



## Second Kings - Chapter Thirteen

### Summary of Chapter Thirteen

This chapter starts by stepping back in time from the death of King Joash of Judah and returns to the theme of the kings in the northern kingdom of Israel.

It commences with the reign of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, who did evil in the sight of God and caused his anger to focus on his errant people. As a result they were continually plagued by the Aramæans until the king called upon the Lord, who heeded his pleas and restored peace to the land at the end of the king's reign, albeit with a much weakened army to defend them.

When Jehoahaz died after seventeen years on the throne his son Jehoash succeeded him and ruled for sixteen years, He continued in the evil ways of his father and was at war with King Amaziah of Judah.

The story now turns to the death of Elisha, the great prophet and servant of God. Before his death, the king was with him and Elisha instructed him first to fire an arrow out of the window towards the east and then to strike his remaining arrows on the ground. Through this Elisha prophesied that Israel would have victory against the Aramæans but only three times. Ultimately, Aram would succeed. When the corpse of a man was thrown into Elisha's grave it came to life again.

Although Jehoahaz was plagued by the Aramæans throughout his reign, his son was granted three victories over them in accordance with Elisha's prophecy, recovering the towns that Aram had taken from Israel.

### **IV      2 Kings 13:1-25 - Jehoahaz and Jehoash**

The reader is now updated on what has been happening in Israel during the reigns of those two kings whose accessions took place within Joash of Judah's lifetime.

#### IV.a 2 Kings 13:1-9 - Jehoahaz Reigns over Israel

Under normal circumstances, one might expect the appearance of a prophet to announce the end of Jehu's house because of its sins. The divine promise to Jehu, however, is functioning like the earlier promise to David, and the Israelite royal house is for the moment being treated like the Judæan royal house. The anger of the Lord is thus expressed only in the form of Aramæan oppression.

<sup>1</sup> In the twenty-third year of King Joash son of Ahaziah of Judah, Jehoahaz son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria; he reigned for seventeen years. <sup>2</sup> He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and followed the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin; he did not depart from them. <sup>3</sup> The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, so that he gave them repeatedly into the hand of King Hazael of Aram, then into the hand of Ben-hadad son of Hazael.

#### 2 Kings 13:1-3

In the twenty-third year of King Joash was 814 BC.

Jehoahaz son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria. This was the beginning of the fulfilment of a promise made to Jehu, as recorded in 2 Kings 10:30. God promised him that his descendants would sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation. This dynasty - although founded on a violent overthrow of the previous royal house - continued, because Jehu came to the throne performing the will of God.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and followed the sins of Jeroboam. His father Jehu had also continued in the idolatry of Jeroboam as stated in 2 Kings 10:31. Therefore, Jehoahaz followed in the footsteps of both Jeroboam and his father Jehu.

He gave them repeatedly into the hand of King Hazael of Aram. The northern kingdom of Israel still had its own name and king, but they were a tributary and subservient nation to Aram. In the general history of this time, the Assyrian Empire kept the Aramæans weak and unable to expand their domain into Israel. However, there was a period when internal problems made the Assyrians bring back their troops from the frontiers of their empire, and the Aramæans took advantage of this time of Assyrian distraction.

<sup>4</sup> But Jehoahaz entreated the Lord, and the Lord heeded him; for he saw the oppression of Israel, how the king of Aram oppressed them.

<sup>5</sup> Therefore the Lord gave Israel a saviour, so that they escaped from

the hand of the Aramæans; and the people of Israel lived in their homes as formerly.

### 2 Kings 13:4-5

Jehoahaz entreated the Lord. Jehoahaz was an ungodly man, and this prayer did not mark a lasting or real revival in his life. Yet God listened to his prayer because of his great mercy and because of his care for his people Israel. The language throughout vv.3-5 is reminiscent of the Book of Judges, where Israel's recurring idolatry was followed by divine anger, expressing itself in oppression by foreigners. When Israel cried out under this oppression, God first allowed them to be humbled and then he sent a saviour to rescue them, for example: <<*But when the Israelites cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the Israelites, who delivered them, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother*>> (Judges 3:9).

It seems likely that the 'saviour' in question here is Assyria, whose interest in Aram-Palestine was rekindled in the closing years of the 9<sup>th</sup> Century BC, resulting in a measure of relief for Israel as the attention of Damascus necessarily turned to the north. However, there is also a school of thought that the successes of King Jeroboam II also place him as a candidate.

