room for Elisha, he had, evidently, warned her that there would be a seven-year-long famine in the land and that it would be wise for her to migrate to Philistine country. It is not clear how Israel could be plagued by a famine, which would be caused by a lack of rain, and Philistia would be spared.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “A famine is mentioned in ... 2 Kings 4:38, which must belong to the reign of Jehoram, and which is probably identified with that here spoken of. Elisha, on its approach, recommended the Shunammite, though she was a woman of substance (... 2 Kings 4:8), to quit her home and remove to some other residence, where she might, escape the pressure of the calamity He left it to her to choose the place of her temporary abode. The phrase, ‘God *hath called* for a famine,’ means no more and no less than ‘God has determined that there shall be a famine.’ With God to speak the word is to bring about the event. And it shall also come upon the land seven years. Seven years was the actual duration of the great famine, which Joseph foretold in Egypt (... Genesis 41:27), and was the ideally perfect period for a severe famine (... 2 Chronicles 24:13). Many of the best meteorologists are inclined to regard the term of ‘seven years’ as a cyclic period in connection with weather changes.”

There is some question about the time sequence followed in the narrative. The conversation between the king of Israel and Gehazi could hardly have taken place after Gehazi was struck by leprosy.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary comments: “This is supposed to have happened before the cleansing of Naaman, for is it likely that the king would hold conversation with a leprous man; or that, knowing Gehazi had been dismissed with the highest disgrace from the prophet's service, he could hold any conversation with him concerning his late master, relative to whom he could not expect him to give either a true or impartial account?”

Some think that this conversation might have taken place after Gehazi became leprous; the king having an insatiable curiosity to know the private history of a man who had done such astonishing things: and from whom could he get this information, except from the prophet's own confidential servant? It agrees better with the chronology to consider what is here related as having taken place after the cure of Naaman. As to the circumstance of Gehazi's disease, he might overlook that, and converse with him, keeping at a reasonable distance, as nothing but actual contact could defile.”

It is not clear why the widow's property would have been confiscated by someone else during her absence. *The Pulpit Commentary* writes: “During her prolonged absence, some grasping neighbor had seized on the unoccupied house and the uncultivated estate adjoining it, and now refused to restore them to the rightful owner. Widows were especially liable to such treatment on the part of greedy oppressors, since they were, comparatively speaking, weak and defenseless (see ... Isaiah 10:2; Matthew 23. 14). Under such circumstances the injured party would naturally, in an Oriental country, make appeal to the king (comp. ... 2 Samuel 14:4; ... 1 Kings 3:16; ... 2 Kings 6:26, etc.).”

The story is more than the report of a coincidental happening; it is meant to show God's control over all situations in life. It is an illustration of Paul's statement in Romans: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."⁴¹ It was another proof to this Shunammite woman that the God of Elisha was working in her life also. It was also meant to show the king that the God of Israel was the living God of miracles.

The king who had this conversation with Gehazi is intrigued by the miracles performed by Elisha. The main reason for his interest seems to be curiosity, rather than faith in God who allowed the miracles to occur. We are not told who this king was. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: "This king could have been either Ahaziah or Joram, both of whom "did evil" (1 Kings 22:51-52; 2 Kings 3:1-2)."

Evidently, it was relatively easy in those days to get access to the king of the nation. The woman must have known that she did not have to go through a long process of complicated procedures to obtain an audience with the monarch. She went straight to the palace and was admitted.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: "The king was the court of appeal for all matters of land tenure (cf. 1 Kgs 21), so she went to the king as the owner of all property taken over during her absence. That she went to "cry out" (Heb. *s 'q*) for her house (v. 5) indicates that this was a legal term of stronger import than *beg* (NIV or 'sought an audience of the king' to beg, NEB, REB; 'appealed,' RSV). 'Lodge a claim' (JB) bring out the sense well (as in Akkad. *ragâmu*). The king (v. 4) is not named, and since Gehazi is in the royal presence it may be assumed that this was before his dismissal as Elisha's servant (5:27). If so, the king might be Jehu, for J(eh)oram knew Elisha well (3:13)."

When the Shunammite appeared, she was, of course, unaware of the fact that she was being the topic of the king's conversation with Gehazi. She must have known Gehazi as Gehazi knew her. This "coincidence" made it easy for her to receive a favorable answer to her plea for help. The king immediately assigned a government official to her case, ordering him to see to it that she not only receive back her property, but also the revenue made in her absence. It was assumed that the person, who had taken her land, had cultivated it and made a profit from the harvests it had produced.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "The official (*saris*) appointed to look into her case was not a 'eunuch' He had to calculate all the income (usufruct) owing from her fields during her absence ('revenues' NEB, rather than 'produce' RSV). God often uses the authorities to make provision for widows and the fatherless as a charge on the state (Deut. 10:18; 24:19-20; Jer. 7:6-7)."

j. Elisha and Hazael (8:7-15)

7 Elisha went to Damascus, and Ben-Hadad king of Aram was ill. When the king was told, "The man of God has come all the way up here,"

8 he said to Hazael, "Take a gift with you and go to meet the man of God. Consult the Lord through him; ask him, "Will I recover from this illness?""

⁴¹ Rom. 8:28

9 Hazael went to meet Elisha, taking with him as a gift forty camel — loads of all the finest wares of Damascus. He went in and stood before him, and said, “Your son Ben-Hadad king of Aram has sent me to ask, “Will I recover from this illness?”“

10 Elisha answered, “Go and say to him, “You will certainly recover”; but the Lord has revealed to me that he will in fact die.”

11 He stared at him with a fixed gaze until Hazael felt ashamed. Then the man of God began to weep.

12 “Why is my lord weeping?” asked Hazael. “Because I know the harm you will do to the Israelites,” he answered. “You will set fire to their fortified places, kill their young men with the sword, dash their little children to the ground, and rip open their pregnant women.”

13 Hazael said, “How could your servant, a mere dog, accomplish such a feat?” “The Lord has shown me that you will become king of Aram,” answered Elisha.

14 Then Hazael left Elisha and returned to his master. When Ben-Hadad asked, “What did Elisha say to you?” Hazael replied, “He told me that you would certainly recover.”

15 But the next day he took a thick cloth, soaked it in water and spread it over the king’s face, so that he died. Then Hazael succeeded him as king.

Elisha’s visit to Damascus is a fulfillment of God’s prophecy to Elijah. When Elijah went through a period of depression, God told him: “Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.”⁴² Elijah did anoint Elisha as his successor, but he never fulfilled the other parts of his commission, leaving them to Elisha. So here Elisha comes to Damascus in Elijah’s shoes, so to speak. The word “anoint” must not be taken in the literal sense of the word because we do not read that oil was used in the transfer of authority.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “It has been usual to connect this visit of Elisha’s to Damascus with the commission given to Elijah many years previously, to anoint Hazael to be king over Syria (... 1 Kings 19:16). But it is certainly worthy of remark that neither is Elijah authorized to devolve his commission on another, nor is he said to have done so, nor is there any statement in the present narrative or elsewhere that Elisha anointed Hazael. It is therefore quite possible that Elisha’s journey was wholly unconnected with the command given to Elijah. It may, as [one Bible scholar] imagines, have been the consequence of disorders and dangers in Samaria, growing out of the divergence of views between Jehoram and the queen-mother Jezebel, who still retained considerable influence over the government; and Elisha may have taken his journey, not so much for the sake of a visit, as of a prolonged sojourn. That he attracted the attention both of Benhadad and of his successor Hazael is not surprising.”

Elisha’s visit to Damascus is a strange phenomenon. King Ben-Hadad had earlier put a price on Elisha’s head. It seems that for Elisha to go to Damascus was like entering the lion’s den. We don’t read that he had received divine instructions, but it seems logical to assume that the prophet had received such a command, which is simply not mentioned in the text.

Some Bible scholars believe that Ben-Hadad was the title of the kings of Aram, similar to “Pharaoh” in Egypt, rather than a personal name. If this Ben-Hadad is the same as the king who was a contemporary of King Ahab of Israel, he must have been a rather old man at the time of this story.

⁴² 1 Kings 19:15,16

We are given no details about Ben-Hadad's sickness. But it was an affliction that caused the king of Aram to be concerned enough to consult the prophet of Israel when he heard that Elisha was in Damascus. He sent his servant Hazael with a gift to consult Elisha.

The description of the gift sounds excessive: "forty camel — loads of all the finest wares of Damascus." Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, notes about the number: "Since the approach was diplomatic (*your son*, v. 9) and implied politeness rather than subservience (cf. 6:21; I Sam. 25:8) there is no need to suggest that the *forty camel-loads* was just to impress by numbers, that the camels were only lightly loaded, or that the number conventionally indicates a large number."

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "The miracles of Elisha had had at any rate this effect — they had convinced the Syrians that Jehovah was a great and powerful God, and made them regard Elisha himself as a true prophet. Their faith in their own superstitions must have been at least partially shaken by these convictions."

There are some questions in this conversation of Elisha with Hazael that have baffled Bible scholars. It sounds as if Elisha allows Hazael to lie to his king by saying "you will certainly recover." A footnote in the NIV reads: "The Hebrew may also be read 'Go and say, 'You will certainly not recover,' for ...'" Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: "*You will certainly not recover* or live (NIV mg; MT *lo hayoh tiheyeh*) is what is written ..., but to avoid an embarrassing lie by the man of God many MSS have change this to *lô*, 'to him,' and so read this as 'you will certainly live.' ... most LXX MSS follow this. However, the explanation could be that the reply was truthfully that first, the king would die but not from the illness about which he enquired and secondly he would surely die by the hand of an assassin. The first but not the second message was passed on by Hazael (v. 14). This is more likely than that the first was a general answer with the second a more considered reply ..., or that it was addressed to Hazael rather than his master ... or must be taken as a mere greeting"

V. 11 has also given problems of interpretation. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: "This verse is also not clear, since the subject is not specified. Heb. 'He set his face until he was ashamed' (cf. NEB 'the man of God stood there like a man stunned until he could bear it no longer'), assuming that Hazael found the meeting with an ecstatic prophet uncomfortable, takes him to be the subject throughout, while NIV (He [Elisha] started at him ... until Hazael felt ashamed) allows a change of subject. This may be the best solution."

The Pulpit Commentary states: "*And he settled his countenance steadfastly* — literally, and he settled his countenance and set it; i.e. Elisha fixed on Hazael a long and meaning look — *until he* — i.e. Hazael — *was ashamed*; i.e. until Hazael felt embarrassed, and his eyes fell. It may be gathered that the ambitious courtier had already formed a murderous design against his master, and understood by the peculiar gaze which the prophet fixed upon him that his design was penetrated. *And the man of God wept*. There flashed on the prophet's mind all the long series of calamities which Israel would suffer at the hands of Syria during Hazael's reign, and he could not but weep at the thought of them."

The foreknowledge of events to come, which the Lord had given Elisha, overwhelmed him with emotions to the point where he began to weep. We don't read what went on in Hazael's mind as he heard the announcement of his king's death. He must have had ambitions to the throne of Aram and he felt that Elisha's initial words about his king's recovery were disappointing. We can hardly assume that Elisha's message made him into the murderer he was about to become. Not only would he assassinate his king, but he would also brutally attack Israel and commit war crimes in Elisha's country.

In making war against Israel he would not only kill the young men who were serving in the army, but murder little children in a most gruesome way and kill pregnant women by ripping open their bellies.

Hazeal answers Elisha by asking what made the prophet think that he was such “a dog.” The Hebrew text reads literally: “But what is your servant, a dog that he would do such a great thing?” *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “Hazeal does not accuse Elisha of making him out a dog in the future, but calls himself a dog in the present. ‘Dog’ is a word of extreme contempt — ‘the most contemptuous epithet of abuse’ ..., as appears, among other places, from ... 1 Samuel 24:14 and ... 2 Samuel 16:9. Hazeal means to say — How is it possible that he, occupying, as he does, so poor and humble a position as that of a mere courtier or domestic ..., should ever wage war with Israel, and do the ‘great things’ which Elisha has predicted of him?”

As Hazeal arrived back at the royal palace in Aram, he reported to his king, giving him part of Elisha’s message. The next day “the dog” in Hazeal took over and he murdered his king by smothering him with a wet blanket. This kind of murder would leave no trace of violence. It would appear as if the king had died a natural death.

(i) History of reigns (8:16-29)

3. Jehoram of Judah (8:16-24)

16 In the fifth year of Joram son of Ahab king of Israel, when Jehoshaphat was king of Judah, Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat began his reign as king of Judah.

17 He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years.

18 He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for he married a daughter of Ahab. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

19 Nevertheless, for the sake of his servant David, the Lord was not willing to destroy Judah. He had promised to maintain a lamp for David and his descendants forever.

20 In the time of Jehoram, Edom rebelled against Judah and set up its own king.

21 So Jehoram went to Zair with all his chariots. The Edomites surrounded him and his chariot commanders, but he rose up and broke through by night; his army, however, fled back home.

22 To this day Edom has been in rebellion against Judah. Libnah revolted at the same time.

23 As for the other events of Jehoram’s reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah?

24 Jehoram rested with his fathers and was buried with them in the City of David. And Ahaziah his son succeeded him as king.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “The fifth year of Joram of Israel, and so the first of Jehoram was 848 BC (see v. 25; 1 Kgs 22:42, 51; 2 Kgs 3:1). The length of reign in Jerusalem, eight years is given as ‘ten (LXX(L)) or ‘forty’ (LXX), but the figure here could well denote his sole reign not counting his co-regency with Jehoshaphat from 853. RSV and some MSS of LXX omit ‘Jehoshaphat (was) king of Judah.’ The omission of Jehoram’s mother’s name, unexpected for a Judean ruler, might be explained if she were dead before he came to the throne.”

Jehoshaphat, Jehoram’s father, had been faithful to the Lord, but he had made the mistake of associating with Ahab. He had allowed his son to marry the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel.

This influenced not only Jehoram's married life but also his reign over Judah. The Scripture's verdict is: "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord."

The implication of his evil lifestyle and reign is that it brought in danger Judah's existence as an independent kingdom. But the Lord kept His hand of protection on Judah for the sake of David. We read that the Lord "had promised to maintain a lamp for David and his descendants forever." The Hebrew text reads literally: "He had promised him to give him and to his children a light always."

Yet we know that David's offspring did not occupy the throne of Judah forever. Jehoiachin was the last king to reign in Judah. Jeremiah prophesied about him: "This is what the Lord says: "Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah."⁴³

God's promise to David was about the Messiah. When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would give birth to Jesus, he said: "The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."⁴⁴

The main event mentioned in Jehoram's reign was the revolt of Edom. *Barnes' Notes* comments: "Edom, which had been reduced by David (2 Sam 8:14; 1 Kings 11:15-16), but had apparently revolted from Solomon (1 Kings 11:14), was again subjected to Judah in the reign of Jehoshaphat (2 Kings 3:8-26). The Edomites had, however, retained their native kings, and with them the spirit of independence. They now rose in revolt, and fulfilled the prophecy (Gen 27:40), remaining from henceforth a separate and independent people (Jer 25:21; 27:3; Amos 1:11, etc.). Kings of Edom, who seem to be independent monarchs, are often mentioned in the Assyrian inscriptions."

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "Edom had been conquered by Joab in the time of David, and had been treated with great severity, all the males, or at any rate all those of full age, having been put to death (... 1 Kings 11:15, 16). On the death of David, Edom seems to have revolted under a prince named Hadad, and to have re-established its independence. It had been again subjected by the time of Jehoshaphat, who appointed a governor over it (... 1 Kings 22:47), and treated it as a portion of his own territories (... 2 Kings 3:8). Now the yoke was finally thrown off, as had been prophesied (... Genesis 27:40). Edom became once more a separate kingdom, and was especially hostile to Judah. In the reign of Ahaz the Edomites 'smote Judah' and carried away many captives (... 2 Chronicles 28:17). When the Chaldeans attacked and besieged Jerusalem, they cried, 'Down with it, down with it, even to the ground!' (... Psalm 137:7). They looked on with joy at the capture of the holy city (... Obadiah 1:12), and 'stood in the crossway, to cut off such as escaped' (... Obadiah 1:14). After the return from the Captivity, they were still Judah's enemies, and are especially denounced as such by the Prophet Malachi (... Malachi 1:3-5). In the Maccabee wars, we find them always on the Syrian side (1 Mac. 4:29, 61; 5:3; 6:31; 2 Macc. 10:15, etc.), doing their best to rivet the hateful yoke of the heathen on their suffering brethren. As Idumaeans, the Herodian family must have been specially hateful to the Jews. *And made a king over themselves*. The king mentioned in ... 2 Kings 3:9, 26 was probably a mere vassal king under Jehoshaphat."

Barnes' Notes comments on the revolt of Libnah: "Libnah being toward the southwest of Palestine (Josh 15:42), its revolt cannot well have had any direct connection with that of Edom. It had been the capital of a small Canaanite state under a separate king before its conquest by Joshua (Josh 10:30; 12:15), and may perhaps always have retained a considerable Canaanite

⁴³ Jer. 22:30

⁴⁴ Luke 1:32,33

population. Or its loss may have been connected with the attacks made by the Philistines on Jehoram's territories (2 Chron 21:16-17)."

4. Ahaziah of Judah (8:25-29)

25 In the twelfth year of Joram son of Ahab king of Israel, Ahaziah son of Jehoram king of Judah began to reign.

26 Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem one year. His mother's name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of Omri king of Israel.

27 He walked in the ways of the house of Ahab and did evil in the eyes of the Lord, as the house of Ahab had done, for he was related by marriage to Ahab's family.

28 Ahaziah went with Joram son of Ahab to war against Hazael king of Aram at Ramoth Gilead. The Arameans wounded Joram;

29 so King Joram returned to Jezreel to recover from the wounds the Arameans had inflicted on him at Ramoth in his battle with Hazael king of Aram. Then Ahaziah son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to Jezreel to see Joram son of Ahab, because he had been wounded.

Bible scholars assume that the duration of Jehoram's reign over Judah, which is given as "one year," was less than twelve months. It was customary among the Hebrews to count part of a year as a whole. The same was done in the counting of days. Days were considered to begin at 6 PM. A time of, for instance, 5:55 PM through 6:05 PM was considered to be "two days." This calculation accounts for the report that Jesus was in the grave for "three days," although He was buried Friday afternoon before 6 PM and rose Sunday morning before 6 AM.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes about the duration of Ahaziah's reign: "The synchronism implies that he ruled for less than one year, though the historian counts part of a year as a whole. The 'accession year' is here counted as the first regnal year (cf. 9:29, eleventh year of Jehoram)."

