



Second Kings - Chapter Eight

II 2 Kings 2:1-10:36 - Elisha and Israel (continues)

Summary of Chapter Eight

Chapter Four told the story of Elisha and the Shunammite woman, how she had a son she never expected and how his life was restored by the Lord through Elisha. The authors now add the detail that Elisha had warned her of a coming famine and had advised that her whole family relocate to another land for seven years to that they might survive. When the family returned after seven years living with the Philistines, they appealed to the king to have their lands restored. Now Gehazi had told the king how Elisha had restored the son's life and he now told the king that this was that family, so the king ordered that their lands should be restored to them.

King Ben-hadad was ill and he sent Hazael to ask Elisha if he would recover. Elisha told Hazael to tell the king that he would recover, stating that in fact he would not. Elisha then wept. When Hazael asked why, Elisha told Hazael that he would be the next king and that he would do wicked things to the Israelites. Hazael said he would not. He returned to the king in Damascus, told him that he would not die but then murdered him the following day and Hazael succeeded him as king of Aram.

A summary of King Jehoram of Judah shows that he was an evil king like those in the northern kingdom of Israel. He even married a daughter of King Ahab. During his reign Edom rose up against Judah and set their own king in place. When he died Ahaziah succeeded him.

King Ahaziah was an evil king like his father. He fought alongside King Joram or Jehoram of Israel against the Aramæans. When Joram was wounded in battle he retreated to Jezreel and Ahaziah went to see him.

II.g 2 Kings 8:1-6 - The Shunammite Woman's Land Restored

After the long narrative about the siege of Samaria, the Shunammite woman of 2 Kings 4:8-37 reappears. The key to understanding this new story is found in 2 Kings 4:13, where the woman declines Elisha's offer of help because she has a home among her own people. In this section, however, she no longer has such a home, for she has followed Elisha's advice and avoided famine by living in Philistia for seven years.

¹ Now Elisha had said to the woman whose son he had restored to life, 'Get up and go with your household, and settle wherever you can; for the Lord has called for a famine, and it will come on the land for seven years.'

2 Kings 8:1

Elisha had said. Chapter 4 describes Elisha's previous dealings with this woman. She and her husband were godly, generous people who helped the prophet. Through Elisha's prayer they were blessed with a son, who was also brought miraculously back to life. The prophecy had been delivered around the same time that Elisha restored the woman's son to life, and the famine had followed shortly thereafter; refer to 2 Kings 4:38. This general state of famine is to be distinguished from the even more severe famine in the city of Samaria described in 2 Kings 6:24-7:20, which was specifically the result of a siege.

² So the woman got up and did according to the word of the man of God; she went with her household and settled in the land of the Philistines for seven years.

2 Kings 8:2

On the advice of the prophet, the woman and her family left Israel because of a coming famine. In the land of the Philistines, they were spared the worst of the famine. The land of the Philistines was a natural place for the Shunammite woman to seek refuge during a time of famine in Israel. Indeed, the patriarch Isaac himself moved into this region in similar circumstances in Genesis 26:1, not least because of its proximity to Egypt, the breadbasket of the ancient world and the common destination throughout the biblical period of people escaping times of hardship, e.g. Genesis 12:10, 41:53-42:5, and 47:4.

³ At the end of the seven years, when the woman returned from the land of the Philistines, she set out to appeal to the king for her house and her land.

2 Kings 8:3

She set out to appeal to the king for her house and her land. Upon leaving Israel and going to the land of the Philistines, the woman forfeited her claim to her ancestral lands. Therefore, someone had taken the woman's property in her absence – perhaps King Jehoram himself, showing the same land-grabbing tendencies as his parents; refer to 1 Kings Chapter 21. The king was now the recipient of her appeal, as the person with primary responsibility under God for the establishment and maintenance of order and justice throughout the kingdom, as confirmed by Psalm 72. She made this appeal so she would not be a loser for listening to God's prophet and for saving her family from famine. In Israel the end of the seventh year was a proper time for restoration of property and cancellation of debt: <<*When you buy a male Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years, but in the seventh he shall go out a free person, without debt. 3 If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him*>> (Exodus 21:2-3), and: <<*Every seventh year you shall grant a remission of debts*>> (Deuteronomy 15:1).

⁴ Now the king was talking with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, 'Tell me all the great things that Elisha has done.'⁵ While he was telling the king how Elisha had restored a dead person to life, the woman whose son he had restored to life appealed to the king for her house and her land. Gehazi said, 'My lord king, here is the woman, and here is her son whom Elisha restored to life.'⁶ When the king questioned the woman, she told him. So the king appointed an official for her, saying, 'Restore all that was hers, together with all the revenue of the fields from the day that she left the land until now.'