The term 'entreated the Lord' comes from a word meaning 'to be sick,' implying weakness and dependency. Jehoahaz was at the end of his tether. Finally, he knew there was nowhere else to go but to the Lord. Of course, that should always be the first place a person turns to, not the last!

<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, they did not depart from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, which he caused Israel to sin, but walked in them; the sacred pole also remained in Samaria.

### 2 Kings 13:6

Nevertheless, they did not depart from the sins of the house of Jeroboam. Although God answered their prayer and sent a deliverer, Israel continued in their false worship of the true God. People often consider this to be a small and inconsequential sin, and excuse the idolatry under the claim of good intentions. Charles Spurgeon comments, "Israel's repentance was only half-hearted; they repented because they suffered. They repented because of the suffering rather than because of the sin. They went back to the sin after they escaped from the sorrow."

The sacred pole also remained in Samaria. The English translation here implies that this is the same Asherah that Ahab made earlier: <<*Ahab also made a sacred pole. Ahab did more to provoke the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than*>>

*had all the kings of Israel who were before him*>> (1 Kings 16:33), which in that case must have survived Jehu's reformation. However, it could also be translated 'an Asherah (once again) stood in Samaria.' On Asherim, refer to the comment made on 1 Kings 14:15.

<sup>7</sup> So Jehoahaz was left with an army of not more than fifty horsemen, ten chariots and ten thousand foot-soldiers; for the king of Aram had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing. <sup>8</sup> Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz and all that he did, including his might, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

### 2 Kings 13:7-8

So Jehoahaz was left with an army of not more than fifty horsemen, ten chariots and ten thousand foot-soldiers. Although Israel was delivered, they remained apostate and they were left weak militarily because they had been weak spiritually. Their lack of fellowship with the true God made them weak; or actually, God made them weak because of their lack of a true relationship.

Made them like the dust at threshing. God's punishment is so severe that it reduces the army of Jehoahaz to little more than a remnant, as insubstantial as chaff in the breeze.

The harvesting of cereal crops in Israel was followed by a threshing and winnowing process, in which the threshed material was thrown into the air with a fork or a shovel to allow the breeze to separate the grain, the straw, and the chaff. The chaff would be blown away by the wind just as the Israelite army had been by the Aramæans.

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.

<sup>9</sup> So Jehoahaz slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in Samaria; then his son Joash succeeded him.

### 2 Kings 13:9

The next king of Israel, introduced here as Joash, is referred to as both Joash (v.14) and Jehoash (v.25) throughout the rest of this chapter and in Chapter 14. He is not to be confused with King Joash of Judah, who is also referred to as Jehoash; refer to the comment made on 2 Kings 11:21.

#### IV.b 2 Kings 13:10-13 - Jehoash Reigns over Israel

This is a brief summary of King Jehoash who replaced his father Jehoahaz. He was another evil king and he was at war with his kinsfolk in Judah

<sup>10</sup> In the thirty-seventh year of King Joash of Judah, Jehoash son of Jehoahaz began to reign over Israel in Samaria; he reigned for sixteen years. <sup>11</sup> He also did what was evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to sin, but he walked in them. <sup>12</sup> Now the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, as well as the might with which he fought against King Amaziah of Judah, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? <sup>13</sup> So Joash slept with his ancestors, and Jeroboam sat upon his throne; Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.

#### 2 Kings 13:10-13

In the thirty-seventh year of King Joash was 798 BC.

Jehoash son of Jehoahaz began to reign over Israel. He was the grandson of King Jehu, founder of this dynasty. He continued in the same sins as his father and grandfather, and the initial sinful king of Israel, Jeroboam I.

The might with which he fought against King Amaziah of Judah. The reign of Jehoash saw a civil war among the people of God, with the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel in war. This war with Amaziah is recorded in detail in 2 Chronicles Chapter 25; it ended in the total defeat of King Amaziah who was taken prisoner by Joash, and afterwards was slain in a conspiracy at Lachish.

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel was a separate record from Kings and Chronicles to which the authors had access that recorded everything of significance that occurred during the reign of the kings.

#### IV.c 2 Kings 13:14-21 - Death of Elisha

King Joash is with a dying Elisha and is instructed to fire an arrow towards the east. He is then told to take his arrows and strike them on the ground, which he does three times. Elisha angrily told him that he should have struck the ground more often for then he would have known total success in his war with Aram. As it was he would only win three victories.