Barnes' Notes observes about the war against Aram, in which Judah joined Israel: "This war of the two kings against Hazael seems to have had for its object the recovery of Ramoth-Gilead, which Ahab and Jehoshaphat had vainly attempted fourteen years earlier (1 Kings 22:3-36). Joram probably thought that the accession of a new and usurping monarch presented a favorable opportunity for a renewal of the war. It may also have happened that Hazael was engaged at the time upon his northern frontier with repelling one of those Assyrian attacks which seem by the inscriptions to have fallen upon him in quick succession during his earlier years. At any rate, the war appears to have been successful. Ramoth-Gilead was recovered (2 Kings 9:14), and remained probably thenceforth in the hands of the Israelites. ... According to Josephus, Joram was struck by an arrow in the course of the siege, but remained until the place was taken. He then withdrew to Jezreel (1 Kings 18:45; 21:1), leaving his army under Jehu within the walls of the town."

The Pulpit Commentary adds: "In ... 2 Kings 9:29 the year of Ahaziah's accession is said to have been Joram's eleventh year. It is conjectured that he began to reign as viceroy to his father during his severe illness in Joram's eleventh year, and became sole king at his father's death in the year following. Did Ahaziah the son of Jehoram King of Judah begin to reign; i.e. begin to be full king. Ver. 26. — Two and twenty years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign. The writer of Chronicles says, 'two and forty' (... 2 Chronicles 22:2), which is absolutely impossible, since his father was but forty when he died ... Even 'two and twenty' is a more

advanced age than we should have expected, since Ahaziah was the youngest of Jehoram's sons (... 2 Chronicles 21:17); he must therefore have been born in his father's nineteenth year. Yet he had several elder brothers (... 2 Chronicles 21:17; 22:1)! To explain this, we have to remember (1) the early age at which marriage is contracted in the East (twelve years); and (2) the fact that each prince had, besides his wife, several concubines. That Joram had several appears from ... 2 Chronicles 21:17. *And he reigned one year in Jerusalem. And his mother's Ares was Athaliah, the daughter of Omri King of Israel.* There is something very remarkable in the dignity and precedence attached to Omri. He was, no doubt, regarded of a sort of second founder of the kingdom of Israel, having been the first monarch to establish anything like a stable dynasty. His "statutes" were looked upon as the fundamental laws of the kingdom, and were "kept" down to the time of its destruction (... Micah 6:16). Foreigners knew Samaria as Beth Khumri, or 'the house of Omri.' He is the only Israelite king mentioned by name on the Moabite Stone (line 5), and the earliest mentioned in the inscriptions of Assyria. Even Jehu, who put an end to his dynasty, was regarded by the Assyrians as his descendant, and known under the designation of 'Yahua, the son of Khumri' (Black Obelisk, epig. 2.). Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, is called 'the daughter of Omri,' not only in the present passage, but also in ... 2 Chronicles 22:2."

Donald J. Wisheart, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: "The text here does not clearly state whether the fact that Ahaziah went with Joram (his uncle) to battle with Hazael was a special alliance for this specific purpose, since he may not have been present at the Ramoth Gilead battle but had only visited the king of Israel in Jezreel (9:21, 27, 29)."

(i) Jehu's revolution (9:1 – 10:36)

a. Jehu anointed king (9:1-13)

1 The prophet Elisha summoned a man from the company of the prophets and said to him, "Tuck your cloak into your belt, take this flask of oil with you and go to Ramoth Gilead.

2 When you get there, look for Jehu son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi. Go to him, get him away from his companions and take him into an inner room.

3 Then take the flask and pour the oil on his head and declare, "This is what the Lord says: I anoint you king over Israel." Then open the door and run; don't delay!"

4 So the young man, the prophet, went to Ramoth Gilead.

5 When he arrived, he found the army officers sitting together. "I have a message for you, commander," he said. "For which of us?" asked Jehu. "For you, commander," he replied.

6 Jehu got up and went into the house. Then the prophet poured the oil on Jehu's head and declared, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: "I anoint you king over the Lord's people Israel.

7 You are to destroy the house of Ahab your master, and I will avenge the blood of my servants the prophets and the blood of all the Lord's servants shed by Jezebel.

8 The whole house of Ahab will perish. I will cut off from Ahab every last male in Israel — slave or free.

9 I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat and like the house of Baasha son of Ahijah.

10 As for Jezebel, dogs will devour her on the plot of ground at Jezreel, and no one will bury her." "Then he opened the door and ran.

11 When Jehu went out to his fellow officers, one of them asked him, “Is everything all right? Why did this madman come to you?” “You know the man and the sort of things he says,” Jehu replied.

12 “That’s not true!” they said. “Tell us.” Jehu said, “Here is what he told me: ‘This is what the Lord says: I anoint you king over Israel.’”

13 They hurried and took their cloaks and spread them under him on the bare steps. Then they blew the trumpet and shouted, “Jehu is king!”

The command to anoint Jehu king over Israel had originally been given to Elijah.⁴⁵ But Elijah had been taken to heaven before he could perform that ritual. So Elisha had inherited the task. Elijah, in turn, passed on the assignment to a member of the school of prophets, whose name is not mentioned.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: “Elisha sends a member of a prophetic group (cf. I Kgs 20:35) to fulfill the task of anointing Jehu that Elijah had passed on to him (I Kgs 19:16). This unnamed young prophet is identified in Jewish tradition (*Seder Olam*) with Jonah (2 Kgs 14:25) and involves a foreign mission. Doubtless Jehu was motivated also by personal ambition and the current disaffection with the regime and its heavy taxation. He was, however, God’s agent using the army to end it just as the army had originally brought Omri to power.

Jehu is the only king of the Northern King (Israel) to have been anointed, perhaps to indicate that he should follow in the Davidic tradition, as Saul had been anointed by Samuel (I Sam. 9:16); 10:1); David by Samuel, to mark the Spirit of God endowing him for the task (I Sam. 16:12-13); and Solomon by the high priest Zadok and Nathan the prophet (I Kgs 1:45). Such anointing was symbolic and probably confined to Hebrew practice.”

Elisha’s directives are very specific and rather unusual. His instructions to the student-prophet can be taken as a form of conspiracy. Joram was the king of the Northern Kingdom at that time, but he had been wounded in battle and was probably unable to carry out his royal duties. Jezebel seems to have been in charge of the day-to-day administration. The young man had to anoint Jehu in secret and then run away.

The Pulpit Commentary states about Jehu: “Jehu served as a soldier under Ahaziah and Jehoram, Ahab’s sons, and attained such distinction that he became one of the captains of the host (infra, ver. 5), according to Josephus ... the chief captain. Jehu was commonly known as ‘the son of Nimshi’ (... 1 Kings 19:16; 2 Kings 9:20), either because, his father having died young, he was brought up by his grandfather, or perhaps simply ‘because Nimshi was a person of more importance than Jehoshaphat.’”

When the prophet-student finds Jehu he was in company of other soldiers. Evidently, Jehu was the commander of the group, since he is addressed as “commander.” The Hebrew word used is *sar*, which can be applied to any person of rank.

Jehu meets the prophet-student in private and is anointed in secret as the king of Israel. He is told that his task will be to eradicate all the members of the house of Ahab. The words about Jezebel seem to indicate that the Lord would take care of the queen personally; Jehu would not have to worry about her.

Jehu’s task would be God’s avenging of the murder of the prophets that were killed by Jezebel during Ahab’s reign.

⁴⁵ I Kings 19:16

When Jehu returned to his fellow soldiers, he did not intend to reveal that he had been anointed as king of Israel. He must have realized that what the prophet had said to him amounted to a conspiracy, and that it would be unwise to make that public. But his colleagues put pressure on him and when they heard what had happened, they declared Jehu to be their king.

The Pulpit Commentary states: “Kings were honored by the spreading of garments in their way, that their feet might not touch the dusty ground (... Matthew 20:8). The captains of the host, without hesitation, acclaimed Jehu king on the strength of the prophetic announcement, made his cause their own, and joined in his rebellion. It is reasonably conjectured ... that ‘a deep dissatisfaction with Joram must have prevailed in the army,’ though whether the dissatisfaction arose from the idolatry of the house of Ahab, or from Joram’s withdrawal from the war, may be doubted. Jehu, on the either hand, was evidently highly esteemed. The captains threw themselves with ardor into his cause, and extemporized a sort of enthronement. As often in an Oriental house, an external staircase led from the court to the upper story or to the roof. This they carpeted with their begets, or outer cloaks, and, seating him on the top stair, saluted him as actual king.”

b. The death of the kings of Israel and Judah (9:14-29).

14 So Jehu son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, conspired against Joram. (Now Joram and all Israel had been defending Ramoth Gilead against Hazael king of Aram,

15 but King Joram had returned to Jezreel to recover from the wounds the Arameans had inflicted on him in the battle with Hazael king of Aram.) Jehu said, “If this is the way you feel, don’t let anyone slip out of the city to go and tell the news in Jezreel.”

16 Then he got into his chariot and rode to Jezreel, because Joram was resting there and Ahaziah king of Judah had gone down to see him.

17 When the lookout standing on the tower in Jezreel saw Jehu’s troops approaching, he called out, “I see some troops coming.” “Get a horseman,” Joram ordered. “Send him to meet them and ask, “Do you come in peace?”“

18 The horseman rode off to meet Jehu and said, “This is what the king says: ‘Do you come in peace?’” “What do you have to do with peace?” Jehu replied. “Fall in behind me.” The lookout reported, “The messenger has reached them, but he isn’t coming back.”

19 So the king sent out a second horseman. When he came to them he said, “This is what the king says: ‘Do you come in peace?’” Jehu replied, “What do you have to do with peace? Fall in behind me.”

20 The lookout reported, “He has reached them, but he isn’t coming back either. The driving is like that of Jehu son of Nimshi — he drives like a madman.”

21 “Hitch up my chariot,” Joram ordered. And when it was hitched up, Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah rode out, each in his own chariot, to meet Jehu. They met him at the plot of ground that had belonged to Naboth the Jezreelite.

22 When Joram saw Jehu he asked, “Have you come in peace, Jehu?” “How can there be peace,” Jehu replied, “as long as all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel abound?”

23 Joram turned about and fled, calling out to Ahaziah, “Treachery, Ahaziah!”

24 Then Jehu drew his bow and shot Joram between the shoulders. The arrow pierced his heart and he slumped down in his chariot.

25 Jehu said to Bidkar, his chariot officer, “Pick him up and throw him on the field that belonged to Naboth the Jezreelite. Remember how you and I were riding together in chariots behind Ahab his father when the Lord made this prophecy about him:

26 ‘Yesterday I saw the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons, declares the Lord, and I will surely make you pay for it on this plot of ground, declares the Lord.’ Now then, pick him up and throw him on that plot, in accordance with the word of the Lord.”

27 When Ahaziah king of Judah saw what had happened, he fled up the road to Beth Haggan. Jehu chased him, shouting, “Kill him too!” They wounded him in his chariot on the way up to Gur near Ibleam, but he escaped to Megiddo and died there.

28 His servants took him by chariot to Jerusalem and buried him with his fathers in his tomb in the City of David.

29 (In the eleventh year of Joram son of Ahab, Ahaziah had become king of Judah.)

While the anointing of Jehu had been a form of conspiracy against the rule of Joram, Jehu’s actions were equally a form of rebellion. Acting on the prophetic word, and taking the support of his colleagues as their approval, he set out to accomplish the takeover of the reign of the Northern Kingdom. In order for the rebellion to be successful Jehu felt that secrecy was important, so he ordered his officers to keep his coronation secret. They had celebrated his ascension, but Jehu didn’t want that word to get out.

Joram had returned from the battle of Ramoth Gilead against Aram, because he had been injured. As it turned out, both Joram and Ahaziah, king of Judah, were in Jezreel. Ahaziah had come to visit Joram, since he had heard about his injuries. Jehu was probably not aware of that fact.

Jehu’s approach is noted by the watchman in the tower of Jezreel, who reports to the king that a group of soldiers is approaching. Joram orders a horseman to be sent out to investigate and to report back to him. They were sent to ask the question “peace”? The Hebrew uses the single word *shalom*? But neither the first, nor the second envoy returns. Jehu orders both to fall in behind him. The envoys were probably forced to do so for fear of their life.

As Jehu comes closer to the city the watchman recognizes him by the way of his driving. He reports to the king: “he drives like a madman.” The Hebrew text reads literally: “He drives furiously,” using the word *shigga`own*.

Realizing it was Jehu who was approaching the city, both Joram and Ahaziah decide to meet him and his troop, both driving their own chariot. Joram asks Jehu the same question his guards had asked: “Shalom?” Jehu’s answer is: “How can there be peace as long as all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel abound?” He was holding Joram responsible for the behavior of his mother.

Joram realizes that Jehu had come to take over the throne and he shouts to Ahaziah that Jehu is a betrayer, warning him to save himself. As he turns around to flee, Jehu shoots him in the back, killing him instantly.

Joram’s driver must have stopped, realizing that, if he didn’t, he could lose his life also. Jehu orders him to throw the king’s body in Naboth’s vineyard. We may assume that the whole scene took place at, or close to that place.

We do not read that Jehu was present when Ahab met Elijah at Naboth’s vineyard, but he either was there, or he had heard the report about the confrontation between the prophet and the king. Bidkar was a captain in Jehu’s detachment. Whether he was present when Elijah met Ahab we are not told either. But evidently that story was well-known.

The Pulpit Commentary states: “Jehu recalls his captain’s recollection to an occurrence which was deeply impressed upon his own. ‘When thou and I rode together after Ahab’ probably means ‘when we two stood behind Ahab in his chariot.’”

Ahaziah witnessed the killing of Joram and so he fled. But Jehu ordered his men to kill him also. The killing of the king of Judah had not been part of the commission Jehu had received when the prophet-student anointed him. But *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “It was a bold step in a pretender not yet settled upon the throne to provoke the hostility of a neighboring country by murdering its monarch; but Jehu probably thought he had more to fear from Ahaziah himself, who had been on such close terms of friendship with Jehoram, than from any probable successors. He, therefore, finding him in his power, pursued after him and slew him. From a religious point of view he could justify the act; since the commission given to him (ver. 7) was to smite all the house of Ahab, and Ahaziah was Ahab’s grandson.”

Ahaziah was not killed instantly as Joram was. He was deadly wounded and died shortly afterward at Megiddo. His body was taken back to Judah where he received a normal burial.

c. Jezebel killed (9:30-37).

30 *Then Jehu went to Jezreel. When Jezebel heard about it, she painted her eyes, arranged her hair and looked out of a window.*

31 *As Jehu entered the gate, she asked, “Have you come in peace, Zimri, you murderer of your master?”*

32 *He looked up at the window and called out, “Who is on my side? Who?” Two or three eunuchs looked down at him.*

33 *“Throw her down!” Jehu said. So they threw her down, and some of her blood spattered the wall and the horses as they trampled her underfoot.*

34 *Jehu went in and ate and drank. “Take care of that cursed woman,” he said, “and bury her, for she was a king’s daughter.”*

35 *But when they went out to bury her, they found nothing except her skull, her feet and her hands.*

36 *They went back and told Jehu, who said, “This is the word of the Lord that he spoke through his servant Elijah the Tishbite: On the plot of ground at Jezreel dogs will devour Jezebel’s flesh.*

37 *Jezebel’s body will be like refuse on the ground in the plot at Jezreel, so that no one will be able to say, ‘This is Jezebel.’”*

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, gives more credit to Jezebel and her behavior than the text seems to warrant. We rather get the impression that her attitude was brazen and daring. She must have known that Jehu meant to kill her and she believed, either that her servants would defend her, or that she ought to meet her fate courageously.

She put on makeup as she heard Jehu was approaching the palace and she addressed Jehu as “Zimri,” the general who assassinated King Elah.⁴⁶ Jezebel’s use of that name may also be a reference to the duration of Zimri’s reign. He only occupied the throne of Israel for seven days!

The scene depicts Jehu as a ruthless character. Jezebel’s taunt may have made him react in anger, but he may initially have planned to arrest the queen and execute her after due process.

⁴⁶ I Kings 16:9, 10

Jezebel's attitude made him decide to act immediately. Looking up at the window where Jezebel was in the company of a few eunuchs, he called "Who is on my side?" asking them to join his rebellion.

Jezebel may not have been loved by her lackeys. It is also quite likely that her servants were more afraid of Jehu than of her. They obey Jehu's orders to throw her out of the window to her death.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "History presents no parallel to such an indignity. Kings and queens had been, time after time, removed by violence; their lives had been taken; they had been transplanted to another sphere of being. But the open casting forth from a window of a crowned head by the menials of the court, at the command of a usurper, was a new thing, unprecedented, unparalleled. It must have been a shock to all established notions of propriety. In commanding it Jehu showed his superiority to existing prejudice, his utter fearlessness, and his willingness to create a new precedent, which might seriously shake the monarchical principle."

Whether the fall killed Jezebel or whether she was killed when the horses trampled her, is not told. The same Hebrew verb is used as in the case of the king's officer who had doubted Elisha's word that the famine of Samaria would be lifted the next day. We read: "Now the king had put the officer on whose arm he leaned in charge of the gate, and the people *trampled* him in the gateway, and he died, just as the man of God had foretold when the king came down to his house."⁴⁷

After Jehu had entered the palace and taken some food and drink, he ordered some of his aides to bury Jezebel's body, saying: "she was a king's daughter." He seems to have had more respect for her dead than alive. But when the servants went out to take care of the mangled body, the dogs had devoured most of her remains. Only her skull, hands and feet were left.

Jehu shows to have had a remarkable knowledge of prophecy. When he heard what had happened to Jezebel's body, he quoted Elijah's words to King Ahab: "Concerning Jezebel the Lord says: "Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. Dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city, and the birds of the air will feed on those who die in the country."⁴⁸

d. The extermination of the royal families of Israel and Judah and of Baal worshippers (10:1-36).

(i) The end of Ahab's family (10:1-11)

1 Now there were in Samaria seventy sons of the house of Ahab. So Jehu wrote letters and sent them to Samaria: to the officials of Jezreel, to the elders and to the guardians of Ahab's children. He said,

2 "As soon as this letter reaches you, since your master's sons are with you and you have chariots and horses, a fortified city and weapons,

3 choose the best and most worthy of your master's sons and set him on his father's throne. Then fight for your master's house."

4 But they were terrified and said, "If two kings could not resist him, how can we?"

⁴⁷ II Kings 7:17

⁴⁸ I Kings 21:23,24

5 So the palace administrator, the city governor, the elders and the guardians sent this message to Jehu: "We are your servants and we will do anything you say. We will not appoint anyone as king; you do whatever you think best."

6 Then Jehu wrote them a second letter, saying, "If you are on my side and will obey me, take the heads of your master's sons and come to me in Jezreel by this time tomorrow." Now the royal princes, seventy of them, were with the leading men of the city, who were rearing them.

7 When the letter arrived, these men took the princes and slaughtered all seventy of them. They put their heads in baskets and sent them to Jehu in Jezreel.

8 When the messenger arrived, he told Jehu, "They have brought the heads of the princes." Then Jehu ordered, "Put them in two piles at the entrance of the city gate until morning."

9 The next morning Jehu went out. He stood before all the people and said, "You are innocent. It was I who conspired against my master and killed him, but who killed all these?"

10 Know then, that not a word the Lord has spoken against the house of Ahab will fail. The Lord has done what he promised through his servant Elijah."