2 Kings 8:4-6

Now the king was talking with Gehazi. This was the same servant of Elisha who was cursed with leprosy in 2 Kings 5:20-27. It seems strange that a severely afflicted leper would be a counsellor to a king, so some commentators state that either Gehazi was granted healing from his leprosy or that this actually took place before the events of 2 Kings Chapter 5. Both seem unlikely as the language of Gehazi's curse seems to indicate it was a permanent state and it also appears that the woman arrived to make her plea close to the time the king was talking with Gehazi about her case.

Of course, it is still possible that the king had this conversation with Gehazi when the prophet's former assistant was a leper and the king simply kept his distance. Some think that this conversation might have taken place after Gehazi became leprosy; 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?

Tell me all the great things that Elisha has done. Perhaps his motive was nothing more than curiosity, yet it was still a significant testimony to the king of Israel. He knew that God was behind the actions of Elisha, giving evidence that he was also the source of the words of Elisha.

While he was telling the king. The woman came to make her request at the exact time Gehazi told the king about the miracles associated with her life. This was perfect, God-ordained timing.

Restore all that was hers, together with all the revenue of the fields from the day that she left the land until now. The king understood that if God was obviously supportive of this woman, then it also made sense for him to support her and to answer her request. King Jehoram goes even further than restoring everything that belonged to the woman; he also provides her with all the income from her land that she would have received had she stayed in the country. In the end, her obedience to God's word was not penalised - it was rewarded.

II.h **2 Kings 8:7-15 - Death of Ben-hadad**

The house of Omri has now held the throne of Israel since 1 Kings 16:23, and in spite of Elijah's prophecy in 1 Kings 21:21-24 about its end, the text now refers to Ahab's second apostate son holding on to his kingdom with the help of Elijah's successor; refer also to 2 Kings 3:1-27 and 6:9-10. Has Elijah sabotaged God's plan by failing to anoint Hazael and Jehu as he was instructed to do in 1 Kings 19:15-18? It turns out that the answer is no. Hazael is now introduced, to be followed shortly by Jehu.

⁷ Elisha went to Damascus while King Ben-hadad of Aram was ill. When it was told him, 'The man of God has come here', ⁸ the king said to Hazael, 'Take a present with you and go to meet the man of God. Inquire of the Lord through him, whether I shall recover from this illness.' ⁹ So Hazael went to meet him, taking a present with him, all kinds of goods of Damascus, forty camel loads. When he entered and stood before him, he said, 'Your son King Ben-hadad of Aram has sent me to you, saying, "Shall I recover from this illness?"'

2 Kings 8:7-9

The man of God has come here. The leaders of Aram once tried to capture or kill Elisha. Since God miraculously delivered the prophet so many times, he was now respected and welcomed in the courts of the Aramæan King. He was especially welcome on account of the king's illness.

Go to meet the man of God. Ben-hadad II consults Israel's God about his future in much the same way that King Ahaziah of Israel had earlier consulted Baal-zebub of Ekron; refer to the comment made on 2 Kings 1:2.

So Hazael went to meet him, taking a present with him. Wanting to know the outcome of his present illness, the king of Aram asked the prophet and with his extravagant gift did whatever he could to prompt a favourable response. It appears to have been customary when consulting prophets to offer some payment, in this case an extravagant gift of **forty camel loads of goods**; for other examples refer also to 1 Samuel 9:1-9, 1 Kings 14:1-4 and 2 Kings 5:1-6.

The messenger **Hazael** enters the narrative mysteriously. Readers are not told his lineage, nor even his role, i.e. whether he was a servant, an officer, or a trusted counsellor. He comes from nowhere – a mere 'dog,' as he puts it in v.13. A fragmentary Assyrian text on a basalt statue of King Shalmaneser III refers to him similarly as the 'son of nobody,' doubtless reflecting lowly, non-royal origins.

¹⁰ Elisha said to him, 'Go, say to him, "You shall certainly recover"; but the Lord has shown me that he shall certainly die.'

2 Kings 8:10

Go, say to him, "You shall certainly recover." This is what the Hebrew text says. But the word translated 'to him' (Hebrew *lo*) is sometimes to be read as the negative word 'not' (the Hebrew word *lo* has virtually the same sound as the almost identical Hebrew word *lo*). If this is the case, then Hazael is to say to Ben-hadad, "You will certainly not recover", and Hazael would have lied to the king (v.14). However, if the Hebrew of Elisha's statement does indeed mean **You shall certainly recover**, it could have been a truthful prediction about the course of Ben-hadad's sickness that was still negated when Hazael murdered him, i.e. Ben-hadad could have recovered had Hazael not killed him. Alternatively, some have suggested that Elisha's statement was in fact deceptive, to lull the king into a false sense of security, so that he would be unprepared for Hazael's attack.