When Elisha was dead a Moabite raiding party came and they threw the body of a man into Elisha's grave and the man immediately came to life as he came into contact with the bones of the great prophet.

<sup>14</sup> Now when Elisha had fallen sick with the illness of which he was to die, King Joash of Israel went down to him, and wept before him, crying, 'My father, my father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!'

<sup>15</sup> Elisha said to him, 'Take a bow and arrows'; so he took a bow and arrows. <sup>16</sup> Then he said to the king of Israel, 'Draw the bow'; and he drew it. Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands. <sup>17</sup> Then he said, 'Open the window to the east'; and he opened it. Elisha said, 'Shoot'; and he shot. Then he said, 'The Lord's arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Aram! For you shall fight the Aramæans in Aphek until you have made an end of them.'

### 2 Kings 13:14-17

Now when Elisha had fallen sick with the illness of which he was to die. Even men of faith and miracles are not immune to sickness and disease. This great man became sick like others whom he had healed as a channel for the power and blessing of God. Although God used Elisha on many occasions to heal others, God appointed this illness to be the means of taking Elisha from this world. God has no one single way that he does this; it is a mistake to believe that all the godly die in their sleep without a hint of prior illness.

King Joash, i.e. Jehoash of Israel, weeps because he thinks he is on the verge of defeat, having inherited depleted resources in chariots and horsemen from his father (v.7). Elisha, who knows of other chariots of Israel and horsemen who are not of flesh and blood whom he had personally seen in 2 Kings 2:11-12 and 6:8-17, is able to promise the king a series of three victories. The victories would have been greater in number and complete had the king, in response to prophetic commands, been more enthusiastically obedient to the words of the prophet, i.e. <<*You should have struck five or six times*>> (v.19).

This reaction of the king of Israel might seem strange having just read the description of the sin and evil that marked his reign. However, it is important to remember that Joash was not a worshipper of the false gods; he was a false worshipper of the true God. He had some respect for the true God, and therefore some regard and honour for Elisha as a prophet. Spurgeon used this example to say, "Dear friends, let us seek so to live that even ungodly men may miss us when we are gone."

The chariots of Israel and its horsemen! Elisha said these words to Elijah at the end of the elder prophet's days on this earth. When he said this to Elijah in 2 Kings

2:12, he recognised the true strength of Israel. He knew that the strength of Israel was really in the presence of the prophet of God. Now Joash perhaps realises that the problem is not his diminished army but that the true strength of God through his prophet is slipping from this earth and he mourns it.

Aphek lay to the east of the main Israelite territory in Transjordan, the direction in which Joash shoots the arrow and from which the Aramæan threat to Israel typically came. Joash was concerned that the true strength of Israel was about to depart from this earth. Therefore, Elisha used this illustration of the arrow shot through the window to show him that the Lord's arrow of victory was still present, and all Joash had to do was to shoot the arrow in faith. Elisha made it clear that there was a connection between the shooting of the arrows towards the east and a strike against the Aramæans that would bring deliverance to Israel.

<sup>18</sup> He continued, 'Take the arrows'; and he took them. He said to the king of Israel, 'Strike the ground with them'; he struck three times, and stopped. <sup>19</sup> Then the man of God was angry with him, and said, 'You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck down Aram until you had made an end of it, but now you will strike down Aram only three times.'

### 2 Kings 13:18-19

Take the arrows. Joash had just heard Elisha make the connection between the arrows shot through the window and the coming victory over the Aramæan army. He knew that these arrows represented the Lord's deliverance of his people Israel against Aram.

Strike the ground with them. This could mean either literally hitting the ground with them or firing them out of the window so that they fell to the ground. Joash may have timidly received this invitation of the prophet to shoot the arrows at no particular target so that they hit the ground. He shot three arrows and stopped, not sensing what he should have - that the arrows represented victories in battle over the Aramæans, and he should have received the prophet's invitation more boldly and continued firing or striking.

The phrase 'Strike the ground' can be for shot arrows hitting the ground. Elisha may have asked Joash to shoot the arrows through the window at no particular target, not to pound them on the floor. Elisha clearly asked Joash to do something that modelled prayer:

- Shooting the arrows required effort and aim.
- Shooting the arrows required instruction and help from the prophet of God.
- Shooting the arrows had to be done through an open window.