11 So Jehu killed everyone in Jezreel who remained of the house of Ahab, as well as all his chief men, his close friends and his priests, leaving him no survivor.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "The history is here concerned to show the zeal of Jehu, acting as the divine agent, to obliterate completely all descendants and relatives of Ahab and Amaziah who might perpetuate evil of any type in opposition to God in both Israel and Judah (vv. 1-14). Jehu also acted to forestall any continuing blood feud and to protect his newly founded dynasty. He also massacred Baal worshippers in Samaria (vv. 15-27). These actions were considered to go beyond Jehu's remit and were severely disapproved by Hosea (Hosea 1:4)."

The Lord had told Hosea to marry the prostitute Gomer. When the first son in that marriage was born, we read: "Then the Lord said to Hosea, "Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel.""

The seventy sons of King Ahab were, obviously the fruit of his extended harem. At the death of Ahab, they may have been teenagers or younger boys. But some of them must have been old enough to take the reign of the Northern Kingdom, since Jehu suggests that the elders of Samaria put one of them on the throne to defend the kingdom and oppose his rebellion.

The Pulpit Commentary states: "The immediate question, after Joram's death, was — would any member of his family rise up as a claimant of the throne, and dispute the succession with Jehu? Ahab had seventy male descendants, all of them resident in Samaria: would there be any one among their number bold enough to come forward and assert his hereditary right? Jehu regarded this as the most pressing and imminent danger, wherefore his first step was to challenge such action, and either precipitate it or crush it."

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments: "Jehu wrote letters, and sent to Samaria, unto the rulers of Jezreel. ... It may be inferred from the tenor of Jehu's letters that their first intention was to select the fittest of the royal family and set him up as king; or perhaps this challenge of Jehu was designed as a stroke of policy on his part to elicit their views, and try whether they were inclined to be pacific or hostile. The bold character of the man, and the rapid success of his conspiracy terrified the civic authorities of Samaria and Jezreel into submission."

The reaction of the elders of Samaria to Jehu's proposition was fear. They had heard of his actions and considered that, if they opposed Jehu they would be his next victims. So they wave a white flag and ask what his conditions of surrender were.

Jehu asked them for the heads of the princes. All seventy were decapitated and the heads were sent in baskets to Jehu. The elders must have figured that merely killing the princes would not be sufficient proof to Jehu that his demands had been met.

The gory exhibition of the heads of the decapitated royals strikes us as a crude and needless show of cruelty. Evidently, Jehu wanted to impress upon the nation that he was in complete control. It was also a demonstration of his obedience to the Lord's command to wipe out any part of Ahab's royal line. No descendant of the royal family would be left to claim the throne.

The most important message Jehu wanted to convey to the public was that the elders of Samaria had joined his revolt. In executing the sons of Ahab they had become co-conspirators with Jehu. That is what Jehu made clear when he stated in public: "You are innocent. It was I who conspired against my master and killed him, but who killed all these?" His appeal to the prophecy Elijah had received of the Lord made it legal.

(ii) The massacre of Ahaziah's family (10:12-14)

12 Jehu then set out and went toward Samaria. At Beth Eked of the Shepherds, 13 he met some relatives of Ahaziah king of Judah and asked, "Who are you?" They said, "We are relatives of Ahaziah, and we have come down to greet the families of the king and of the queen mother."

14 "Take them alive!" he ordered. So they took them alive and slaughtered them by the well of Beth Eked — forty-two men. He left no survivor.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "It is likely that the Judean princes were returning from Jezreel before the atrocities there and at Samaria were known to them. Their visit could be explained by their relationship with the Omride house through the queen mother (2 Kgs 9:30)."

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "There is something abnormal and needing explanation in this visit. Forty-two princes, with their retinues, do not, under ordinary circumstances, start off on a sudden from one capital, on a complimentary visit to their cousins at another."

The suggestion is that Queen Athaliah, who was a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, had heard rumors of trouble in Samaria and she wanted the princes to go and report back to her. They may have been totally unaware of what had happened and merely went out on a social call or a family visit. They would have heard of Ahab's death, since the king of Judah had been involved in that battle in which that king was killed, but they must have been unaware of the death of Jezebel.

The members of the delegation did not realize how dangerous their visit could be. *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests that they knew more than they let on. We read: "Falling in with an armed force stronger than their own, they pretended ignorance of the revolution that had taken place, and sought to pass off their hostile purpose under the pretence of a visit of compliment. But the pretence did not deceive Jehu." It seems more logical, however, to assume that they were ignorant.

(iii) Jehu meets Jehonadab (10:15-17)

15 After he left there, he came upon Jehonadab son of Recab, who was on his way to meet him. Jehu greeted him and said, “Are you in accord with me, as I am with you?” “I am,” Jehonadab answered. “If so,” said Jehu, “give me your hand.” So he did, and Jehu helped him up into the chariot.

16 Jehu said, “Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord.” Then he had him ride along in his chariot.

17 When Jehu came to Samaria, he killed all who were left there of Ahab’s family; he destroyed them, according to the word of the Lord spoken to Elijah.

Regarding the encounter of Jehu with Jehonadab, Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “The Rechabites originated among the Kenites (I Chr. 2:55, cf. Judg. 4:11-12) and are generally thought to have harked back to the supposed purity of a nomadic simple lifestyle in the desert which stood for the following of Yahweh better than later urbanism. They abstained from wine. *Jehonadab* was remembered as the leader of this conservative movement (Jer. 35:6, 14-16). Some believe the Rechabites were craft workers in metal. Josephus ... makes Jehonadab to be a longstanding friend of Jehu so that their association would not alarm the Baal priests in view of their know standing in the community. In the question “Is it good with your heart as my heart is with your heart?” the text asks if they are allied in this matter (Are you in accord with me?).”

So Jehonadab was not a Jew, but a descendant of an ancient Canaanite tribe. *Barnes’ Notes* observes about the Kenites: “Jehonadab ... belonged to the tribe of the Kenites, one of the most ancient in Palestine (Gen 15:19). Their origin is unknown, but their habits were certainly those of Arabs. Owing to their connection with Moses (Num 24:21 ...), they formed a friendship with the Israelites, accompanied them in their wanderings, and finally received a location in the wilderness of Judah (Judg 1:16). The character of this chief, Jonadab, is best seen in the rule which he established for his descendants (Jer 35:6-7) - a rule said to be still observed at the present day. It would seem that he sympathized strongly with Jehu’s proceedings, and desired to give the countenance of his authority, such as it was, to the new reign.”

The Pulpit Commentary states: “Between Beth-Eked and Samaria Jehu fell in with the great Kenite chief, Jehonadab, the founder of the remarkable tribe and sect of the Rechabites (... Jeremiah 35:6-19). Jehonadab is mentioned only here and in the passage of Jeremiah just quoted; but it is evident that he was an important personage. His tribe, the Kenites, was probably of Arab origin, and certainly of Arab habits. It attached itself to the Israelites during their wanderings in the Sinaitic desert, and was given a settlement in “the wilderness of Judah,” on the conquest of Palestine (... Judges 1:16). Jehonadab seems to have been of an ascetic turn, and to have laid down for his tribe a rule of life stricter and more severe than any known previously. He required them not merely to dwell in tents, and, unless under the compulsion of war, never to enter cities, but also to abstain wholly from the use of wine, and to have neither house, nor field, nor vineyard (... Jeremiah 35:8-10).”

If, as the commentary states, Jehonadab was of Arab descent, it would mean that he was a descendant of Ishmael and thus remotely related to the Israelites via Abraham. His tribe must have preserved the worship of Yahweh throughout the centuries, which is something not mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament.

(iv) The worshippers of Baal killed (10:18-27)

18 Then Jehu brought all the people together and said to them, “Ahab served Baal a little; Jehu will serve him much.

19 Now summon all the prophets of Baal, all his ministers and all his priests. See that no one is missing, because I am going to hold a great sacrifice for Baal. Anyone who fails to come will no longer live.” But Jehu was acting deceptively in order to destroy the ministers of Baal.

20 Jehu said, “Call an assembly in honor of Baal.” So they proclaimed it.

21 Then he sent word throughout Israel, and all the ministers of Baal came; not one stayed away. They crowded into the temple of Baal until it was full from one end to the other.

22 And Jehu said to the keeper of the wardrobe, “Bring robes for all the ministers of Baal.” So he brought out robes for them.

23 Then Jehu and Jehonadab son of Recab went into the temple of Baal. Jehu said to the ministers of Baal, “Look around and see that no servants of the Lord are here with you — only ministers of Baal.”

24 So they went in to make sacrifices and burnt offerings. Now Jehu had posted eighty men outside with this warning: “If one of you lets any of the men I am placing in your hands escape, it will be your life for his life.”

25 As soon as Jehu had finished making the burnt offering, he ordered the guards and officers: “Go in and kill them; let no one escape.” So they cut them down with the sword. The guards and officers threw the bodies out and then entered the inner shrine of the temple of Baal.

26 They brought the sacred stone out of the temple of Baal and burned it.

27 They demolished the sacred stone of Baal and tore down the temple of Baal, and people have used it for a latrine to this day.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “This account tells of a great destruction of the Baal worship, its followers and the temple erected by Ahab and Jezebel (I Kgs 16:31-32). It was accomplished by trickery (v. 19), deceptively (NIV; Heb. “*qb*”) and using “subtily” (AV) and “with cunning” (RSV). The same verb occurs in Jacob’s name (Gen. 25:26; 27:35-36). As Elijah had summoned all the prophets of Baal (I Kgs 18:19) so Jehu now calls together all the ‘worshippers.’ This is a better translation than *ministers*, who would be included (NIV; MT *’bd* means ‘to serve, worship, minister’). The call was based on a proclamation of a special feast day, used by Jehu perhaps as a pretext for challenging the religious dignitaries (*summon*) just as he had already the secular rulers (vv. 1-6). There may be an oral play on words between ‘worship’ (*’abad*) and ‘slaughter’ (*’ibbad*), as in verse 19.”

Bible scholars voice different opinions about Jehu’s motives in wanting to eradicate the worship of Baal. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states: “Jehu had determined to have no worship in Israel but that of the golden calves at Dan and Beth-el; therefore he purposes to destroy all the worshippers of Baal: and that he may do it without suspicion, he proclaims a great sacrifice; and that he may do it the more easily he gathers them all together into one place.”

Barnes’ Notes observes: “Though we cannot ascribe to Jehu a spirit of true piety (see 2 Kings 10:29), we can well enough understand how the soldier, trained in the Syrian wars, revolted against the unmanly and voluptuous worship of the Dea Syria, and wished to go back to the simple solemn service of Yahweh. These views and feelings it would have been dangerous to declare during the lifetime of Jezebel. Even after her death it was prudent to temporize, to wait

until the party of Ahab was crushed politically, before broaching the religious question. Having now slain all the issue of Ahab in the kingdom of Israel, and all the influential men of the party (2 Kings 10:7,11,17), Jehu felt that he might begin his reformation of religion. But even now he uses “subtilty” rather than open violence.”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments: “Jehu allayed the people’s suspicions by pretending to worship Baal. This act, which was one of his falsehoods, showed his bloodthirstiness. ... But Jehu did it in subtilty. Jehu planned a trap. The garments (v. 22) were to make it easier to identify the priests of Baal. Gathering them in the outer-court confines of the Temple (v. 21) made it easier to effect their death. ... Only the priests of Baal were to be put to death. Jehu intended to break the power of Ahab’s dynasty completely by removing these adherents, and he hoped at the same time to gain the support of those loyal to Israel’s God, thus securing his own position.”

The Pulpit Commentary states: “Hitherto the revolution had borne the appearance of a mere dynastic change, like those introduced by Baasha (... 1 Kings 15:27-29), Zimri (... 1 Kings 16:9-12), and Omri (... 1 Kings 16:17-19), and had had none of the characteristics of a religious reformation. Probably, as yet, no suspicion had touched the public mind that Jehu would be a less zealous worshipper of Baal than his predecessor. The outburst against Jezebel’s ‘whoredoms’ and ‘witchcrafts’ (... 2 Kings 9:22) would be known to few, and might not have been understood as a condemnation of the entire Baalistic system. The ‘zeal for Jehovah’ whispered in the ear of Jehonadab (ver. 16) had been hitherto kept secret. Thus there was nothing to prevent the multitude from giving implicit credence to the proclamation now made, and looking to see the new reign inaugurated by a magnificent and prolonged festival in honor of the two great Phoenician deities, Baal the sun-god, and Ashtoreth or Astarte the famous ‘Dea Syra.’ Such festivals were frequently held in Phoenicia and the rest of Syria, often lasting over many days, and constituting a time of excitement, feasting, and profligate enjoyment, which possessed immense attraction for the great mass of Asiatics.”

The Bible text seems to leave little doubt that Jehu’s intent was to obey the order that had been given to him by God. He may have lacked in love for the Lord with all of his heart and mind, but at least he was obedient. That he used trickery to assemble all the priests of Baal is understandable. How else would he get them all together? And if not all of Baal’s priests were assembled, how could the Baal cult be eradicated?

So Jehu proclaimed a feast of sacrifices for Baal, threatening all of Baal’s adherents with death if they did not appear. The Hebrew word used to describe the feast is *’atsarah*, which the KJV generally renders as a “solemn assembly.”

The place of this mass gathering is not mentioned in Scripture; it was most likely the capital Samaria. All the priests of Baal showed up and we are told that the temple of Baal “was full from one end to the other.” The Hebrew text reads literally “from one mouth to another.”

Special clothes were distributed to all the adherents so they could be easily identified as Baal priests. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “The wearing of special (usually white or red) garments adds to the solemnity of the occasion, since they were provided by the *keeper of the wardrobe* (AV “him that was over the vestry”). The word for robes (*mettahâ*) only occurs here and of the clothes put round Jeremiah to lift him from a cistern (38:11).”

Jehu was accompanied by Jehonadab who had probably been informed by Jehu about what he planned to do. It was to Jehonadab that Jehu had said: “See my zeal for the Lord.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹ II Kings 10:16

Jehu had placed eighty guards around the temple and had given them specific instructions that none of the participants were allowed to exit. If anyone escaped it would be their lives for them. They must have understood some of Jehu's purpose; otherwise such instructions would have made no sense. The fact that so many guards were involved must have made it difficult to keep the intent of the massacre a secret, but evidently, it worked.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "Keeping up the pretence that he was a devotee of Baal, anxious to 'serve him much' (ver. 18), Jehu himself entered the sacred edifice, together with Jehonadab the son of Rechab, whom he wished to have as a witness to his 'zeal for the Lord' (ver. 16). Having entered, he addressed the multitude, or the chief authorities among them, requiring that they should exercise extreme vigilance, and make it quite certain that none but true followers of Baal were present.

Jehu's real object was undoubtedly to save the lives of any 'servants of Jehovah' who might incautiously have mixed themselves up with the Baal-worshippers, out of curiosity, or to have their share in the general holiday. That he should have thought such a thing possible or even probable indicates the general laxity of the time, and the want of any sharp line of demarcation between the adherents of the two religions. He cleverly masked his desire for the safety of his own religionists under a show of keen anxiety that the coming ceremonies should not be profaned by the presence of scoffers or indifferent persons. His requirement was in the spirit of that warning which the heathen commonly gave before entering upon the more sacred rites of their religion."

The NIV reads: "As soon as Jehu had finished making the burnt offering ..." but the Hebrew text reads literally: "As soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering," leaving open who performed the ritual. There is no reason to believe that Jehu went as far as bringing a sacrifice to Baal as to avoid suspicion.

The Pulpit Commentary states: "It has been concluded from this that Jehu offered the sacrifices with his own hand, as though he were the most zealous of Baal's adorers ... but the conclusion does not follow necessarily from the expression used. ... Jehu may be said to have made the offerings, because he famished the victims, not because he immolated them with his own hand. Throughout heathendom, wherever there were priests, it was the duty of the priests to slay the victims offered."

The Hebrew word rendered "guards" is *ruwts*, which literally means "runners." *Barnes' Notes* explains: "This name seems to have been given to the royal body-guard as early as the time of Saul (1 Sam 22:17, margin). It was their duty to run by the side of the king's chariot as he moved from place to place." The word occurs for the first time in Scripture as a verb in the verse: "Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he *hurried* from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground."⁵⁰ And also in: "But Esau *ran* to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept."⁵¹

At Jehu's command the guards moved in and massacred all the Baal worshippers, throwing their bodies outside the building. The NIV reads: "They brought the sacred stone out of the temple of Baal and burned it." The Hebrew word used is *matstsebah*, which can mean "a pillar" or "idol." It could mean that they destroyed the idol image. The word is used in Scripture for any kind of stone. In the story of Jacob we read: "Early the next morning Jacob took the *stone*

⁵⁰ Gen. 18:12

⁵¹ Gen. 33:4

he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it.”⁵² But it can also refer to an idol, as in the verse: “Do not bow down before their gods or worship them or follow their practices. You must demolish them and break their sacred *stones* to pieces.”⁵³

The NIV states that the temple was turned into a “latrine.” The NKJV renders the Hebrew word *mowtsa’ah* as “refuse dump.”

(v) Résumé of Jehu’s achievements (10:28-36)

28 So Jehu destroyed Baal worship in Israel.

29 However, he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit — the worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan.

30 The Lord said to Jehu, “Because you have done well in accomplishing what is right in my eyes and have done to the house of Ahab all I had in mind to do, your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.”

31 Yet Jehu was not careful to keep the law of the Lord, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam, which he had caused Israel to commit.

32 In those days the Lord began to reduce the size of Israel. Hazael overpowered the Israelites throughout their territory

33 east of the Jordan in all the land of Gilead (the region of Gad, Reuben and Manasseh), from Aroer by the Arnon Gorge through Gilead to Bashan.

34 As for the other events of Jehu’s reign, all he did, and all his achievements, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?

35 Jehu rested with his fathers and was buried in Samaria. And Jehoahaz his son succeeded him as king.

36 The time that Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria was twenty-eight years.

Jehu received high marks for administering God’s judgment upon the house of Ahab and eradicating the Baal cult. But he failed the test of faithfulness in serving YHWH. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “He seems to have been driven more by a political desire to secure his own position on the throne of the Northern Kingdom than by a desire to serve the LORD. In this he was guilty of using God’s judgment on the house of Ahab to satisfy his self interest.” He did not rid the kingdom of the idol rituals that had been introduced by Jeroboam, who had broken with God’s revelation of Himself by making two images of golden calves, one in Bethel and one Dan, saying that those were the gods that had brought Israel out of Egypt.⁵⁴

Jehu’s neglect would eventually lead to the captivity of the Northern Kingdom from which the people never returned. Yet, God recompensed Jehu for his obedience in eradicating the house of Ahab in that his offspring continued to occupy the throne of Israel for four generations.