The Lord has shown me that he shall certainly die. God gave Elisha insight into more than the health of the king of Aram. He also saw the inevitable and ultimately God-ordained political machinations that would unfold. Elisha rightly said that the king would certainly recover from his illness, and he did. However, he also saw that the same servant he spoke with at that moment would engineer an assassination and take the throne. This is how Elisha's statement was true. The king certainly did recover from his illness, and he really did die soon but not from the illness.

¹¹ He fixed his gaze and stared at him, until he was ashamed. Then the man of God wept. ¹² Hazael asked, 'Why does my lord weep?' He

answered, 'Because I know the evil that you will do to the people of Israel; you will set their fortresses on fire, you will kill their young men with the sword, dash in pieces their little ones, and rip up their pregnant women.' ¹³ Hazael said, 'What is your servant, who is a mere dog, that he should do this great thing?' Elisha answered, 'The Lord has shown me that you are to be king over Aram.'

2 Kings 8:11-13

He fixed his gaze and stared at him. The text does not identify 'he' and 'him' in this verse. Most interpreters understand the first 'he' to be Elisha, who fixed his gaze on Hazael, staring at him but also seeing with prophetic vision what Hazael would do in the future. Hazael does not know how to respond and is ashamed or embarrassed, and then Elisha wept. An alternative interpretation is that Hazael remains dazed by what he has heard and so he stares at Elisha, until Elisha's weeping breaks into his reverie.

I know the evil that you will do to the people of Israel. This was a dramatic, personal confrontation between this prophet and the messenger from the king of Aram. Elisha stared at him so because he had prophetic knowledge of future events, and the damage this man would do to Israel in the future, causing innocent women and children to suffer as a result.

God told Elisha more about the coming situation than he wanted to know. He showed the prophet that the messenger of the king Hazael, after he took the throne from the present king of Aram, would do evil to the children of Israel. Elisha's prophetic calling and gift was at times more of a burden than a blessing. He could clearly see what would befall Israel through Hazael, but he was powerless to prevent it.

What is your servant, who is a mere dog, that he should do this great thing? Perhaps Hazael had planned this assassination and simply acted ignorant at Elisha's announcement. Perhaps he had not yet planned it, but did not know the evil capabilities in his own heart. Either way, his offence was inappropriate. He should have taken this warning as an opportunity to confront himself and to do right, instead of turning an accusation back upon Elisha.

The Lord has shown me that you are to be king over Aram. It may be asked if Elisha should have told Hazael this; perhaps he set in motion a self-fulfilling prophecy and actually inspired the assassination of the king of Aram and, indeed, the later devastation of the people of Israel.

However, there are many reasons for thinking that Elisha did exactly the right thing when he said this to Hazael:

- Elisha did not tell Hazael how the king would die; he did not reveal that it would be through assassination.
- Elisha did not tell Hazael how he would become the next king of Aram; he did not tell Hazael to assassinate the king.
- Elisha went against his own compassionate and patriotic interests in telling Hazael this, making it more likely that he did it at God's prompting.
- Elisha perhaps hoped that this amazing prophecy would touch Hazael's heart and turn him away from the evil he could later commit against Israel.

Charles Spurgeon commented, "As it turned out, God knew the actions of Hazael, but he did not make Hazael do it. It was absolutely foretold that Hazael would be king of Aram. The prophet knew the fact right well, and he clearly descried the means; else, why should he look into Hazael's face, and weep? God foreknew the mischief that he would do when he came to the throne; yet that foreknowledge did not in the least degree interfere with his free agency."

¹⁴ Then he left Elisha, and went to his master Ben-hadad, who said to him, 'What did Elisha say to you?' And he answered, 'He told me that you would certainly recover.'¹⁵ But the next day he took the bed-cover and dipped it in water and spread it over the king's face, until he died. And Hazael succeeded him.

2 Kings 8:14-15

He told me that you would certainly recover. Which he certainly did or would have, had not the wicked Hazael committed murder.

But the next day he took the bed-cover and dipped it in water and spread it over the king's face, until he died. Hazael took an evil inference from Elisha's prophecy and seized the throne. He should have taken the prophet's announcement as a warning to check his own heart; instead he acted on that evil and was fully responsible for his own actions.