- Shooting the arrows had to be done without knowing the exact outcome ahead of time. The target was only fully known by faith.
- Shooting the arrows was ineffective because it was not repeated enough, reflecting a lack of confidence in the process.
- Shooting the arrows had its strategic moment, and when that moment passed it was gone.
- Failing to shoot the arrows hurts others, not only self.

The man of God was angry with him. Because King Joash did not seize the strategic moment, Israel would enjoy only three victories over the Aramæan army, instead of the many more they could have enjoyed. In fact, had they truly repented as a nation and returned to God it is unlikely that any of their subsequent troubles and ultimate scattering among the nations would have occurred.

But now you will strike down Aram only three times. As it happened, life and death depended on how many arrows Joash shot to the ground. When King Joash had the opportunity to shoot the arrows, it probably seemed to be a small thing to him. He did not know that God's plan for a nation and his seemingly small actions were vitally connected.

<sup>20</sup> So Elisha died, and they buried him. Now bands of Moabites used to invade the land in the spring of the year. <sup>21</sup> As a man was being buried, a marauding band was seen and the man was thrown into the grave of Elisha; as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he came to life and stood on his feet.

### 2 Kings 13:20-21

So Elisha died. Perhaps he expected or hoped that he would be carried up into heaven after the dramatic pattern of his mentor Elijah. Yet that was not God's plan or will for Elisha. Like many others, he simply became old, sick, and then died. This is the way of life for many such great people of God.

The grave of Elisha. Tombs in ancient Israel were often dug out of soft rock, or located in caves, e.g. as in Genesis Chapter 23, and they were not difficult to access. It is probably important to know at this point that Elisha's powers to 'resurrect' life live on, because as this man was thrown, Hebrew *shalak*, into the grave of Elisha, so God will soon 'throw,' 'cast,' or 'banish' Israel into exile in Assyria as recorded in 2 Kings 17:20 using the same verb *shalak*. The Israelites need to maintain contact with the great prophets of the past through obedience to their teachings if this 'death' in exile is also to be followed by an unexpected resurrection; refer to the account of the dry bones in Ezekiel 37:1-14.

**This is one of the more strange and unusual miracles in the Bible. There is little explanation and the silence of the record suggests that there was no inherent**

power in the bones of Elisha to resuscitate others. It was never intended to lead people to use various relics as implements to reproduce the miracles, which is more about superstition than faith. This seems to be a unique, one-time miracle to bring honour to the memory of this great prophet.

#### IV.d 2 Kings 13:22-25 - Israel Recaptures Cities from Aram

King Joash did indeed have three victories over Aram as Elisha had said and he recovered the towns that had been lost in earlier battles by his father Jehoahaz.

<sup>22</sup> Now King Hazael of Aram oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz.

<sup>23</sup> But the Lord was gracious to them and had compassion on them; he turned towards them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them; nor has he banished them from his presence until now.

#### 2 Kings 13:22-23

Now King Hazael of Aram oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. This was allowed - even planned - by God as a way to discipline this wayward nation. Second Kings 8:12 records Elisha's prior knowledge of the calamity Hazael would bring upon Israel.

But the Lord was gracious to them and had compassion on them. Israel deserved this discipline, yet God refused to forsake them. He gave them many blessings and saved them from many problems and would not destroy them; nor has he banished them from his presence.

His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Here is a deeper reason than the one given in 2 Kings 10:30 for Israel's survival during Jehoahaz's reign. Long before he made promises to Jehu about kingship and a covenant with David, God was dealing with Israel's ancestors, e.g. Genesis 15:1-21 and 17:1-27. That is why he kept the Aramæans at bay during the reign of Jehoahaz, in spite of Israel's sin; and that is why the equally sinful Jehoash was later able to lead Israel to something of a recovery in a period when Hazael's successor Ben-hadad III was preoccupied with the Assyrian threat to his north. Even until now, in the time that the authors are writing after Israel's exile, Israel remains in God's presence.

<sup>24</sup> When King Hazael of Aram died, his son Ben-hadad succeeded him.

<sup>25</sup> Then Jehoash son of Jehoahaz took again from Ben-hadad son of Hazael the towns that he had taken from his father Jehoahaz in war. Three times Joash defeated him and recovered the towns of Israel.

## 2 Kings 13:24-25

Three times Joash defeated him. Elisha had promised Joash these three victories over the Aramæans. It can be supposed that, especially after the third victory, King Joash wished he had shot more arrows through the window at the invitation of Elisha. History may have been different if he had had the faith to do so.