Even during Jehu’s reign God began to punish the nation by reducing their territory. King Hazael of Aram made raids into the country and occupied certain of its areas. He had assassinated King Ben-Hadad and usurped the throne of Aram, a feat that had been prophesied by Elisha.⁵⁵

⁵² Gen. 28:18

⁵³ Ex. 23:24

⁵⁴ I Kings 12:28-30

⁵⁵ II Kings 8:12

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “The Arameans took advantage of the new political situation in Israel and the cessation of pressure from the Assyrians, engaged elsewhere, to *reduce* or ‘make gashes in’ (MT) Israelite territory making attacks on the northern border and regaining land east of Jordan which had been so often the area of contention between them.”

An inscription on the Black Obelisk of Assyria states that Jehu submitted to Shalmaneser III of Assyria in 841 BC, a fact that is not mentioned in Scripture. According to *Halley's Bible Handbook*, the inscription reads: “The tribute of Jehu, son (successor) of Omri, silver, gold, bowls of gold, chalices of gold, cups of gold, vases of gold, lead, scepter for the king, and spear-shafts I have received.”

When Jehu died, his son Jehoahaz succeeded him and reigned for twenty-eight years.

5. The History of Judah and Israel to the Fall of the Northern Kingdom (2 KGS 11:1 – 17:41)

a. Athaliah takes over Judah (11:1-20)

(i) Athaliah's plot (11:1-3)

1 When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she proceeded to destroy the whole royal family.

2 But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Jehoram and sister of Ahaziah, took Joash son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the royal princes, who were about to be murdered. She put him and his nurse in a bedroom to hide him from Athaliah; so he was not killed.

3 He remained hidden with his nurse at the temple of the Lord for six years while Athaliah ruled the land.

The Fausset's Bible Dictionary states about Athaliah: “Daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, married Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram, king of Judah. It was a union (compare 1 Cor 15:33; 6:14-18) fatal to the cause of piety in Judah, a cause which the godly Jehoshaphat had so much at heart. She bore a hideous likeness to Jezebel her mother, as the history with such unstudied truthfulness brings out. By her influence Jehoram was led to walk in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab (2 Chron 21:6). Baal worship through her was introduced into Judah, as it had been through her mother into Israel. Worldly policy, the hope of reuniting Israel to Judah, and concession to his son, whose reckless violence was afterward seen in the murder of his own brothers (2 Chron 21:3-4), infatuated Jehoshaphat to sanction the union. The same bloodthirstiness, lust of dominion over husband and over the state, and unscrupulous wickedness in killing all that stood in the way of ambition, appear in the daughter as in the mother.”

As *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “Athaliah has been well called ‘a second Jezebel.’ She was married to Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, probably in the lifetime of his father, to cement the alliance concluded between Ahab and Jehoshaphat against the Syrians (... 1 Kings 22:2-4). She inherited much of her mother Jezebel's character, obtained an unlimited ascendancy over her husband, Jehoram, and kept her son Ahaziah in leading-strings. It was unquestionably through her influence that Jehoram was prevailed upon to introduce the Baal-worship into Judah (... 2

Kings 8:18; ... 2 Chronicles 2:5, 11), and Ahaziah prevailed upon to maintain it (... 2 Kings 8:27;

2 Chronicles 22:3, 'He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counselor to do wickedly'). On the death of Ahaziah, she found her position seriously imperiled. The crown would have passed naturally to one of her grandchildren, the eldest of the sons of Ahaziah. She would have lost her position of *gebirah*, or queen mother, which would have passed to the widow of Ahaziah, the mother of the new sovereign. If she did not at once lose all influence, at any rate a counter-influence to hers would have been established; and this might well have been that of the high priest, who was closely connected by marriage with the royal family. Under these circumstances, she took the bold resolution described in the next clause. She arose and destroyed the seed royal. She issued her orders, and had all the members of the house of David on whom she could lay her hands put to death. The royal house had already been greatly depleted by Jehoram's murder of his brothers (... 2 Chronicles 21:4), by Arab marauders (... 2 Chronicles 21:17), and by Jehu's murder of the 'brethren of Ahaziah' (... 2 Kings 10:14); but it is clear that Ahaziah had left several sons behind him, and some of his 'brethren' had also, in all probability, left issue. There may also have been many other descendants of David in Judah, belonging to other branches of the house than that of Rehoboam. Athaliah, no doubt, endeavored to make a clean sweep, and get rid of them all."

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes about Jehosheba: "The wife of the high priest *Jehosheba* (Jehoshabeath in 2 Chr. 22:11) was a daughter of Jehoram through another wife than Athaliah. She was probably the half-sister of Ahaziah and the infant Joash was her nephew. *J(eh)oash* ('Yah[weh] gave') is identical in name with the contemporary Israelite king (13:9-10, cf. 12:1). ... Jehosheba may have lived in the priest's quarters adjacent to the temple. Josephus ... says that the *bedroom* where the child and his nurse hid was a room where spare furniture and mattresses were stored. ... The child was *about to be murdered*—by such a narrow margin the lamp of David ... was almost extinguished. But God had promised that he would never fail to provide an heir to David (Ps. 89:36)."

It is difficult to imagine how a person, a woman in this case, could bring herself to commit a crime of such magnitude simply for the reason to hold on to the reins of power.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary observes: "How dreadful is the lust of reigning! It destroys all the charities of life; and turns fathers, mothers, brothers, and children, into the most ferocious savages! Who, that has it in his power, makes any conscience 'To swim to sovereign rule through seas of blood?'"

In what a dreadful state is that land that is exposed to political revolutions, and where the succession to the throne is not most positively settled by the clearest and most decisive law! Reader, beware of revolutions; there have been some useful ones, but they are in general the heaviest curse of God."

And *Barnes' Notes* states about Athaliah: "The revolution effected by Jehu touched her nearly. It struck away from her the support of her relatives; it isolated her religious system, severing the communication with Phoenicia; and the death of Ahaziah deprived her of her legal status in Judaea, which was that of queen-mother ..., and transferred that position to the chief wife of her deceased son. Athaliah, instead of yielding to the storm, or merely standing on the defensive, resolved to become the assailant, and strike before any plans could be formed against her. In the absence of her son, hers was probably the chief authority at Jerusalem. She used it to command the immediate destruction of all the family of David, already thinned by previous massacres (2 Kings 10:14; 2 Chron 21:4,17), and then seized the throne."

Athaliah must not have kept close count of all the princes and how many of them were actually killed, otherwise she would have discovered that one of them was lacking. Thus Jehosheba succeeded in keeping Joash hidden in one of the rooms in the temple. Athaliah, being a worshipper of Baal, would not have entered the temple of Yahweh which Solomon had built. The poor boy must have spent six miserable years of his life, not being allowed to be seen in public.

(ii) Jehoiada's plan (11:4-8)

4 In the seventh year Jehoiada sent for the commanders of units of a hundred, the Carites and the guards and had them brought to him at the temple of the Lord. He made a covenant with them and put them under oath at the temple of the Lord. Then he showed them the king's son. 5 He commanded them, saying, "This is what you are to do: You who are in the three companies that are going on duty on the Sabbath — a third of you guarding the royal palace, 6 a third at the Sur Gate, and a third at the gate behind the guard, who take turns guarding the temple— 7 and you who are in the other two companies that normally go off Sabbath duty are all to guard the temple for the king. 8 Station yourselves around the king, each man with his weapon in his hand. Anyone who approaches your ranks must be put to death. Stay close to the king wherever he goes."

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: "Jehoiada took the army company commanders, probably of the royal guard, the royal bodyguard and the royal escort into his confidence when he *made a covenant with them* (NEB 'agreement,' REB 'compact') under oath. The Carites were mercenaries from Caria in south-west Asia Minor and may be identified with the Kerethites in the royal bodyguard of David (2 Sam. 20:23 *Kari*). The account in Chronicles (2 Chr. 23:1) names the commanders and the recruitment of Levites and heads of families ('clans'). The plan was for the five companies of priest, including two that had gone off duty after a week's service and the one on duty, all to be in the temple together without suspicion at a major Sabbath festival. Meanwhile the guards from the royal palace (leaving that clear, v. 13) and others would be able to protect the young king at his public appearance."

Bible scholars have some difficulty in reconciling the report in Second Kings with the one in Second Chronicles. Also in the text before us they find a problem in that in v. 5 there is a group that goes on duty on the Sabbath and in v. 7 a group that is off duty. The NIV seems to solve this by stating that the two companies "normally" go off duty, implying that there would be a change of the normal routine.

The Pulpit Commentary writes about Jehoiada's conspiracy: "After waiting, impatiently we may be sure, for six long years, and seeing the young prince grow from an infant to a boy of seven years of age, Jehoiada deemed that the time was come to venture on an effort. It was necessary for him to make his arrangements beforehand with great care. His first step was to sound the captains of the royal guard. To these men, five in number (2 Chronicles 23. 1), he sent secretly, and inquired them to confer with him in the temple on important business. Finding them well disposed to adopt his views, he revealed to them the fact that Joash had escaped the massacre of Ahaziah's sons, and was still living, even allowing them to see him. The result of the interview was that they put themselves at Jehoiada's disposal, and agreed to take their orders from him (ver. 4). Jehoiada then proceeded to his second step. Either distrusting the body-guard

which the captains commanded, or regarding it as insufficient in numbers, he gave them orders to visit the various cities of Judea, and collect from them a strong force of Levites and other trusty persons, and bring them to Jerusalem (... 2 Chronicles 23:2), where he would give them their orders. This was done successfully, and, as it would seem, without in any way rousing the suspicions of Athaliah. A day was fixed for proclaiming Joash king; the guard and the Levites were skillfully disposed about the temple and the palace; the king was brought up, crowned, anointed, and saluted as monarch, with noisy acclamations (ver. 12). The noise was heard in the palace, and Athaliah went forth, with a few attendants, to inquire the reason of it. Following the sound, she came to the temple, and entered it, when she saw what was going on, and cried out, 'Treason! Treason!' By Jehoiada's order the guards seized her, conducted her out of the temple, and slew her (vers. 13-16)."

It seems that Jehoiada first made the commanders swear an oath of secrecy before revealing what that plot was. He must have had their confidence; otherwise they would probably have wanted to know first what the plot was about.

Athaliah must not have been popular among the military and Jehoiada had no problem getting their cooperation to plot against the queen.

Barnes' Notes observes: "Five divisions of the guard under their five captains are distinguished here. Three of the five divisions 'enter in' on the Sabbath; the other two 'go forth' on the Sabbath (2 Kings 11:7). By the former phrase seems to be meant the mounting guard at the royal palace (the 'king's house,' where Athaliah then was); by the latter the serving of escort to the sovereign beyond the palace bounds. Jehoiada orders that of those whose business it would be to guard the palace on the ensuing Sabbath, one company or cohort should perform that task in the ordinary way, while another should watch the gate of Sur-or better, 'the gate of the foundation' (2 Chron 23:5) - that by which the palace was usually quitted for the temple, and a third should watch another of the palace gates, called 'the gate of the guard' (see 2 Kings 11:19). The two companies whose proper business it would be to serve as the royal escort beyond the palace walls, he orders to enter the temple, and surround the person of the young king."

(iii) The plot as carried out (11:9-12)

9 The commanders of units of a hundred did just as Jehoiada the priest ordered. Each one took his men — those who were going on duty on the Sabbath and those who were going off duty — and came to Jehoiada the priest.

10 Then he gave the commanders the spears and shields that had belonged to King David and that were in the temple of the Lord.

11 The guards, each with his weapon in his hand, stationed themselves around the king — near the altar and the temple, from the south side to the north side of the temple.

12 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 the people clapped their hands and shouted, "Long live the king!"

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, describes the procedure: "The groups of priests were supported by the army, whose commanders, to avoid suspicion and in accordance with custom, entered the temple unarmed. The men were drawn up in ranks with the royal escort (*rasîm*) and their officers armed from the weapons already in the temple itself. Some of those had been dedicated there by David as spoils of war (2 Sam. 8:7-8), some were replacements for

lost articles (I Kgs 14:26-28). The spear (MT is singular, but cf. 2 Chr. 23:9, plural) could have been a royal symbol or standard. There were thus sufficient arms to preclude an attack on the young king. The guard formed a semi-circle outside the temple building and the altar in the courtyard from south to north (v. 11)."

Once sufficient military protection for the young Joash was provided, the high priest Jehoiada crowned him and provided him with a copy of the law of Moses. Moses had stated: "When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel."⁵⁶

It is not clear how Jehoiada could be in possession of the royal crown. One would think that this item could only be found in the royal palace. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "The crown was probably a band of gold, either plain or set with jewels (... Zechariah 9:16), fastened behind with a ribbon. It receives here the same name that is given to the high priest's diadem in ... Exodus 29:6 and 39:30."

Then the young Joash was declared the new king of Israel under the loud exclamations: "Long live the king!" The shout was probably taken up by all who were in and around the temple at the moment, because there was enough noise to draw the attention of Athaliah who was in the palace.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes about the coronation: "The coronation ... took place in stages, first in an inner sanctuary and then as a presentation to a wider group of representatives outside. In Judah the crown (*nezer*), the covenant and perhaps the anointing, were unique. Saul had been crowned and given an armlet (2 Sam. 1:10; so RSV emends here). Some interpret the text to say that as well as the crown the covenant or 'testimony' (AV, MT *'edût*) was put 'over' or 'upon him' since both are governed by 'he gave.' This could affirm that the divinely chosen king was not an absolute monarch, but as Yahweh's anointed was under the law."

(iv) The death of Athaliah (11:13-16)

13 When Athaliah heard the noise made by the guards and the people, she went to the people at the temple of the Lord.

14 She looked and there was the king, standing by the pillar, as the custom was. The officers and the trumpeters were beside the king, and all the people of the land were rejoicing and blowing trumpets. Then Athaliah tore her robes and called out, "Treason! Treason!"

15 Jehoiada the priest ordered the commanders of units of a hundred, who were in charge of the troops: "Bring her out between the ranks and put to the sword anyone who follows her." For the priest had said, "She must not be put to death in the temple of the Lord."

16 So they seized her as she reached the place where the horses enter the palace grounds, and there she was put to death.

⁵⁶ Deut. 17:18-20

It is difficult to determine under what conditions Athaliah entered the temple. Bible scholars disagree on the subject. *The Pulpit Commentary*, for instance, states: “It was not her habit to enter the temple on the sabbath, or on any other day; but, hearing the noise, she hurried across from the palace to learn its cause. It would seem that she was still unsuspecting of danger, and brought no guards with her, nor any large body of attendants.” But *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* writes: “Her cry of *Treason* (v. 14), presumes the presence of her own bodyguard, whom she now ordered to take the boy Jehoash and his supporters.”

It is logical to assume that Athaliah was always surrounded by a bodyguard and it could be that those men turned against her when they realized that Joash had been crowned as the new king. There may not have been any kindness lost between the queen and her guards.

Athaliah’s cry of treason gives an ironic tone to the story. Here is a woman who had assassinated her own offspring in order to establish her royal power. After the death of her son, she had massacred the whole royal family. Speaking of treason!

Seeing Joash standing at one of the main pillars of the temple, wearing the royal crown, she realizes that her own life is in danger and she tears her royal robes.

Jehoiada orders her to be killed, but not on the temple precincts, which would have desecrated the building. Some had been killed on the temple premises, like the prophet Zechariah.⁵⁷ Joab was killed on the grounds of the tabernacle.⁵⁸

The Pulpit Commentary writes: “Josephus makes Athaliah pass out of the temple by the east gate, and descend into the Kedron valley. He says she was put to death ‘at the gate of the king’s mules,’ but does not mark the locality. The gate intended can scarcely be the ‘horse gate’ of ... Nehemiah 3:28, which was in the eastern wall, and north of the temple. It was probably a gate on the western side of the Tyropoeum valley, giving entrance to the stables of the palace (comp. ... 2 Chronicles 23:15, and ver. 20).”

(v) The renewal of the covenant (11:17-20)

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.

18 All the people of the land went to the temple of Baal and tore it down. They smashed the altars and idols to pieces and killed Mattan the priest of Baal in front of the altars. Then Jehoiada the priest posted guards at the temple of the Lord.

19 He took with him the commanders of hundreds, the Carites, the guards and all the people of the land, and together they brought the king down from the temple of the Lord and went into the palace, entering by way of the gate of the guards. The king then took his place on the royal throne,

20 and all the people of the land rejoiced. And the city was quiet, because Athaliah had been slain with the sword at the palace.

The essence of the covenant that Jehoiada made between the Lord, the king and the people, was that the king would reign, not as absolute monarch, but as God’s representative. Moses had stipulated the role and obligations of the king. He had said: “When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of

⁵⁷ II King 24:21; Matt. 23:35; Luke 11:51

⁵⁸ I Kings 2:28-34

the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.”⁵⁹

Joash being only seven years old, he needed a guardian who would be able to hold the reins of government for him and to prepare him for the royal office, once he had reached the age where he could make his own decisions. So Jehoiada acts as the king’s spokesman in leading the people back into a covenant relationship with God.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: “As earlier with David (2 Sam. 5:3; 7:8-16), and later with Josiah (2 Kgs 23:3), an essential part of the return of God’s people to true worship and service was the renewal of the covenant (Exod. 24). The king and people must now bind themselves to be, and to act as, the people of God (Deut. 4:20; 27:9-10). The heart of this covenant is that Yahweh will be their God and they his holy people (Deut. 14:2).”

One of the first things to be done was to rid the country of everything that reminded of the Baal worship. The first thing to go was the Baal temple, which was probably in Jerusalem.

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary states: “It is probable that Athaliah had set up the worship of Baal in Judah, as Jezebel had done in Israel; or probably it had never been removed since the days of Solomon. It was no wonder that Jehoiada began his reform with this act, when we learn from 2 Chron 24:7, that the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the Lord did they bestow upon Baalim.”

Jehoiada seems to have received general popular support. Athaliah’s ungodly reign must have been oppressive to the nation and this change of government was felt as a genuine relief. So the people, en masse, cooperated in destroying the signs of Baal worship by demolishing the idol temple. They also killed the Baal priest Mattan. It seems strange that only a single person would have served as priest in the idol temple. It may be that there were others who had been able to flee to the north before the outbreak of the actual revolution.

We read that Jehoiada posted guards at the temple of the Lord. No reason for this is given here. *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: “The parallel passage of Chronicles (... 2 Chronicles 23:18, 19) explains this statement. We are there told that ‘Jehoiada appointed the offices of the house of the Lord by the hand of the priests the Levites... to offer the burnt offerings of the Lord, as it is written in the Law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, as it was ordained by David. And he set the porters at the gates of the house of the Lord, that none which was unclean in anything should enter in.’ During Athaliah’s reign the temple service had ceased; breaches had been broken in the outer walls; and neither the priests nor the porters had served in their regular order; there had been no morning or evening sacrifice, and no antiphonal psalm-singing. Jehoiada re-established the regular courses and the worship.”