Again, Charles Spurgeon commented, "The predestination of God does not destroy the free agency of man, or lighten the responsibility of the sinner. It is true, in the matter of salvation, when God comes to save, his free grace prevails over our free agency, and leads the will in glorious captivity to the obedience of faith. But in sinning, man is free, free in the widest sense of the term, never being compelled to do any evil deed, but being left to follow the turbulent passions of his own corrupt heart, and carry out the prevailing tendencies of his own depraved nature."

Hazael succeeded him. Hazael came to power in Aram at some point between the Assyrian Shalmaneser III's campaign in the west in his fourteenth year (845 BC), when it is known that Ben-hadad (a throne name; his personal name was Adad-idri) was still on the throne, and the campaign of Shalmaneser's eighteenth year (841 BC), which records Hazael as king. He reigned for about 40 years as one of Israel's most bitter enemies.

II.i 2 Kings 8:16-24 - Jehoram Reigns over Judah

Judah was last mentioned in Chapter 3, when Jehoshaphat was king of Judah. Another Judæan king has come and gone in the meantime, however, and the reader must be told about him and be introduced to his successor in order to understand Chapters 9-10.

¹⁶ In the fifth year of King Joram son of Ahab of Israel, Jehoram son of King Jehoshaphat of Judah began to reign. ¹⁷ He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned for eight years in Jerusalem.

2 Kings 8:16-17

Jehoram son of King Jehoshaphat of Judah. First introduced briefly in 1 Kings 22:50, this king is mentioned again in 2 Kings 1:17. In vv.21-24, his name appears as 'Joram,' which is also the name of the king of Israel during this period (v.16). This Israelite king is himself called 'Jehoram' in such verses as 2 Kings 1:17 and 3:1. At precisely the point when the southern monarchy has come to resemble the northern monarchy most closely in its worship (v.18), their kings are called by the same name, and one must work hard to distinguish their actions in the text.

¹⁸ He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. ¹⁹ Yet the Lord would not destroy Judah, for the sake of his servant David, since he had promised to give a lamp to him and to his descendants for ever.

2 Kings 8:18-19

Jehoram walked in the way of the kings of Israel. His father, Jehoshaphat, had made peace with the king of Israel in the aftermath of the struggles that arose out of the division of the kingdoms under Jeroboam and Rehoboam; refer to 1 Kings 22:44. From Jehoshaphat's reign onward, the fortunes of the house of Omri and the house of David were closely interconnected. There was intermarriage between the two families, and the two kingdoms followed a similar religious policy, i.e. as the house of Ahab had done. This was not a compliment. While the southern Kingdom of Judah had a mixture of godly and wicked kings, the northern Kingdom of Israel had nothing but evil, God-rejecting kings. The Chronicler adds that

Jehoram made all Judah to sin according to the religion of the Canaanites; refer to 2 Chronicles 21:11.

The daughter of Ahab was his wife. The wickedness of Jehoram was not a surprise, considering how much he allowed himself to be influenced by the house of Ahab. Perhaps this marriage made sense politically or socially, but it was a spiritual calamity for Judah. Perhaps some people thought that the marriage between the royal families of the kingdom of Judah and the kingdom of Israel would lift up the kingdom of Israel spiritually. It did not work out that way. Instead, it brought the kingdom of Judah down spiritually.

He had promised to give a lamp to him. Sins in David's family are to be punished not with the destruction of his dynasty but with <<*a rod such as mortals use*>> according to 2 Samuel 7:14-16 – divine discipline, characterised in 1-2 Kings as affliction; refer to 1 Kings 11:39. So it is that the Lord would not destroy Judah, for the sake of his servant David. The implication is that Jehoram's evil was great enough to justify such judgement, but God withheld it out of faithfulness to his ancestor David. The lamp was more than a symbol of life and of testimony, it reminded the hearer of the covenant: <<*There I will cause a horn to sprout up for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one*>> (Psalm 132:17).

Ultimately, the lamp would be Jesus himself: <<*Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life'*>> (John 8:12), <<*And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb*>> (Revelation 21:23).

²⁰ In his days Edom revolted against the rule of Judah, and set up a king of their own. ²¹ Then Joram crossed over to Zair with all his chariots. He set out by night and attacked the Edomites and their chariot commanders who had surrounded him; but his army fled home. ²² So Edom has been in revolt against the rule of Judah to this day. Libnah also revolted at the same time. ²³ Now the rest of the acts of Joram, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ²⁴ So Joram slept with his ancestors, and was buried with them in the city of David; his son Ahaziah succeeded him.