Then the new young king is led to the throne room of the royal palace and put on the throne to the joy of all the people. There must have been the noise of celebration, but we read that the city was quiet, which may be read as that there was no opposition from the side of former Athaliah supporters, if there had been any.

b. Joash of Judah (11:21 – 12:21)

⁵⁹ Deut. 17:18-20

(i) Summary of reign (11:21 – 12:3)

21 Joash was seven years old when he began to reign.

12:1 In the seventh year of Jehu, Joash became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem forty years. His mother's name was Zibiah; she was from Beersheba.

2 Joash did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the years Jehoiada the priest instructed him.

3 The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “The MT begins chapter 12 with 11:21. *Joash* as the name for the Judean king is so read by NIV for the fuller ‘Jehoash’ (RSV) to differentiate him from the king of Israel bearing the same name (13:10-25). As a *seven year old* he needed a tutor who may well have given advice in competition with Athaliah. The forty year reign (831-796 BC) is not a general span (as Judg. 5:31; 8:28), but realistic His father’s marriage to *Zibiah* (‘Gazelle’) may have been to gain tribal support on the Negeb border with Edom.”

The way the second verse reads seems to indicate that Joash’s righteous acts were more to the credit of the priest Jehoiada than to the king himself. He did well as long as he was under Jehoiada’s tutelage. After Jehoiada’s death Joash turned away from serving the Lord and even had Jehoiada’s son Zechariah assassinated in the temple.

The problem that had persisted during the reign of Joash’s predecessors, continued to plague the nation during his reign also. The people had become accustomed to sacrificing at other places outside the temple and they continued to do so. The fact that the temple was in bad repair, as is clear from the following section, may have had something to do with this.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the people’s sacrifices outside the temple: “So it had been with the best of the previous kings of Judah, as Asa (... 1 Kings 15:14) and Jehoshaphat (... 1 Kings 22:43); and so it was with the other ‘good’ kings (... 2 Kings 14:4; 15:4, 35) until the reign of Hezekiah, by whom the high places were removed (see 2 Kings 18:4). We must remember that it was Jehovah who was worshipped in the ‘high places,’ not Baal, or Moloch, or Ashtoreth”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes: “Only two kings of Judah, Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4) and Josiah (23:8), removed the high places. One of the evil effects of this worship on the high places was that it divided Judah’s spiritual vision; and thus it contributed materially to the nation’s fall.”

(ii) Temple repairs (12:4-16)

4 Joash said to the priests, "Collect all the money that is brought as sacred offerings to the temple of the Lord-the money collected in the census, the money received from personal vows and the money brought voluntarily to the temple.

5 Let every priest receive the money from one of the treasurers, and let it be used to repair whatever damage is found in the temple."

6 But by the twenty-third year of King Joash the priests still had not repaired the temple.

7 Therefore King Joash summoned Jehoiada the priest and the other priests and asked them, "Why aren't you repairing the damage done to the temple? Take no more money from your treasurers, but hand it over for repairing the temple."

8 The priests agreed that they would not collect any more money from the people and that they would not repair the temple themselves.

9 Jehoiada the priest took a chest and bored a hole in its lid. He placed it beside the altar, on the right side as one enters the temple of the Lord. The priests who guarded the entrance put into the chest all the money that was brought to the temple of the Lord.

10 Whenever they saw that there was a large amount of money in the chest, the royal secretary and the high priest came, counted the money that had been brought into the temple of the Lord and put it into bags.

11 When the amount had been determined, they gave the money to the men appointed to supervise the work on the temple. With it they paid those who worked on the temple of the Lord-the carpenters and builders,

12 the masons and stonecutters. They purchased timber and dressed stone for the repair of the temple of the Lord, and met all the other expenses of restoring the temple.

13 The money brought into the temple was not spent for making silver basins, wick trimmers, sprinkling bowls, trumpets or any other articles of gold or silver for the temple of the Lord;

14 it was paid to the workmen, who used it to repair the temple.

15 They did not require an accounting from those to whom they gave the money to pay the workers, because they acted with complete honesty.

16 The money from the guilt offerings and sin offerings was not brought into the temple of the Lord; it belonged to the priests.

The Pulpit Commentary observes about Joash's initiative in restoring the temple: "It is rather surprising that the temple had not been thoroughly repaired by Jehoiada during the long minority of Joash, when he must practically have had the sole management of affairs. Probably he did repair the worst of the damage done by Athaliah's orders (... 2 Chronicles 24:7), which may have been very considerable, but neglected the restoration of such portions of the edifice as appeared to him of secondary importance, as the walls of the courts and the outbuildings. Joash, however, when his minority came to an end, and he succeeded to the administration of the state, took a different view. To him the completion of the repairs seemed a pressing business. Probably he thought the honor of God required the entire obliteration of Athaliah's wicked proceedings, and the renewal of the temple's old glories. His six years' residence within the temple precincts may have also inspired him with a love of the building as a building."

There is a question as to who was responsible for the maintenance of the temple edifice. Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, states: "The maintenance of the main national temple was the responsibility of the king, for the temple served also as a chapel royal."

Joash's instructions to the priests do not imply that he considered them responsible for the actual labor to be done, but that he wanted them to find people to whom they could delegate the work. That meant that some people had to be hired and this required money.

The people who came to the temple did bring money to pay for several things. The NIV mentions "sacred offerings," "money collected in the census", money from "personal vows" and voluntarily gifts.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes about the collection of money for temple repairs: “Originally the priests received all the revenue and used it to maintain the temple services and carry out necessary repairs.

Lack of zeal by the priests (2 Chr. 24:5) and perhaps lack of supervision by the ageing Jehoiada (who was to die aged 124) led Joash, now aged thirty (v.6), to make new arrangements (vv. 9-16) for making good the repairs needed (v. 7, *damage*, ‘breaches’ AV). There seems also to be concern over possible mishandling of financial affairs which ever brings shame on God’s house. Joash’s transfer of responsibility to the whole people may have been directed to making the temple self-supporting and to get all the people involved in sharing in provision for God’s work. The priests now relinquish both the collection of funds and the management of repairs on the fabric (vv. 7-8).

The breach between Jehoiada and Joash may have occurred about this time.”

Bible scholars do not agree about the way money was collected. Evidently, there had been no offering chest before, because we read that one had to be made for the purpose of collecting money. It could be, however, that there had been a chest, but that it was understood that the money collected in it was for the support of the priests and not for temple repairs. This chest was particularly marked for repair purposes.

There is also a question about where the chest was placed. It seems originally to have been next to the burnt offering altar. Later it was placed outside the temple gate.⁶⁰ *Barnes’ Notes* comments: “The north door into the priests’ court (Ezek 40:35-43) seems to be intended, not the door of the temple building. The chest must have been placed a little to the right of this north door, between it and the altar of burnt-offering, so that the people could see it from the doorway. The people were not ordinarily allowed to go within the doorway into this court, which belonged to the priests and Levites only.”

The handling of the money was not left exclusively to the priests. We read that the royal secretary was involved. Evidently King Joash intended to keep his finger in the pie, not trusting the priests to effectively handle the temple finances. Their previous procrastination must have been sufficient reason for this arrangement. The priest must have hired a crew of repairmen to do the work necessary on the temple building. We are told specifically that no money was used to buy any equipment used in the temple services.

It is interesting to read that, in spite of the previous mishandling of funds, the priests were not asked to keep accounts of incomes and expenditures. The king figured that their conscience should be their guide and that the Lord would hold them responsible. It is interesting to contrast the Old Testament morality on this point with the suspicious climate of the New Testament in which the Apostle Paul had to handle finances.⁶¹

(iii) Annalistic details (12:17-21)

17 About this time Hazael king of Aram went up and attacked Gath and captured it. Then he turned to attack Jerusalem.

18 But Joash king of Judah took all the sacred objects dedicated by his fathers — Jehoshaphat, Jehoram and Ahaziah, the kings of Judah — and the gifts he himself had dedicated and all the gold found in the treasuries of the temple of the Lord and of the royal palace, and he sent them to Hazael king of Aram, who then withdrew from Jerusalem.

⁶⁰ II Chron. 24:8

⁶¹ II Cor. 8:20,21

19 As for the other events of the reign of Joash, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah?

20 His officials conspired against him and assassinated him at Beth Millo, on the road down to Silla.

21 The officials who murdered him were Jozabad son of Shimeath and Jehozabad son of Shomer. He died and was buried with his fathers in the City of David. And Amaziah his son succeeded him as king.

Hazael's attack of Judah was God's punishment for the crimes Joash had committed. The fact that he used the temple treasures to pay off the king of Aram indicates that he had no concept of the sanctity of those items. When the prophet Zechariah condemned him for his attitude, he ordered the prophet to be murdered.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Hazael's attack upon Judah: "Hitherto Judah had been safe from any attack on the part of Syria, since Israel had been interposed between the two powers. Now, however, that Hazael had conquered from Jehu the entire trans-Jordanic territory (... 2 Kings 10:33), the case was wholly altered — Judah and Syria had become conterminous along the line of the lower Jordan, and Syria could invade Judaea at any moment. It is surprising that Gath should have been the special object of attack, since Gath (Abu-Gheith) lay remote from the Syrian frontier, in the southwestern part of Judaea, and could only be reached from Syria by an enemy who was not afraid of leaving Jerusalem behind him. Gath, when last mentioned, was a Judaeon city, and was fortified by Rehoboam (... 2 Chronicles 11:8); but it was originally Philistine (... 1 Samuel 5:17), and the Philistines had recovered it before the time of Uzziah (... 2 Chronicles 26:6). To which power it belonged when Hazael made war upon it is uncertain."

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: "The murder of Joash by his *officials* (v. 21) or servants implies that it may have been the result of disaffection following the defeat by Hazael. It was more likely direct revenge on Joash for having stoned to death Jehoiada's son Zechariah in the temple after he had criticized."

We read a fuller account of that crime in *Second Chronicles*: "After the death of Jehoiada, the officials of Judah came and paid homage to the king, and he listened to them. They abandoned the temple of the Lord, the God of their fathers, and worshiped Asherah poles and idols. Because of their guilt, God's anger came upon Judah and Jerusalem. Although the Lord sent prophets to the people to bring them back to him, and though they testified against them, they would not listen. Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. He stood before the people and said, 'This is what God says: 'Why do you disobey the Lord's commands? You will not prosper. Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you.' But they plotted against him, and by order of the king they stoned him to death in the courtyard of the Lord's temple. King Joash did not remember the kindness Zechariah's father Jehoiada had shown him but killed his son, who said as he lay dying, 'May the Lord see this and call you to account.'"⁶²

c. Jehoahaz of Israel (13:1-9)

1 In the twenty-third year of Joash son of Ahaziah king of Judah, Jehoahaz son of Jehu became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned seventeen years.

⁶² II Chron. 24:17-22

2 He did evil in the eyes of the Lord by following the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit, and he did not turn away from them.
3 So the Lord's anger burned against Israel, and for a long time he kept them under the power of Hazael king of Aram and Ben-Hadad his son.
4 Then Jehoahaz sought the Lord's favor, and the Lord listened to him, for he saw how severely the king of Aram was oppressing Israel.
5 The Lord provided a deliverer for Israel, and they escaped from the power of Aram. So the Israelites lived in their own homes as they had before.
6 But they did not turn away from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, which he had caused Israel to commit; they continued in them. Also, the Asherah pole remained standing in Samaria.
7 Nothing had been left of the army of Jehoahaz except fifty horsemen, ten chariots and ten thousand foot soldiers, for the king of Aram had destroyed the rest and made them like the dust at threshing time.
8 As for the other events of the reign of Jehoahaz, all he did and his achievements, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?
9 Jehoahaz rested with his fathers and was buried in Samaria. And Jehoash his son succeeded him as king.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes about the pressure Aram was able to put on the Northern Kingdom of Israel: "The main reason for this was that for a while Assyrian attention was diverted from the west both by campaigns on its north-west and eastern frontiers at the end of Shalmaneser III's reign, and by a great revolt in Nineveh and other Assyrian centers noted in the Eponym Chronicles for the years 827-822 BC. His successor Shamshi-Adad V (825-811 BC) had to win control nearer home and for a time the Assyrian domination of the west lapsed. This was Hazael's opportunity to harass Israel."

The important lesson to be learned from this is that political events are not haphazard, but they are the result of a nation's relationship with God. It was because Israel had abandoned the Lord and had turned to idol worship that they suffered politically. *The Book of Proverbs* states: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people."⁶³

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments about the conditions of Jehoahaz' reign: "Under his government, which pursued the policy of his predecessors, regarding the support of the calf-worship, Israel's apostasy from the true God became greater and more confirmed than in the time of his father Jehu. The national chastisement, when it came, was consequently the more severe; and the instruments employed by the Lord in scourging the revolted nation were Hazael, and his son and general, Ben-Hadad, in resisting whose successive invasions the Israelite army was sadly reduced and weakened."

The Pulpit Commentary states: "There is no reason to believe that Jehoahaz re-introduced the Baal-worship, or sinned in any other flagrant way than by maintaining the calf-worship at Dan and Bethel. Jehu had done the same (... 2 Kings 10:29), as had all previous kings of Israel from the time of Jeroboam. The honor of God, however, required that idolatry of whatever kind should be punished, and the Samaritan kingdom could not otherwise be saved from destruction than by, 'casting away all the works of darkness' and returning to the pure worship of Jehovah. Hence Jehu himself, notwithstanding the good service that he had done in crushing the Baal-

⁶³ Prov. 14:34

worship, was chastised by God (... 2 Kings 10:32, 33) on account of his continuance in the ‘sin of Jeroboam;’ and now Jehoahaz was even more signally punished.”

Somehow the Lord got through to Jehoahaz and he turned to the God of Israel for the salvation of his nation and his throne. There are several pieces of information that seem to be lacking in the text. First of all, we are told that the Lord provided a deliverer, but we don’t read who that was. And secondly, the mention of the people continuing to live in their own homes, suggests that captivity had become a threat, or that some people had been relocated earlier.

The Hebrew text of v.5 reads literally: “And the Lord gave Israel a savior, so they went out from under the hand of the Syrians: and the children of Israel dwelt in their own tents as beforetime.” *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on “A savior”: “This refers neither to some patriotic defender nor some signal victory, but to the deliverance obtained for Israel by the two successors of Jehoahaz—namely, Joash, who regained all the cities which the Syrians had taken from big father (2 Kings 13:25); and Jeroboam II, who restored the former boundaries of Israel (2 Kings 14:25).”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on the “savior”: “He came after Jehoahaz died The people continued to practice the sins of ... Jeroboam, thus continuing the broken covenant. Jehoahaz’ ‘repentance’ was only mental; he did not return to the covenant.”

Not only did Jehoahaz keep sacrificing at the altars Jeroboam had erected to prevent the people from worshipping at the temple in Jerusalem, but he also kept the Asherah pole, which means that he practiced idol worship at the same time. His was no complete and irrevocable choice for YHWH. Jesus warned against this double-mindedness, when He said: “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”⁶⁴

What remained of Jehoahaz’ military might is compared to “the dust at threshing time.” Israel’s army is compared to less than the chaff that would remain on a threshing floor after collecting the grains of wheat. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The meaning seems to be that Hazael limited the standing army of Jehoahaz to fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen, not that he slew the entire military population except this small remnant. The policy of limiting the forces to be maintained by a subject-king was one known to the Romans, and has often been adopted in the East.”

d. Jehoash of Israel (13:10-25)

(i) Summary of reign (13:10-13)

10 In the thirty-seventh year of Joash king of Judah, Jehoash son of Jehoahaz became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned sixteen years.

11 He did evil in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit; he continued in them.

12 As for the other events of the reign of Jehoash, all he did and his achievements, including his war against Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?

13 Jehoash rested with his fathers, and Jeroboam succeeded him on the throne. Jehoash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.

⁶⁴ Matt. 6:24

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes about Jehoash's reign: "An Assyrian stela found at Tell Rimah, northern Mesopotamia, dated to the reign of Adadnirari III records his campaign against Syria in 805-802 BC. Among the rulers bringing tribute he claims 'Jehoash the Samaritan' (*Yu-'a-su Sa-mer-ri-na-a*) by this also noting that the dynasty of Omri (*bit Humri*) had passed away. ... The same Assyrian ruler dominated Damascus taking spoil from Mar'i (= Ben-Hadad III) whom he refers to in the previous line of the same stela by his Syrian name of Mar'i. ...

This reign is entered here only with reference to its introductory (vv. 10-11) and closing formulae (vv. 12-13)."

For details about "the other events of the reign of Jehoash" we are being referred to "the book of annals of the kings of Israel," which is not included in the Scriptures and is no longer available to us.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary comments about Jehoash's war: "This war with Amaziah may be seen in ample detail 2 Chron 25; it ended in the total defeat of Amaziah, who was taken prisoner by Joash, and afterward slain in a conspiracy at Lachish. Joash took Jerusalem, broke down four hundred cubits of the wall, and took all the royal treasures, and the treasures of the house of God. See 2 Chron 25:20-27."

(ii) The closing events of Elisha's life (13:14-21)

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!"

15 Elisha said, "Get a bow and some arrows," and he did so.

16 "Take the bow in your hands," he said to the king of Israel. When he had taken it, Elisha put his hands on the king's hands.

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."

18 Then he said, "Take the arrows," and the king took them. Elisha told him, "Strike the ground." He struck it three times and stopped.

19 The man of God was angry with him 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."

20 Elisha died and was buried. Now Moabite raiders used to enter the country every spring.

21 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.

We are confronted with one of the mysteries of divine wisdom. Here is the servant of the Lord who performed the miracle of raising the dead, who becomes the victim of a fatal illness. The thought of Paul's "thorn in the flesh"⁶⁵ comes to mind. Another mystery is that the dead Elisha performed another miracle of resurrection.

⁶⁵ II Cor. 12:7

While on his sickbed, Elisha was visited by the king of Israel. King Jehoash was deeply moved by Elisha's suffering. He used the same words Elisha had used at the home-going of Elijah: "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!"⁶⁶ It is more amazing that the king of Israel used those words than Elisha earlier. Jehoash must have understood something about the spiritual realities that govern events on earth. He understood what the Apostle Paul would later define as "our struggle ... not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."⁶⁷

The following symbolic actions Elisha tells Jehoash to take are strange, since the king was not told first what the meaning of his shooting arrows was. Elisha put his hands on the king's hands as if to identify himself with him, or to convey spiritual power. He then tells the king to open a window that faces east and shoot an arrow. When Jehoash shoots the arrow, Elisha proclaims it to be "the Lord's arrow of victory over Aram!"

Jehoash is then ordered to take the other arrows and strike the ground, which the king does three times. Again the king is not told the meaning of that symbolic act until after he has performed it. There seems to be a conflict between Elisha's initial statement that Jehoash would completely destroy Aram and that his victory would not be complete, since he would only win three battles.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on this visit: "The visit of a king to a prophet, in the way of sympathy and compliment, would be a very unusual occurrence at any period of the world's history. In the East, and at the period of which the historian is treating, it was probably unprecedented. Prophets waited upon kings, not kings upon prophets: If a king came to a prophet's house, it was likely to be on an errand of vengeance (... 2 Kings 6:32), not on one of kindness and sympathy. The act of Joash certainly implies a degree of tenderness and consideration on its part very uncommon at the time, and is a fact to which much weight should be attached in any estimate that we form of his character. He was, at any rate, a prince of an amiable disposition. ... Elisha, it would seem, rose from his bed, and took the attitude of an archer, covering the king's two hands with his own hands, and making as if he too was pulling the bow, so that the shooting should be, or at least appear to be, the joint act of himself and the king. The intention was, no doubt ... 'to show that the power which was to be given to the bow-shot' was not the king's own power, but 'came from the Lord through the mediation of his prophet.'"

The miracle recorded in vv. 20 and 21 is probably the most remarkable one in the Old Testament. Elisha had been instrumental in raising the dead son of Shunammite woman.⁶⁸ But there is no other record in Scripture of a dead person performing such a miracle.

Barnes' Notes comments on the circumstances of the event: "The Moabites had been increasing in strength ever since their revolt from Ahaziah (2 Kings 1:1). The defeat which they suffered at the hands of Jehoram and Jehoshaphat (2 Kings 3:24) did not affect their subjugation. They spread themselves into the country north of the Arnon (Isa 16:2), and thence proceeded to make plundering expeditious year by year into Samaria, in Spring. This was the natural season for incursions, as then in Palestine the crops began to be ripe. ...

The graves of the Jews were not pits dug in the ground, like ours, but caves or cells excavated in the side of a rock, the mouth of the cave being ordinarily shut by a heavy stone.

⁶⁶ II Kings 2:12

⁶⁷ Eph. 6:12

⁶⁸ II Kings 4:35-37

This miracle of Elisha's after his death is more surprising than any of those which he performed during his lifetime. The Jews regarded it as his highest glory (compare Ecclesiasticus 48:13,14). It may be said to belong to a class of Scriptural miracles, cases, i.e. where the miracle was not performed through the agency of a living miracle-worker, but by a material object in which, by God's will, 'virtue' for the time resided (compare Acts 19:12). The primary effect of the miracle was, no doubt, greatly to increase the reverence of the Israelites for the memory of Elisha, to lend force to his teaching, and especially to add weight to his unfulfilled prophecies, as to that concerning the coming triumphs of Israel over Syria. In the extreme state of depression to which the Israelites were now reduced, a very signal miracle may have been needed to encourage and reassure them."

(iii) A note on Israel – Aram relations (13:22-25)

22 Hazael king of Aram oppressed Israel throughout the reign of Jehoahaz.

23 But the Lord was gracious to them and had compassion and showed concern for them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. To this day he has been unwilling to destroy them or banish them from his presence.

24 Hazael king of Aram died, and Ben-Hadad his son succeeded him as king.

25 Then Jehoash son of Jehoahaz recaptured from Ben-Hadad son of Hazael the towns he had taken in battle from his father Jehoahaz. Three times Jehoash defeated him, and so he recovered the Israelite towns.

The amazing truth expressed in these verses is that the military victory of Jehoash, who retook the Israelite towns that had been occupied by Hazael, the king of Aram, is linked to God's covenant with Israel's ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The Apostle Paul uses a similar principle when, speaking about the adding of the gentiles to the church of Christ, he writes: "He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."⁶⁹

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "This links the history with verses 3, 7, and emphasizes the LORD's covenant relation with his people in terms of his dealing with their ancestors. It would remind the hearer or reader of the covenant's clear provisions forecasting exile if his requirements were broken and yet of the promise of forgiveness and restoration when they turned from their evil ways. The former was to be fulfilled less than a century later when he let them go into exile from Samaria (2 Kgs 17:14-25).

Such punishment by banishment *from the presence* of God had been long foretold since Adam (Gen. 3:23) and the possibility reiterated (I Kgs 8:47). Meanwhile God's long-suffering compassion and grace (*yahan*, 'shower mercy') and *concern* for his people would give time for repentance without which his judgment must inexorably fall, though it was not his will that any should perish. His dealing with people in the time of Noah illustrates this (Gen. 6:13; cf. 7:11; I Pet. 3:20; II Pet. 2:5). On the human side the reluctance of Aram to invade Israel could be in part explained by the pressure Adad-nirari of Assyria was imposing on Damascus.

⁶⁹ Gal. 3:14

The towns recovered by Jehoash were probably west of Jordan (cf. I Kgs 20:34) and not regained until Jeroboam did so (14:25). The defeat inflicted by Jehoash (Heb. here has the variant Joash) three times is recorded to show the fulfillment of the promise of verses 18-19."

e. Amaziah of Judah (14:1`-22)

(i) Summary of reign (14:1-7)

1 In the second year of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel, Amaziah son of Joash king of Judah began to reign.

2 He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Jehoaddin; she was from Jerusalem.

3 He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not as his father David had done. In everything he followed the example of his father Joash.

4 The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there.

5 After the kingdom was firmly in his grasp, he executed the officials who had murdered his father the king.

6 Yet he did not put the sons of the assassins to death, in accordance with what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses where the Lord commanded: "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sins."

7 He was the one who defeated ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt and captured Sela in battle, calling it Joktheel, the name it has to this day.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on the words "In the second year of Jehoash": "Again the chronology is defective. If Joash of Israel ascended the throne in the thirty-seventh year of Joash of Judah (... 2 Kings 13:10), and the latter reigned forty years (... 2 Kings 12:1), Amaziah cannot have become king till the fourth or fifth year of the Israelitish Joash, instead of the second. The ordinary explanation of commentators is a double accession; but this is unsatisfactory. It is best to allow that the chronology of the later half of the Israelite kingdom is in confusion."

But Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "The chronology fits if it includes a twenty-four-year co-regency with his son Azariah beginning c. 791 BC (v. 21, cf. 15:1-2). That would not be unduly long in relations to the fifty-two year reign attributed to Azariah. Some try to read 'nine' for *twenty-nine years*, but verse 17 is against this....

Though the evaluation is of a king who *did what was right* the exception *but not* (MT *raq*, 'only') carries the reader back to David (who did the right 'except in the case of Uriah the Hittite,' I Kgs 15:5) and 2 Chronicles 25:14-16 reminds us that Amaziah did not break free from pagan involvement. His faithful following of the LORD fell short of that of his predecessors Asa and Jehoshaphat (I Kgs 15:11, 14; 22:43)."

Amaziah did not take immediate action against the murderers of his father. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments on this: "No doubt those wicked men, Jozachar and Jehozabad, who murdered his father, had considerable power and influence; and therefore he found it dangerous to bring them to justice, till he was assured of the loyalty of his other officers: when this was clear, he called them to account, and put them to death."

We are not told here what was lacking in Jehoahaz' reign in comparison with the reign of King David. But *Second Chronicles* tells us: "When Amaziah returned from slaughtering the Edomites, he brought back the gods of the people of Seir. He set them up as his own gods, bowed down to them and burned sacrifices to them."⁷⁰

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments on Amaziah's reprisal: "It seems that Amaziah had to struggle to gain control much as Solomon had done (cf. I Kgs 2:26, though the verb there is 'firm, settled' and here 'strong'). He eventually put to death his father's assassins (2 Kgs 12:20), which was common Near Eastern practice which all king's vassals and officials swore under oath to effect ... However, in contrast the humanizing tendency of the law is now followed in not putting children to death for their father's sin."

The text refers further to Amaziah's victory over the Edomites without giving any details. For that again we have to go to *Second Chronicles*, where we read: "Amaziah then marshaled his strength and led his army to the Valley of Salt, where he killed ten thousand men of Seir. The army of Judah also captured ten thousand men alive, took them to the top of a cliff and threw them down so that all were dashed to pieces."⁷¹

(ii) Israel fights Judah (14:8-16)

8 Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash son of Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, king of Israel, with the challenge: "Come, meet me face to face."

9 But Jehoash king of Israel replied to Amaziah king of Judah: "A thistle in Lebanon sent a message to a cedar in Lebanon, 'Give your daughter to my son in marriage.' Then a wild beast in Lebanon came along and trampled the thistle underfoot."

10 You have indeed defeated Edom and now you are arrogant. Glory in your victory, but stay at home! Why ask for trouble and cause your own downfall and that of Judah also?"

11 Amaziah, however, would not listen, so Jehoash king of Israel attacked. He and Amaziah king of Judah faced each other at Beth Shemesh in Judah.

12 Judah was routed by Israel, and every man fled to his home.

13 Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Joash, the son of Ahaziah, at Beth Shemesh. Then Jehoash went to Jerusalem and broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate — a section about six hundred feet long.

14 He took all the gold and silver and all the articles found in the temple of the Lord and in the treasuries of the royal palace. He also took hostages and returned to Samaria.

15 As for the other events of the reign of Jehoash, what he did and his achievements, including his war against Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?

16 Jehoash rested with his fathers and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel. And Jeroboam his son succeeded him as king.

Some Bible scholars see in Amaziah's message to the king of Judah an invitation to a peaceful person meeting, as if Amaziah wanted a covenant with Jehoash. It seems more to have been a challenge to a personal duel between the two monarchs.

⁷⁰ II Chron. 25:14

⁷¹ II Chron. 25:11-12

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “The call to *come, meet me face to face* was no mere call to a personal meeting, though ‘face to face’ includes this and is commonly used of a challenge to an encounter with God (Gen. 32:30; Exod. 33:11; Deut. 5:4 and in I Cor 13:12); NEB paraphrases ‘to propose a meeting’ (REB ‘a confrontation’). The suggestion that it was a proposal for a treaty sealed by a marriage alliance depends on the fable which follows. Such a proposal would have taken Judah back to the Joram – Amaziah situation (8:27) and is unlikely. It is more likely to be a challenge to war, for such a taunt often occurs in the initiation of conflict (I Sam. 17:4ff).”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on Amaziah’s message to Jehoash: “His arrogance led him into trouble with Israel, because of his worship of Edomite gods. In the flush of victory over Petra, Amaziah challenged Jehoash of Israel to war: Come, let us look one another in the face. Josephus ... says that Amaziah demanded submission, or war would result (see also 2 Chron 25:13). ... Jehoash was the cedar; Amaziah was the thistle. Amaziah’s challenge was presumptuous and arrogant. Jehoash had smitten Syria and measured her. Verses 11-14 describe the defeat of Judah, the partial destruction of Jerusalem, and the taking of hostages - all because Amaziah worshiped Edomite gods (2 Chron 25:20). Amaziah himself was taken captive (2 Kings 14:13), for he had rejected the prophet’s counsel to repent (2 Chron 25:15-16).”

Jehoash’s answer in the form of a parable is in the typical style of the time and area in the same way as Jesus’ teaching in parables was. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “People in the East very often express their sentiments in a parabolic form, especially when they intend to convey unwelcome truths, or a contemptuous sneer. This was the design of the admonitory fable related by Joash in his reply. The thistle, a low shrub, might be chosen to represent Amaziah, a petty prince; the cedar, the powerful sovereign of Israel; and the wild beast that trod down the thistle, the overwhelming army with which Israel could desolate Judah. But, perhaps, without making so minute an application, the parable may be explained generally, as describing, in a striking manner the effects of pride and ambition, towering far beyond their natural sphere, and sure to fall with a sudden and ruinous crash. The moral of the fable is contained in 2 Kings 14:10.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “Amaziah had a cause of complaint against Jehoash, or at any rate against his subjects, which does not appear in the narrative of Kings. The author of Chronicles tells us that, when Amaziah dismissed his Israelite mercenaries, they were offended, and vented their anger by an inroad into his territories (... 2 Chronicles 25:13), where they killed three thousand men and ‘took much spoil.’ This was a clear *casus belli*, if Amaziah chose to consider it such.”

About the tone of the message, the same commentary states: “A rude message, if it was actually couched in these terms. But perhaps the writer substitutes the gist of the message for the language in which it was wrapped up. Josephus says that Amaziah wrote a letter to Joash, and required him to submit himself and people to the authority of the Jewish state, and thus restore the state of things which had existed under David and Solomon. Otherwise the sword must decide between them Whatever its terms, pride and self-confidence, the result of his success against Edom, were at the root of the challenge.”

When Amaziah ignored Jehoash’s message, the king of Israel attacked Judah and took him captive, destroying most of Jerusalem, including part of the temple. We read in *Second Chronicles* that the Lord allowed this to happen, because of Amaziah’s idolatry: “Amaziah,

however, would not listen, for God so worked that he might hand them over to [Jehoash], because they sought the gods of Edom.”⁷²

When Jehoash died he was buried in Samaria and his son, Jeroboam II, ascended the throne of the Northern Kingdom.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: “No details are given as to where, or for how long, the king was held captive. It could be that at this time his son was appointed acting regent (v. 21). ... The term hostages (v. 14 the Heb. phrase *bene hata’drubôt* occurs only here and in the parallel 2 Chr. 25:24) were hardly pledges for war indemnity (scarcely recorded in Old Testament times) but rather high-ranking officials taken as a guarantee for future loyal behavior. It could be that temple officials were among them, this was the situation in which some temple singers, called to the north and longing to be back in God’s house, composed such psalms as 42 – 43.”

(iii) The end of Amaziah (14:17-22)

17 Amaziah son of Joash king of Judah lived for fifteen years after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel.

18 As for the other events of Amaziah’s reign, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah?

19 They conspired against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish, but they sent men after him to Lachish and killed him there.

20 He was brought back by horse and was buried in Jerusalem with his fathers, in the City of David.

21 Then all the people of Judah took Azariah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in place of his father Amaziah.

22 He was the one who rebuilt Elath and restored it to Judah after Amaziah rested with his fathers.

Amaziah became one of the most unpopular monarchs of the kingdom of Judah. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on the people’s dissatisfaction to his reign: “Amaziah’s apostasy (2 Chron 25:27) was followed by a general mal-administration, especially the disastrous issue of the war with Israel-the ruinous condition of Jerusalem, the plunder of the temple, and the loss of their children, who were taken as hostages-lost him the respect and attachment, not of the grandees only, but of his subjects generally, who were in a state of rebellion. The king fled in terror to Lachish, frontier-town of the Philistines where however, he was traced and murdered. His friends had his corpse brought, without any pomp or ceremony, in a chariot to Jerusalem, where he was interred among his royal ancestors.”

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The author of Chronicles connects this conspiracy with the idolatry of which Amaziah was guilty (... 2 Chronicles 25:27); but, though his subjects may have been offended by his religious changes, and have become alienated from him in consequence, the actual conspiracy can scarcely have been prompted by an act which was fifteen, or at any rate thirteen, years old. It is more likely to have sprung out of dissatisfaction with Amaziah’s military inaction from and after his defeat by Joash. While Jeroboam II was carrying all before him in the north, recovering his border, pushing it as far as Hamath, and even

⁷² II Chron. 25:20

exercising a suzerainty over Damascus (vers. 25, 28), Amaziah remained passive, cowed by his one defeat, and took no advantage of the state of weakness to which he had reduced Edom, but sat with folded hands, doing nothing. The conspirators who removed Amaziah, and placed his son Azariah, or Uzziah, upon the throne, may be credited with the wish and intention to bring the period of inaction to an end, and to effect in the south what Jeroboam was effecting in the north. It is true that Azariah was but sixteen years of age (ver. 21; comp. ... 2 Chronicles 26:1), but he may have given indications of his ambition and capacity. Sixteen, moreover, is the time of manhood in the East, and the conspirators had probably waited until Azariah was sixteen in order that his competency to reign should not be disputed. As soon as he was on the throne he initiated the warlike policy which they desired (see ver. 22). *And he fled to Lachish*. Lachish, one of the south-western Judaeian towns (... Joshua 15:39), was at all times a fortress of importance. It resisted Joshua (10:3, 31), and was taken by storm. It was fortified by Jeroboam against the Egyptians (2 Chronicles 11:9). It was besieged and taken by Sennacherib (... 2 Kings 18:14; ...). The position is marked by the modern Um-Lakis, on 'a low round swell or knoll,' between Gaza and Beit-Jibrin, about thirteen miles from Gaza and nearly thirty-five from Jerusalem. But they sent after him to Lachish, and slew him there. So the author of Chronicles (... 2 Chronicles 25:27) and Josephus ... but details are wanting."

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, mentions one theologian who supposed that Azariah (Uzziah) "might have been involved since he did not punish the plotters." The text gives no indication that such may have been the case.

Dr. Wiseman comments further: "The election of Amaziah's son Azariah may refer to an earlier time when 'all the people had taken Azariah, when he was sixteen years old and had made him king' while Azariah had been a prisoner. If translated 'had taken' this 'flashback' would link this to the fuller story of his reign in 15:1. The choice appears to be of a popular election (cf. 2 Kgs 11:14). The presence of Judah in Elath, at the northwest of the Gulf of Aqaba, is attested by a seal inscribed 'belonging to Jotham' found at Tell el-Khaleifeh. That ancient fortified port was of immense importance to Judah then, as it is to Israel today. It maintained a trade with south Arabia which resulted in a south Arabian seal found at Bethel. Control of the port of Elath seems to have soon been lost c. 730 BC to Aram, who later let it revert to the control of their allies Edom (16:6)."

f. Jeroboam II of Israel (14:23-29)

23 In the fifteenth year of Amaziah son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel became king in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years.

24 He did evil in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit.

25 He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, in accordance with the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hepher.

26 The Lord had seen how bitterly everyone in Israel, whether slave or free, was suffering; there was no one to help them.

27 And since the Lord had not said he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Jehoash.

28 As for the other events of Jeroboam's reign, all he did, and his military achievements, including how he recovered for Israel both Damascus and Hamath, which had belonged to Yaudi, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?

29 Jeroboam rested with his fathers, the kings of Israel. And Zechariah his son succeeded him as king.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: “Jeroboam, the fourth king of the dynasty of Jehu, followed up the victories of Jehoash over Ben-Hadad III of Aram (2 Kgs 13:25). He was able to carry on Jehoash’s aggressive policy of expansion because the campaign of Adad-nirari III had broken the heart of the Aramaean coalition and the Assyrians had now turned to campaigning in Urartu (Armenia) leaving Jehoash, whom they record as a vassal or tribute-paying servant of Assyria ... free to become a powerful force in the area and to restore the northern boundary of Israel to what it had been in the days of David.

The resultant prosperity, however, which ended in the wrong use of power in luxury and the oppression of the poor, was denounced by the contemporary prophets, especially Amos (Amos 2:6-7; 8:4-6); Isaiah (Isaiah 3:18-26; 5:8-13) and Micah (Micah 2:2). They saw the state’s security as false (Amos 6:1-8) and behind it all an empty religious ritual (Amos 5:21-24).

Assyria grew weaker under Ashur-dan III (772-754 BC), a situation which may provide much of the background for this reign. Freedom from outside interference brought advances reflected in the tax returns described in the ostraca from Samaria which show the economy as producing an increasing royal income. The personal names they recorded thereon show an advance in apostasy in that for every eleven personal names compounded with Yah seven now include Baal.”

Jeroboam II followed in the footsteps of Jeroboam I in that he ignored the place of God’s revelation.