2 Kings 8:20-24

In his days Edom revolted against the rule of Judah. This is evidence of the weakness of the kingdom of Jehoram. He thought that the marriage alliance with Ahab and the kingdom of Israel would make Judah stronger, but this act of disobedience only made them weaker. The 'affliction' on David's house in this case

comes in Jehoram's failure to subdue a rebellion by Edom, a country hitherto ruled by a king appointed by Judah; refer to 1 Kings 22:47 and the comment made on 2 Kings 3:7-9. As well as in unrest even within Judah itself for Libnah was a Judæan city to the southwest of Jerusalem and 5 miles or 8 km to the northeast of Lachish, with which it is associated in 2 Kings 19:8. Chronicles adds to this picture of a weak king by telling of attacks from the Philistines and Arabs who had given tribute to Jehoram's father (2 Chronicles 21:16-17).

The Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah 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.

So Joram slept with his ancestors, and was buried with them in the city of David. It is easy to get confused with the variation between Jehoram and Joram, but they are two variant names for the same king of Judah. He died and was buried in Jerusalem, but not in the honoured tombs of his ancestors: <<*He was thirty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned for eight years in Jerusalem. He departed with no one's regret. They buried him in the city of David, but not in the tombs of the kings*>> (2 Chronicles 21:20). According to 2 Chronicles 21:12-15, Elijah wrote Jehoram a letter condemning him for his sins and predicting that judgement would come upon him and disaster upon the nation. At the age of 40, Jehoram was struck with a fatal intestinal disease and he died in terrible pain according to 2 Chronicles 21:19.

His son Ahaziah succeeded him. This leads directly into the next section.

II.j 2 Kings 8:25-29 - Ahaziah Reigns over Judah

The short life and reign of Jehoram, who reigned only eight years and died at 40 years of age, should have warned Ahaziah. His brief reign of just one year shows he was even less blessed than his father Jehoram.

²⁵ In the twelfth year of King Joram son of Ahab of Israel, Ahaziah son of King Jehoram of Judah began to reign. ²⁶ Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned for one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of King Omri of Israel. ²⁷ He also walked in the way of the house of Ahab, doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as the house of Ahab had done, for he was son-in-law to the house of Ahab.

2 Kings 8:25-27

Ahaziah son of King Jehoram of Judah. This Judæan king, too, had habits of religion to match those of the family to whom he is related by marriage, i.e. He also walked in the way of the house of Ahab. The fact that he reigned for just

one year, combined with the fact that he began his reign in the twelfth year of King Joram of Israel, i.e. Joram's last year (2 Kings 3:1), is the first hint of moving toward the end of the house of Omri.

Ahaziah succeeded his father Jehoram in the critical year of 841 BC. He was not to survive the momentous waves of the political events that were to inundate the ancient Near East in that year. Indeed, in 841 BC King Shalmaneser III of Assyria, who reigned from 859 to 824 BC, at last was able to break the coalition of western allies with whom he had previously fought a long series of battles in 853 BC, 848BC and 845 BC.

Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he began to reign. This is at odds with 2 Chronicles 22:2, which says that Ahaziah took the throne at 42 years of age. It seems that either the Chronicler was mistaken or that the text has been miscopied at some point in history and it seems most likely that the age in Kings is correct.

His mother's name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of King Omri of Israel. This fact is important as it declares Ahaziah to be a direct descendant of Ahab. When Jehu is instructed by the Lord through his prophet to eliminate the house of Ahab this includes Ahaziah. The account of his death is given in 2 Kings 9:27-29.

²⁸ He went with Joram son of Ahab to wage war against King Hazael of Aram at Ramoth-gilead, where the Aramæans wounded Joram. ²⁹ King Joram returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds that the Aramæans had inflicted on him at Ramah, when he fought against King Hazael of Aram. King Ahaziah son of Jehoram of Judah went down to see Joram son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was wounded.

2 Kings 8:28-29

He went with Joram son of Ahab to wage war against King Hazael of Aram at Ramoth-gilead. The context in which the house of Omri comes to its end is now provided. Another joint battle against the Aramæans at Ramoth-gilead (1 Kings 22:1-4) is followed by withdrawal to the Omride stronghold of Jezreel, so that the Israelite king can recover from his wounds. Ramoth-gilead is apparently back in Israelite hands by this point in the narrative (2 Kings 9:14), perhaps abandoned in the course of the general Aramæan retreat recorded in 2 Kings 7:3-7.

Ahaziah's close association with the wicked house of Ahab developed into a war alliance with Israel against Aram. His connection with his mother's family, who was a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (v.18), was so strong and sympathetic that he paid a visit to the injured and sick King Joram of Israel.