Yet God did not withdraw His compassion from His people, seeing their suffering. The Hebrew text uses the word *marah*, “bitter.” Interestingly, the word also has the meaning of “rebellion,” as in the verse: “[Moses] and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, ‘Listen, you *rebels*, must we bring you water out of this rock?’”⁷³

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary comments: “It appears that about this time Israel had been greatly reduced; and great calamities had fallen upon all indiscriminately; even the diseased and captives in the dungeon had the hand of God heavy upon them, and there was no helper; and then God sent Jonah to encourage them, and to assure them of better days. He was the first of the prophets, after Samuel, whose writings are preserved; yet the prophecy delivered on this occasion is not extant; for what is now in the prophecies of Jonah, relates wholly to Nineveh.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “Apart from Jehovah, Israel had no one to come to her aid. Judah would not help her, for Judah had just suffered at her hands (vers. 11-14); still less would Philistia, or Moab, or Ammon, who were her constant enemies. Her isolation rendered her all the more an object for the Divine compassion.

God’s decision under the circumstances was not, as it well might have been, considering Israel’s ill desert, to blot out forthwith the very name of Israel from the earth. On the contrary, he gave the nation a breathing-space, a gleam of light, a second summer before the winter set in — a further opportunity of repenting and turning to him with all their hearts if they would only have taken advantage of it, a chance of redeeming the past and reestablishing themselves in his favor.

⁷³ Num. 20:10

He might well have destroyed them at this time if he had looked only to considerations of justice, if in his wrath he had not thought upon mercy.

Joash began the salvation, but it was reserved for Jeroboam to complete it. He was the true ‘savior’ (... 2 Kings 13:5), the true accomplisher of the work, for which his father only paved the way. Thus one Jeroboam founded the kingdom; another refounded it, restored its ancient glories, and gave it its old dimensions.”

For other details about the reign of Jeroboam II we are again referred to “the book of the annals of the kings of Israel,” which is no longer available to us.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes about Jeroboam’s reign: “The *other events* of Jeroboam’s long reign and all he did include extensive building work at Tirzah, the repair of the great gate and local governor’s palace with large buildings with stone foundations. At Megiddo the large grain storage pit (7 m deep x 11.4 m wide) capable of holding 12,800 bushels of grain is attributed to his work. The sixty-three inscribed sherds from Samaria, if dated to his reign and not to Menahem, record the prosperity which enabled imports of oil and wine from neighboring crown-estates to maintain a high income from taxes on these and other items....

The accession of Zechariah fulfills the prophecy that there would be four generations in Jehu’s line (10:30)

At this time it must be assumed that Judah now shared in the prosperity of Israel before the pressure Assyria was to exert had begun to be felt.”

g. Azariah of Judah (15:1-7)

1 In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Azariah son of Amaziah king of Judah began to reign. 2 He was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-two years. His mother's name was Jecoliah; she was from Jerusalem. 3 He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Amaziah had done. 4 The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there. 5 The Lord afflicted the king with leprosy until the day he died, and he lived in a separate house. Jotham the king's son had charge of the palace and governed the people of the land. 6 As for the other events of Azariah's reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah? 7 Azariah rested with his fathers and was buried near them in the City of David. And Jotham his son succeeded him as king.

For important details about the reign of Azariah, or Uzziah, we have to go to Second Chronicles, where we read about his “unfaithfulness” in entering the temple to burn incense on the altar of incense,⁷⁴ a ministry that was exclusively reserved to the ordained priests. As punishment for his pride, he was struck on the spot with leprosy.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings* writes about King Uzziah: “Azariah (‘my help is Yah(weh)’ is unlikely to be a throne-name. His other name Uzziah is as frequently used of him here in Kings (vv. 13, 30, 32, 34) and elsewhere in the Old (except I Chr. 3:12) and New Testaments (Matt. 1:8-9) including the Prophets (Isa. 1:1; 6:1; 7:1; Hos. 1:1; Amos 1:1; Zech. 14:5). Uzziah (‘my strength is Yah(weh)’ is of a know variant type of personal name (e.g. Azare-el-Uzzi-el, I Chr. 25:4, 18).”

⁷⁴ II Chron. 26:16-21

The Scripture's judgment about Uzziah is that "he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord." He did not commit idolatry by involving himself in the Baal cult. Yet, David's vision of the temple as the place of God's revelation was not part of Uzziah's worship. He allowed the people to bring sacrifices at other places where altars had been erected.

The Pulpit Commentary writes about the dating of Uzziah's reign: "In ... 2 Kings 14:23 it is distinctly stated that Jeroboam's reign of forty-one years commenced in the fifteenth of Amaziah, who from that time lived only fifteen years (... 2 Kings 14:17). Either, therefore, Azariah must have begun to reign in the fifteenth year of Jeroboam, or there must have been an interregnum of twelve years between the death of Amaziah and the accession of Azariah. As this last hypothesis is precluded by the narrative of ... 2 Chronicles 26:1 and ... 2 Kings 14:20, 21, we must correct the 'twenty-seventh year' of this verse into the 'fifteenth.' If we do this, corresponding changes will have to be made in vers. 8, 13, 23, and 27. These numbers are confirmed by Chronicles (... 2 Chronicles 26:1-3) and by Josephus ..., who says that he reigned fifty-two years, and died at the age of sixty-eight."

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes about Uzziah's sickness: "Azariah's disease was taken to be God-inflicted, as was sickness in Bible times. The 'dreaded skin disease' (GNB), or *leprosy* (AV, NIV ...) was a punishment for unlawfully usurping the priestly function of burning incense on the temple altar (2 Chr. 26:16-21; cf. Lev. 13:46). Since he then could not undertake royal public functions, he 'lived in a house on his own, relieved of all duties' (GNB). The *separate house* (RSV, NIV) is a word (Heb. *bet hahopsit*) which is difficult to interpret, indeed the Greek only transliterates it. It may be related to 'freedom' from slavery (Exod. 21:3, 4; Deut. 15:12; Jer. 34:9-11 as in Ugar. *hpt*; Akkad. *hupsu*) or from taxes or civil obligations (I Sam. 17:25). There is no evidence to link it with worlds for a place of isolation (JB 'he lived confined to his room'), but more likely he lived as a king 'in freedom at home.' A fine small building south-west of Jerusalem at Ramat Rahel is thought by ... its excavator, to be the place to which the king went. Similar buildings, also made of stone, are known from earlier periods at Samaria and Megiddo."

h. Zechariah of Israel (15:8-12)

8 In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah king of Judah, Zechariah son of Jeroboam became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned six months.

9 He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, as his fathers had done. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit. 10 Shallum son of Jabesh conspired against Zechariah. He attacked him in front of the people, assassinated him and succeeded him as king. 11 The other events of Zechariah's reign are written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel. 12 So the word of the Lord spoken to Jehu was fulfilled: "Your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation."

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on Zachariah's reign over Israel: "It has been supposed, on the ground of the recorded duration of his father's reign, ... where the Hebrew numerals are probably corrupt, that there was an interregnum, from some unknown cause, between the reign of Jeroboam and the accession of his son, which lasted, according to some, for 10 or 12 years, according to others, for 22 years, or more. This prince, who was a weak, facile, groveling sot (Hos 5), pursued the religious policy of the calf-worship, and his reign was short, being abruptly terminated by the hand of violence. There is nothing,

however, said in the history as to an interregnum arising from anarchy or faction, and the idea might seem to be improbable after so vigorous a reign as Jeroboam's. But that objection has no weight in the minds of many chronologists, who maintain that on the death of Jeroboam, his kingdom fell rapidly into confusion and decay. The sacred books are exceedingly short as regards the history of the last times of the kingdom of Israel. Sacred historiography has no interest in the details of this process of decay, which began with the death of Jeroboam, and which is represented by Amos as it were the day of Israel's death (Amos 7:11), although a bare existence is still for sometime spared. By the rejection of this interregnum, Hosea's ministry would be shortened by twelve years; but this gain, if gain it be, can be purchased only at the expense of a most improbable extension of the duration of Jeroboam's reign."

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "The death of this last king of the dynasty of Jehu (v. 12) saw the end of the Northern Kingdom proper. In the last twenty years six rulers were to follow each other, but only one was to die naturally. Anarchy, rivalry and regicide led to terminal bloodshed which fulfilled Hosea's prophecies (1:4).

The apparent discrepancy with 14:23 and 15:1 can be explained if (i) a co-regency of Azariah with his father is allowed, and (ii) Zechariah's six months spanned two separate years (753–752 BC), cf. I Kings 22:51."

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on Zachariah's sin: "Zachariah continued to break the covenant by maintaining the nationally divisive and idolatrous worship of the calves of Dan and Bethel. ... Zachariah was assassinated publicly. Lack of retaliation by the people indicates that they had sunk far down in their sins. ... Zachariah was the fourth descendant of Jehu, the last of that line to hold the throne (cf. 10:30)."

V. 10 has given Bible scholars some problems of interpretation. The Hebrew text reads literally: "And Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him and slew him before the people, and reigned in his stead." The problem is the Hebrew word *qabal*, which may mean "opposite," or "the presence." It is only found in this verse in the Old Testament.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: "The place of a conspiracy is occasionally given (v. 25, cf. I Kgs 15:27) but not invariably (v. 30). Thus the NIV *in front of the people* (*qabal'am*, cf. NRSV 'in public') though an unusual grammatical form, may be possible. There is little support (LXX (I.) for the differing reading (RSV) 'in Ibleam' (Heb. *beyible'am*) though it appeals since there Jehu's dynasty itself began with an assassination (I Kgs 9:27)."

i. Shallum of Israel (15:13-16)

13 Shallum son of Jabesh became king in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah king of Judah, and he reigned in Samaria one month.

14 Then Menahem son of Gadi went from Tirzah up to Samaria. He attacked Shallum son of Jabesh in Samaria, assassinated him and succeeded him as king.

15 The other events of Shallum's reign, and the conspiracy he led, are written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel.

16 At that time Menahem, starting out from Tirzah, attacked Tiphshah and everyone in the city and its vicinity, because they refused to open their gates. He sacked Tiphshah and ripped open all the pregnant women.

Shallum's reign over Israel represent probably a record in that it was limited to only one month. The Hebrew reads literally "a month of days," which is considered to be thirty.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary comments: "Menahem is supposed to have been one of Zachariah's generals. Hearing of the death of his master, when he was with the troops at Tirzah, he hastened to Samaria, and slew the murderer, and had himself proclaimed in his stead. But, as the people of Tiphseh did not open their gates to him, he took the place by assault; and as the text tells us, practiced the most cruel barbarities, even ripping up the women that were with child!"

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary adds: "Menahem's action was based on the facts that the Israelite kingdom was a military monarchy, that Shallum was a usurper, and that when the Jehu line died out, the throne would go to the commander in chief of the army."

The rapid successions on the throne of Israel and the violence that accompanied them indicate in what state of anarchy the nation had fallen. All this was the result of the fact that they had abandoned the true worship of YHWH. The Book of Proverbs states: "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law."⁷⁵

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: "The action by Menahem ... against the inhabitants of Tiphseh is unparalleled for brutality by any Israelite. Here it may mark the increasing influence of the surrounding nations (cf. 2 Kgs 21:2, 6). It was a foreign practice inflicted on the Israelites themselves by Aram (2 Kgs 8:12), Ammon (Amos 1:13) and Assyria (Hos. 13:8)."

j. Menahem of Israel (15:17-22)

17 In the thirty-ninth year of Azariah king of Judah, Menahem son of Gadi became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria ten years.

18 He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. During his entire reign he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit.

19 Then Pul king of Assyria invaded the land, and Menahem gave him a thousand talents of silver to gain his support and strengthen his own hold on the kingdom.

20 Menahem exacted this money from Israel. Every wealthy man had to contribute fifty shekels of silver to be given to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria withdrew and stayed in the land no longer.

21 As for the other events of Menahem's reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?

22 Menahem rested with his fathers. And Pekahiah his son succeeded him as king.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: "Menahem took over just before Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria (745-727 BC) began renewed operations in the west in a series of campaigns from 743 BC onwards which culminated in the first major direct contact of Assyria with Israel. The Assyrian policy was initially to leave a state on its borders independent, though requiring substantial annual payment for the privilege. Thereafter the state might be made a vassal, which entailed having an Assyrian official at court as a watchdog on the ruler's attitudes. This usually left the local king on the throne but in the event of any infringement the Assyrians would invade, exact special payments, and increase the annual tribute. Eventually Tiglath-pileser, who reorganized the whole administration, and his successors sub-divided Syro-Palestine into Assyrian provinces directly responsible to the Assyrian capital. Menahem maintained his

⁷⁵ Prov. 29:18

position by harsh methods (v. 16) until, near the end of his reign (752–742/1 BC), Tiglath-pileser (Pul) made an approach and was paid to support Menahem.”

At this time the deportation of the Northern Kingdom did not yet take place, but the political events described here would eventually lead to the captivity of the people of Israel and to the end of the nation. No one ever returned from the Israelites taken to Assyria. The Babylonian captivity of the Southern Kingdom, which followed later, would leave a remnant that returned.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Tiglath-pileser, who invaded Israel: “Tiglath-pileser, the great founder of the later Assyrian empire, made himself king in B.C. 745, and proceeded to consolidate the Assyrian power on every side, after a period of great weakness and disorganization. He made several expeditions against Babylonia, and several into Syria and Palestine. The expedition in which he came into contact with Menahem is thought to have been that of his eighth year, B.C. 738.”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes about the fine Menahem had to pay: “*A thousand talents of silver* represents three million shekels, about thirty-seven tons or ‘thirty-four thousand kilograms’ (GNB). At *fifty shekels* a head, which was the current price of a slave in Assyria, it needed sixty thousand payers to buy off (redeem) the threat. The sum was exacted, the money coming from the leading class (*gibbôri hahayil*) who would otherwise have had to furnish men of war. ... The sums paid by individuals would not have been unduly oppressive. This levy doubtless enabled Menahem to appoint his son Pekahiah as successor, for the fear of any Assyrian return would have prevented any rebellion.”

k. Pekahiah of Israel (15:23-26)

23 In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekahiah son of Menahem became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned two years.

24 Pekahiah did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit.

25 One of his chief officers, Pekah son of Remaliah, conspired against him. Taking fifty men of Gilead with him, he assassinated Pekahiah, along with Argob and Arieah, in the citadel of the royal palace at Samaria. So Pekah killed Pekahiah and succeeded him as king.

26 The other events of Pekahiah's reign, and all he did, are written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel.

The Hebrew name Pekahiah means *Yah has opened* [the eyes]. Interestingly, “peka” is the word for “eye” in one of the tribal languages of Papua, Indonesia.

Pekahiah’s reign was evil and it was cut short by assassination. One of his army officers, Pekah, rebelled against him and took his life and his throne.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “The short reign of Pekahiah was wholly undistinguished. He held the throne for two years only, or perhaps for parts of two years, and performed no action that any historian has thought worthy of record. Our author has nothing to relate of him but the circumstances of his death (ver. 25), wherewith he combines the usual formulae (vers. 23, 24, 26).”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments: “Pekahiah’s two-year reign coincided with Azariah’s last two years, overlapping with his fiftieth year. ... His evil was that he followed in the sins of Jeroboam. ... Pekah was an adjutant of Pekahiah, a captain of fifty men of the king’s

bodyguard. The fact that the bodyguard, instead of protecting the king, helped Pekah slay him, shows how the bonds of discipline, order, fidelity, and obedience had dissolved. Therefore the Lord had a ‘controversy with the inhabitants of the land’ (Hos 4:1-2). 27. ... Pekah took the throne of Israel in Uzziah’s last year. Correlation of all references to Pekahiah, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hoshea reveals the startling fact that Pekah usurped the years of Menahem and Pekahiah.”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments: “His assassin may have been his commander-in-chief ... Some think him leader of a Gileadite faction which was against Pekahiah as representing hereditary kingship.

The place of the murder is obscure. *Argob and Arieah* could be personal names, as NIV, the names of the guards units, or even place names (cf. I Kgs 4:13; Deut. 3:4); RSV omits, taking them to be displaced from verse 29. One possible solution is that they refer to gateway figures of an eagle (*‘rgh*) and lion (*‘ryh*). Sennacharib was cut down between protective figures according to the Ashurbanipal’s account. Such detail here would be unusual.”

I. Pekah of Israel (15:27-31)

27 In the fifty-second year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekah son of Remaliah became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned twenty years.

28 He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit.

29 In the time of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came and took Ijon, Abel Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh and Hazor. He took Gilead and Galilee, including all the land of Naphtali, and deported the people to Assyria.

30 Then Hoshea son of Elah conspired against Pekah son of Remaliah. He attacked and assassinated him, and then succeeded him as king in the twentieth year of Jotham son of Uzziah.

31 As for the other events of Pekah’s reign, and all he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Israel?

The Scripture’s judgment on Pekah is the same as of the other kings of Israel: “He did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit.” It is a sad and repetitive formula describing the depth to which the Northern Kingdom had fallen.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “The wider historical background is important. Pekah’s anti-Assyrian stance led Tiglath-pileser of Assyria in 734 BC to march as far as Gaza to cut off any hope of Egyptian assistance (as later 2 Kgs 17:4; cf. Hos. 7:11; 12:1). Its king Hanunu fled for a time to Egypt and the Assyrians maintained control of the coastal route by setting up a province *Du’ru* (Dor) to watch the Philistia-Sharon region. In 733/2 the Assyrians conquered Gal’za, Abilakka which is near Samaria (*Bit-Humria*) and the wide land of Damascus (*Bit-Haza’ili*) to its entire extent. ‘I added these to Assyria and appointed my own officials as governors of them’ (Assyrian annals). The cuneiform texts show how Assyria overran north Galilee (v.29) and incorporated it into the provincial system (with *Magiddu* = Megiddo as its center) as well as Gilead (*Gal’za*). This was to be the beginning of the elimination of Israel as an independent state. The Assyrian invasion may have been the result of the appeal to them for help by Ahaz or Judah.”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states: “Tiglath-pileser says, ‘I placed Ausi (Hosea) over them as king.’ What happened was that Hosea had to have his usurpation of the throne approved by Tiglath.”

Pekah, who had murdered Pekahiah, met the same fate of assassination. He became the victim of the anarchy he had helped to create. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: “The murder of Pekah introduced a period of anarchy, which lasted nine years, and was terminated by Hoshea’s success in establishing himself on the throne Jotham’s reign having lasted only sixteen years, the meaning is, that the reign of Hoshea began in the twentieth year after the beginning of Jotham’s reign: the sacred historian, having not yet introduced the name of Ahaz, reckoned the date by Jotham, whom he had already mentioned.”

The Pulpit Commentary writes: “By a mutilated notice in the records of Tiglath-pileser, it appears that the revolution here related was the result of another invasion of the Israelite territory by that monarch. ‘The land of Beth-Croft,’ he says, ‘... the tribe... the goods of its people and their furniture I sent to Assyria. Pekah their king [I caused to be put to death?] and Hoshea I appointed to the kingdom over them; their tribute I received, and [their treasures?] to Assyria I sent’ ... It is probably this invasion of which the writer of Chronicles speaks (... 1 Chronicles 5:26) as resulting in the deportation of the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “The Assyrians moved west up the valley to *Kedesh* ... and to *Janoah* ... thus cutting northern Israel off from possible Aramean aid. So all *Galilee* and *Gilead* were now lost and Israel was pressed back into the ‘Ephraim’ hill country.”

About the deportation, Dr. Wiseman states: “This first reference to the practice of removing leaders and selected experts into exile shows that the next step had now been taken towards making Israel a vassal-state. Some action had provoked the Assyrian Tiglath-pileser III who records ‘From Israel (Bît Humria) ... I led off its inhabitants and possessions to Assyria’ ... Deportation served as a punishment to rebels, weakening possible centers of resistance, as well as warning of exile for continuing offenders. It was to be expected as a punishment for any deviation from a covenant-treaty made with the Assyrians or Babylonians.”

m. Jotham of Judah (15:32-38)

32 In the second year of Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel, Jotham son of Uzziah king of Judah began to reign.

33 He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. His mother's name was Jerusha daughter of Zadok.

34 He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Uzziah had done.

35 The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there. Jotham rebuilt the Upper Gate of the temple of the Lord.

36 As for the other events of Jotham's reign, and what he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah?

37 (In those days the Lord began to send Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah against Judah.)

38 Jotham rested with his fathers and was buried with them in the City of David, the city of his father. And Ahaz his son succeeded him as king.

For more detailed information about Jotham, we have to refer to *Second Chronicles* 27. We read that he followed in his father's footsteps, doing "what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Uzziah had done, but unlike him he did not enter the temple of the Lord." But the people "continued their corrupt practices." *Second Chronicles* also states that Jotham made war with the Ammonites and conquered them, making them pay tribute to Judah.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes: "Jotham strove to defend his small territory and his increasing power was attributed to his steadfast way of life before God. The compiler of the book of Kings surprisingly does not include this conquest of Ammon from which he received a large tribute over three years.

Jotham ('Yah[weh] is perfect') began his sole rule in Pekah's second year after ten years co-regency, included in his sixteen regnal *years*. His mother's place of origin may be omitted on the assumption that Zadok's priestly title implied Jerusalem. 2 Chronicles 27:1 reads her name as Jerusha. A seal of Jotham found at Elat ... shows a pair of bellows denoting the importance of the copper industry in the Arabah there at the time.

The rebuilt *Upper Gate* was possibly the Benjamin Gate northeast of the temple area (Zech. 14:10), i.e. the Upper Benjamin Gate of Jeremiah 20:2 facing north (Ezek. 9:2). The Chronicler adds other building works on an extensive wall on Ophel hill and in towns in the Judean hills with forts and watchtowers in the wooded areas as part of the anti Syria/Ephraim defense measures now necessary.

The initial move by Rezin and Pekah against Judah are noted as an explanation of verse 35. The full hostilities did not come until the days of Ahaz (16:5-12), but Jotham, aware of the impact of the attack on Jerusalem in his father's time (14:13), was taking no chances. Rezin was the last king of Aram-Damascus and is mentioned in the Assyrian annals and in Isaiah (7:1-8; 8:6; 9:11). The variant Rezon (I Kgs 11:23-25) has been taken to imply that this was a title (cf. *rozen*, 'ruler') held by more than one king of Aram. Tiglath-pileser III c. 738 BC records the name *Ra-hi-ia-nu* (Rahyan, Razuyon, i.e. Rezon, formerly misread as *Ra-sun-nu*), in a list before Menahem of Samaria, as bringing him tribute."

n. Ahaz of Judah (16:1-20)

i. Summary of reign (16:1-4)

1 In the seventeenth year of Pekah son of Remaliah, Ahaz son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign.

2 Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God.

3 He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.

4 He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree.

Under the sixteen year long reign of Ahaz, Judah was led into the same kind of idolatry that prevailed in the Northern Kingdom. We read in more detail what Ahaz did to separate himself and his nation from the Lord in *Second Chronicles*.⁷⁶ We read that he even offered his

⁷⁶ 2 Chron. 28:1-27

own son, who was to replace him on the throne, as a sacrifice to Baal. *Second Chronicles* also records that he brought sacrifices on other places than at the one chosen by the Lord.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, writes: “This is the first instance where Judah imitates Israel’s apostasy (cf. 17:17), and this was to influence Manasseh (21:6; 23:10). He even ‘caused his son to pass through fire’ (AV, so Heb.) has been interpreted as sacrificed (NIV) or as a burnt-offering (RSV) – a desperate act in the face of defeat (3:27) contrary to the Mosaic law requiring the redemption of the first-born (Lev. 18:23; Deut. 18:10). But if taken as child sacrifice, which is rarely attested until later, this view must be based on an interpretation of the vow in Judges 11:31. There may be a Canaanite practice dedicating or initiating a son to the god Molech in a fire cult ... which was not practiced in Assyria. The hill-shrines were now used for worship of both Yahweh and other local gods, and every spreading tree notes the widespread immoral rites practiced here as in Israel.”

(ii) The Syro-Ephraimite attack (16:5-6)

5 Then Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem and besieged Ahaz, but they could not overpower him.

6 At that time, Rezin king of Aram recovered Elath for Aram by driving out the men of Judah. Edomites then moved into Elath and have lived there to this day.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, observes about the incident: “This followed the earlier pressure on Jotham (15:37) with a direct attack. There is no evidence that this was to force Ahaz into an anti-Assyrian condition. The plan was to dispose Ahaz and put Tab-el on the throne (Isa. 7:6) rather than to win expansion of Israelite territory. Either they failed to overpower or to ‘bring him to battle’ (NEB) or divine intervention (MT ‘they were unable to fight’) means that Ahaz or his men put up no resistance and so later fell into Syrian hands (so 2 Chr. 28:5). Judah suffered heavy casualties, while Ahaz withstood the attacks (Isa. 7:3) but then called for help.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments on Ahaz’ character and actions: “Ahaz was the most wicked king that had as yet reigned in Judah. The author, therefore, prefaces his account of the reign by a brief summary of some of the king’s chief iniquities.

(1) He departed from the way of David (ver. 2); (2) he made his son pass through the fire to Moloch (ver. 3); and (3) he took an active part in the worship at the high places and in the groves, at which most previous kings had winked, but which they had not countenanced.”

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, states: “*Ahaz* as a personal name also occurs elsewhere on a seal ‘Ashna, official of Ahaz.’ It is an abbreviation of the name Jehoahaz (13:1), written by the Assyrians *Ya-a-da-aia* in the list of kings from Cilicia to Gaza who paid tribute to Assyria about 732 BC. The chronology here is difficult and it may be assumed that the *twenty years old* was his age when he began to rule as co-regent with Jotham in 735 BC, and would then have been about fourteen when Hezekiah was born. ... The *sixteen years* of reign would be after the death of Jotham It is unusual that the name of the mother of a Judean king is omitted. That he *did not do right* is a unique evaluation of his reign and character. It may be a sorrowful appraisal which implies that he did not take some specific steps which would warrant the specific classification as doing evil. On the other hand only Manasseh is more severely berated than Ahaz.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “As sixteen years afterwards his son Hezekiah was twenty-five (... 2 Kings 18:2), it is scarcely possible that Ahaz can have been no more than twenty at his accession, since in that case he must have married at ten years of age, and have had a son at eleven! The reading of ‘twenty-five’ instead of ‘twenty,’ found in some Hebrew codices, in the Vatican manuscript of the Septuagint, and elsewhere, is therefore to be preferred. *And reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem.* So the author of Chronicles (... 2 Chronicles 28:1) and Josephus The reign of Ahaz probably lasted from B.C. 742 to B.C. 727.”

The Adam Clarke's Commentary states: “It is likely that this was the time when Isaiah was sent to console Ahaz (see Isa 7:1) and predicted the death both of Rezin and Pekah, his enemies.”

Barnes' Notes comments: “Rezin and Pekah, who had already begun their attacks upon Judaea in the reign of Jotham (2 Kings 15:37), regarded the accession of a boy-king, only 16 years of age, as especially favorable to their projects, and proceeded without loss of time to carry them out. The earlier scenes of the war, omitted by the writer of Kings, are given at some length in 2 Chron. 28:5-15.”

The NIV's rendering of the Hebrew word *lacham*, as “overpower” is acceptable. The word literally means “to swallow up.” It is generally rendered with “to fight with.”

But the Aramean army did capture the city of Elath and the Edomites settled there.

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “The alliance between Rezin and Pekah has been already glanced at (... 2 Kings 16:37). It began, apparently, in the reign of Jotham. The policy which brought it about was one that was entirely new. Since Syria developed an aggressive tendency under the first Ben-hadad (... 1 Kings 20:1), there had till now been no alliance made with her by either of the two Israelite kingdoms. She had been reckoned as their common enemy; and while they had on two occasions been allied together against her (... 1 Kings 22:4-36; ... 2 Kings 8:28), never as yet had either asked her help against the other. Now, however, Ephraim became confederate with Syria against Judah. The new policy must be ascribed to the new condition of things consequent upon the attitude assumed by Assyria under Tiglath-pileser. Assyria had been under a cloud for forty years. The nations of the western coast of Asia had ceased to fear her, and had felt at liberty to pursue their own quarrels. Her recovery of vigor altered the whole situation. It was at once evident to the statesmen who directed the policy of the small western states that, unless they combined; they were lost. Hence the alliance between Pekah and Rezin. Probably they would have been glad to have drawn Ahaz into the confederacy; but it would seem that he did not share their fears, and would not join them. Hereupon the design was formed to dethrone him, and set up in his place a new ruler, a certain Ben-Tabeal (... Isaiah 7:6), on whose assistance they could rely. The two confederate princes then began the campaign. Pekah invaded Judaea, and gained a great victory over Ahaz, which is perhaps exaggerated in ... 2 Chronicles 28:6-15; Rezin carried his arms further south, took Elath, and reestablished the Edomites in power Then the allies joined forces and proceeded to besiege Jerusalem. *And they besieged Ahaz*, but could not overcome him. The siege is mentioned by ... Isaiah 7:1, who was commissioned by God to comfort Ahaz, and assure him that the city would not fall (... Isaiah 7:7). The fortifications of Uzziah (... 2 Chronicles 26:9) and Jotham (... 2 Chronicles 27:3) had, no doubt, greatly strengthened the city since the time when (as related in ... 2 Kings 4:13) it was captured so easily by Joash.

At that time Rezin, King of Syria recovered Elath to Syria. The Syrians had certainly never previously been masters of Elath, which had always hitherto been either Jewish or Edomite (see ... 1 Kings 9:26; 22:48; ... 2 Kings 14:22). Hence it seems to be necessary that we should

either translate the Hebrew verb ... by ‘gained,’ ‘conquered,’ instead of ‘recovered;’ or else change ..., ‘Syria,’ into ... ‘Edom.’ The Syrians could ‘recover’ Elath for Edom; they could only ‘gain’ it for themselves. *And drove the Jews from Elath* — *i.e.* expelled the Jewish garrison which had been maintained in Elath from the time of its conquest by Uzziah (... 2 Kings 14:22) — *and the Syrians came to Elath*; rather, *the Edomites* — ... *for* ... Rezin could not have thought of holding a place so remote from Damascus as Elath; and, had he done so, the danger of his kingdom in the next year would have necessitated the relinquishment of so distant a possession. *And dwelt there unto this day*. It is quite certain that Elath belonged to Edom, and not to Syria, at the time when the Books of Kings were written.”

(iii) The appeal to Assyria (16:7-9)

7 Ahaz sent messengers to say to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, "I am your servant and vassal. Come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Aram and of the king of Israel, who are attacking me."

8 And Ahaz took the silver and gold found in the temple of the Lord and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria.

9 The king of Assyria complied by attacking Damascus and capturing it. He deported its inhabitants to Kir and put Rezin to death.

Donald J. Wiseman, in 1 and 2 Kings, comment: “The address ‘I am your servant and your son’ clearly places Ahaz as the petitioning vassal and shows he was trusting in Assyria rather than the LORD, against the advice of Isaiah (7:10-16; cf. Exod. 23:22). From this time Judah, whose inhabitants are here first designated men of Judah or ‘Jews’ (as AV), was, with minor exceptions, subservient to Assyria. According to Assyrian vassal-treaties a vassal could expect help against any of the overlord’s enemies who might attack him. The Chronicler adds that at this time Edom and Philistia were attacking Judah (2 Chr. 28:20-21) and views this embassy to Assyria as being ‘most unfaithful to the Lord’ and as ‘promoting wickedness in Judah.’ The intervention was bought at a heavy price. The temple treasury reserves were depleted (cf. 12:18; 14:14) to send a ‘bribe’ (so NEB, *sohad*) which was accepted by the Assyrians as tribute.”

(iv) Ahaz makes innovations in the temple (16:10-18)

10 Then King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria. He saw an altar in Damascus and sent to Uriah the priest a sketch of the altar, with detailed plans for its construction.

11 So Uriah the priest built an altar in accordance with all the plans that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus and finished it before King Ahaz returned.

12 When the king came back from Damascus and saw the altar, he approached it and presented offerings on it.

13 He offered up his burnt offering and grain offering, poured out his drink offering, and sprinkled the blood of his fellowship offerings on the altar.

14 The bronze altar that stood before the Lord he brought from the front of the temple — from between the new altar and the temple of the Lord — and put it on the north side of the new altar.

15 King Ahaz then gave these orders to Uriah the priest: "On the large new altar, offer the

morning burnt offering and the evening grain offering, the king's burnt offering and his grain offering, and the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their grain offering and their drink offering. Sprinkle on the altar all the blood of the burnt offerings and sacrifices. But I will use the bronze altar for seeking guidance."

16 And Uriah the priest did just as King Ahaz had ordered.

17 King Ahaz took away the side panels and removed the basins from the movable stands. He removed the Sea from the bronze bulls that supported it and set it on a stone base.

18 He took away the Sabbath canopy that had been built at the temple and removed the royal entryway outside the temple of the Lord, in deference to the king of Assyria.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments: "The Assyrian conquerors required all their tributaries to set up in their capitals altars to the great gods, as a token of gratitude, on the part of the victor, to the deities by whose favor he had triumphed, and a badge of subjection to their suzerain on the part of the dependents. During his stay that pagan city, Ahaz saw an altar with which he was greatly captivated. Forthwith a sketch of it was transmitted to Jerusalem, with orders to Uriah the priest to get one constructed according to the Damascus model, and to let this new altar supersede the old one in the temple.

The Pulpit Commentary states: "The new position into which Ahaz had brought himself with respect to Assyria was followed by certain religious changes, which were probably, in part at any rate, its consequence, though some of them may have been the result of his own religious (or irreligious) convictions. He had a new altar made and introduced into the temple, which at first he used for his own private sacrifices (vers. 10-13); then, that his new altar might occupy the post of honor, he removed from its place the old brazen altar of Solomon, and put it in an inferior position (ver. 14). After this, he required all sacrifices to be offered on the new altar (ver. 15). Finally, he proceeded to interfere with several other of Solomon's arrangements, with what particular object is not very apparent (vers. 17, 18). In carrying out all these changes, he had the high priest of the time for his obsequious servant."

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments on Ahaz' act of profanity: "The Solomonic altar did not please Ahaz after he had seen the altar in Damascus. He sinned against the Lord by having removed the altar made according to the Lord's instruction and placed there by His direction. God's appointed instruments are not to be tampered with. Ahaz made further depredations upon the temple furnishings, stripping them of valuable ornamentation for fear of (not for, i.e., for the benefit of) the king of Assyria. He guarded against exciting the cupidity of Tiglath-pileser, should he come into Jerusalem."

Ahaz used the original altar for a scientific experiment, which amounted to idolatry. He had it taken apart and used it "for seeking guidance." But that would not be seeking the will of the Lord.

Donald J. Wiseman, in *1 and 2 Kings*, comments on Ahaz' experiments: "The use of the bronze altar for seeking guidance or 'to inquire by' (RSV) is not clear as there is no derogatory comment about it. The Hebrew *haqquer* means 'to examine for defect.' And Jewish tradition interprets this as the proper examination of sacrificial animals. It is, however, and unusual term to use of searching animal entrails for omen guidance, a practice condemned by Deuteronomy 18:10-12. Others interpret the use of this altar to be for the king's exclusive personal use ('as for the altar of bronze I shall see to that' JB). Ahaz needed precious metal for replenishing the treasury and perhaps for payment of a further annual tribute. He therefore cut up the side panels, 'borders' (NASB) or 'frames' (RSV) of the ten mobile basins (cf. I Kgs 7:27-33) and replaced

the bronze base of the vast ‘Sea’ laver with stone (cf. I Kgs 7:23-25). All this to get hold of metal which was primarily dedicated to the worship and glory of God alone.”

In all this King Ahaz demonstrated to have total disrespect for the revelation God had given to Moses and King Solomon. The original altar built by Moses was a copy of the heavenly model God had shown Moses on the mountain.⁷⁷

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The ‘covert for the sabbath’ was probably ... ‘a covered place or stand in the court of the temple, to be used by the king whenever he visited the temple with his retinue on the sabbath, or on feast- days.’ It may have been elaborately ornamented. *And the king’s entry without.* This may have been ‘the ascent into the house of the Lord,’ which Solomon constructed for his own use (... 1 Kings 10:5), and which was among those marvels of art that made the spirit of the Queen of Sheba faint within her.”

It is not clear whether Ahaz acted merely out of complete disrespect for God’s revelation or whether he had other political motivations. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, evidently, believes he had, and comments: “Ahaz made further depredations upon the temple furnishings, stripping them of valuable ornamentation for fear of (not for, i.e., for the benefit of) the king of Assyria. He guarded against exciting the cupidity of Tiglath-pileser, should he come into Jerusalem.”

(v) Concluding formula for Ahaz’ reign (16:19-20)

19 As for the other events of the reign of Ahaz, and what he did, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah?

20 Ahaz rested with his fathers and was buried with them in the City of David. And Hezekiah his son succeeded him as king.

For Ahaz’ other acts we are again referred to “the annals of the kings of Judah,” which has not been preserved. We read that he was buried in “the City of David,” which is Jerusalem. Amazingly, this godless monarch was followed by his son, Hezekiah, who was one of the most God-fearing of Judah’s kings, beside his ancestor David.

o. Hoshea and the fall of Israel (17:1-41)

(i) The occasion of the exile (17:1-6)

1 In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea son of Elah became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned nine years.

2 He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, but not like the kings of Israel who preceded him.

3 Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up to attack Hoshea, who had been Shalmaneser’s vassal and had paid him tribute.

4 But the king of Assyria discovered that Hoshea was a traitor, for he had sent envoys to So king of Egypt, and he no longer paid tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore Shalmaneser seized him and put him in prison.

5 The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched against Samaria and laid siege to it for three years.

⁷⁷ Ex. 27:8

6 In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes.