

SECOND KINGS 1-10
&
SECOND CHRONICLES 21:1 - 22:9

¹After the death of Ahab, Moab rebelled against Israel.

²Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice in his upper chamber in Samaria, and lay injured; so he sent messengers, telling them, "Go, inquire of Baal-zebul, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury."

³But the angel of YHWH said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Get up, go to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebul, the god of Ekron?' ⁴Now therefore thus says YHWH, 'You shall not leave the bed to which you have gone, but you will surely die.'" So Elijah went.

⁵The messengers returned to the king, who said to them, "Why have you returned?" ⁶They answered him, "There came a man to meet us, who said to us, 'Go back to the king who sent you, and say to him: Thus says YHWH: Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baal-zebul, the god of Ekron? Therefore you will not leave the bed to which you have gone, but will surely die.'" ⁷He said to them, "What sort of man was he who came to meet you and told you these things?"

⁸They answered him, "A hairy man, with a leather belt around his waist." He said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."

⁹Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty men. He went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and said to him, "O man of God, the king says, 'Come down.'" ¹⁰But Elijah answered the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then fire came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

Ahab was killed in a battle that took place in the sixth year of the reign of Shalmaneser III of Assyria, that is, in 853BC (see 1Kings 22:35, page 134). It is by working back from this date that we have estimated the years of the reigns of the kings from the death of Solomon through to Ahaziah in Israel and Jehoshaphat in Judah.

We were introduced to Ahab's son, Ahaziah in the last verses of 1Kings (see 1Kings 22:51-53). Here he has a fall, and appeals to the god Baal-zebul for healing. 'Baal-zebul' (only here in the Hebrew Bible; but see Matthew 10:25) is a pejorative way of speaking of Baal-zebul ('Prince Baal').

Elijah is mentioned only once in Chronicles (see 2Chronicles 21:12). He has already featured in 1Kings 17-21 during the reign of Ahab, and has already passed a death sentence on the dynasty (see 1Kings 21:20-24). Here he is again, sent by a messenger of YHWH to meet the messengers of the king, and declaring that the injured Ahaziah: 'will surely die' (verse 4).

Verse 8 is picked up in the Newer Testament in the description of John, the herald who announced the presence of the Messiah, Jesus (see Matthew 3:4 and 11:8-11).

Verses 9-10 are the stuff of legend. Here again the calling down fire from heaven is picked up in the Newer Testament, when James and John wanted Jesus to call down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans (see Luke 9:54).

The Chronicler

The Chronicler passes over the first seven chapters of 2Kings.

The scene enacted in verses 9-10 is repeated (verses 11-12). Clearly power lies with YHWH and his prophet, not with the king and his soldiers.

The third lot of messengers (verse 13-14) are more wary and more respectful to the man of God.

There is no leniency for a king who utterly fails to respect the exclusive rights of YHWH. He 'will surely die' (verse 16; repeating verse 6).

'So he died' (verse 17). The word of YHWH, through the prophet Elijah, is fulfilled.

According to 2Kings 3:1 (see page 149) Jehoram of Israel began his reign in 852 ('the eighteenth year of King Jehoshaphat of Judah'). We have already been told that 'Ahaziah reigned two years over Israel' (1Kings 22:51); so from 853 to 852.

We learn here (verse 17) that Jehoram of Israel succeeded Ahaziah 'in the second year of King Jehoram of Judah'; that is in 847 (see 2Kings 8:16, page 168). It appears that from 852 to 847 Ahaziah lingered on in bad health and that his brother, Jehoram, acted as co-regent, ruling in his own right from 847.

¹¹Again the king sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty. He went up and said to him, "O man of God, this is the king's order: Come down quickly!" ¹²But Elijah answered them, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.

¹³Again the king sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. So the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and entreated him, "O man of God, please value my life, and the life of these fifty servants of yours. ¹⁴Look, fire came down from heaven and consumed the two former captains of fifty men with their fifties; but now let my life be precious in your sight."

¹⁵Then the angel of YHWH said to Elijah, "Go down with him; do not be afraid of him." So he set out and went down with him to the king, ¹⁶and said to him, "Thus says YHWH: Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, – is it because there is no God in Israel to inquire of his word? – therefore you will not leave the bed to which you have gone, but you will surely die."

¹⁷So he died according to the word of YHWH that Elijah had spoken. His brother, Jehoram succeeded him as king in the second year of King Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat of Judah, because Ahaziah had no son.

¹⁸Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

¹Now when YHWH was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. ²Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here; for YHWH has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As YHWH lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel.

³The company of prophets who were in Bethel came out to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today YHWH will take your master away from you?" And he said, "Yes, I know; keep silent."

⁴Elijah said to him, "Elisha, stay here; for YHWH has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As YHWH lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho.

⁵The company of prophets who were at Jericho drew near to Elisha, and said to him, "Do you know that today YHWH will take your master away from you?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be silent."

⁶Then Elijah said to him, "Stay here; for YHWH has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As YHWH lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on.

⁷Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. ⁸Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

This account of Elijah's departure from the scene and the transfer of his power to his disciple Elisha (see 1Kings 19:19-21), is placed here between the reigns of Ahaziah and his brother Jehoram. This is not intended as a chronological note so much as another indication that what God is doing through his prophets stands outside and above what the kings are doing.

For reasons that are not explained, Elijah is summoned by God to go to Bethel (verses 2-3), Jericho (verses 4-5) and the Jordan (verses 6-8). In each of these places there is a 'company of prophets' (see 1Kings 20:35; 22:6). We might compare such a company with monks who live in community and devote themselves to living a religious life separate from the world around them. Rightly or wrongly they were considered to have a special insight into God's will.

Elijah gives Elisha every opportunity to leave, but each time Elisha declares on oath 'I will not leave you'.

Elijah strikes the water with his mantle. This is the mantle that he threw over Elisha, thus 'ordaining' him as his disciple (see 1Kings 19:19). We are meant to recall God's words to Moses:

Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground.

— Exodus 14:16

See also Joshua 4:21-24.

Elisha requests a double share of Elijah's spirit. Elijah knows that it is God who gives the spirit not he. Unlike kingship or priesthood in Israel, which can be handed on from father to son, prophecy cannot be institutionalised. It depends on the surprise of God's gift.

In verses 11-12 we have the extraordinary picture of Elijah's assumption alive into the transcendent realm of the gods. The whirlwind speaks of a theophany. The chariot and horses of fire, and Elisha's cry speak of the 'God of hosts'. It is not the armies of the king that determine what is happening in this world, it is YHWH, speaking and acting through his prophets.

This extraordinary, unparalleled, scene gave rise to an expectation that Elijah, having escaped death, would one day return (see Malachi 4:4-5).

Elisha's name means 'YHWH saves'. He casts off his own clothes and dons Elijah's mantle (verses 12-13). He strikes the water in the Jordan with the mantle he has inherited from Elijah, and so enters the Promised Land with double the spirit of Elijah – something that will be demonstrated through the miracles God will work through him.

The 'company of prophets' (verse 15; see verse 7) acknowledge him as their leader.

Verses 16-18 provide 'proof' that Elijah has, indeed, been taken into heaven.

9When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit." ¹⁰He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." ¹¹As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. ¹²Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

¹³He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. ¹⁴He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, "Where is YHWH, the God of Elijah?" When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

¹⁵When the company of prophets who were at Jericho saw him at a distance, they declared, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." They came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him. ¹⁶They said to him, "See now, we have fifty strong men among your servants; please let them go and seek your master; it may be that the spirit of YHWH has caught him up and thrown him down on some mountain or into some valley." He responded, "No, do not send them." ¹⁷But when they urged him until he was ashamed, he said, "Send them." So they sent fifty men who searched for three days but did not find him. ¹⁸When they came back to him (he had remained at Jericho), he said to them, "Did I not say to you, Do not go?"

¹⁹Now the people of the city said to Elisha, "The location of this city is good, as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the land is unfruitful."

²⁰He said, "Bring me a new bowl, and put salt in it." So they brought it to him. ²¹Then he went to the spring of water and threw the salt into it, and said, "Thus says YHWH, I have made this water wholesome; from now on neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it." ²²So the water has been wholesome to this day, according to the word that Elisha spoke.

²³He went up from there to Bethel; and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, "Go away, baldhead! Go away, baldhead!" ²⁴When he turned around and saw them, he cursed them in the name of YHWH. Then two she-bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the boys.

²⁵From there he went on to Mount Carmel, and then returned to Samaria.

The divine power invested in Elisha is manifested in a public way when he miraculously purifies the water supply for the city of Jericho (verses 19-22). We recall Moses' first act after passing through the Red Sea: he made sweet the bitter waters of Marah (see Exodus 15:22-25).

In recording this legend, the Deuteronomists are not concerned with the image of YHWH that it conveys. They are content to make the point that Elisha is not someone to be trifled with. He has power to give life (see 2:19-22). He has power to take life away (verses 23-24).

Verse 25 places Elisha in the royal city. We are ready to return to the chronicle of the kings, with a new prophet established in Israel.

In 852 ('the eighteenth year of King Jehoshaphat') Jehoram began his reign and ruled 'twelve years' (till 841). He was co-regent 852-847 after his brother's accident (see page 145). He is the fourth and final king of the Omri dynasty. He was killed by Jehu in a palace coup (see 2Kings 9:24). He receives the typical Deuteronomic judgment on all the kings of Israel, though it is conceded that he was not as bad as his father, Ahab.

The rest of chapter three is concerned with war against Moab. Note that Moab was a vassal of Israel, not Judah (see 2Kings 1:1). When Ahab was king, Moab had no choice but to pay a hefty tribute in sheep and wool. King Mesha of Moab took the occasion of Ahab's death to stop payment. We know this also from a stone inscription discovered at Dibon in Moab in 1868 which recounts how Mesha won back territory from Israel (see ANET 320-321).

Jehoram successfully 'invited' Jehoshaphat to join him in a military expedition to assert his authority (compare Jehoshaphat's earlier response to Ahab, 1Kings 22:4). Jehoram decides to draw Edom into the campaign. However, the expedition runs out of water (verse 9). Jehoshaphat thinks of YHWH and is told that there is a prophet in Israel whom they could consult, namely, Elisha, a disciple of the great Elijah (verses 11-12).

The Chronicler

The Chronicler makes no mention of this war, even though it involves Jehoshaphat of Judah.

¹In the eighteenth year of King Jehoshaphat of Judah, Jehoram son of Ahab became king over Israel in Samaria; he reigned twelve years. ²He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH, though not like his father and mother, for he removed the pillar of Baal that his father had made.

³Nevertheless he clung to the sin of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to commit; he did not depart from it.

⁴Now King Mesha of Moab was a sheep breeder, who used to deliver to the king of Israel one hundred thousand lambs, and the wool of one hundred thousand rams. ⁵But when Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.

⁶So King Jehoram marched out of Samaria at that time and mustered all Israel. ⁷As he went he sent word to King Jehoshaphat of Judah, "The king of Moab has rebelled against me; will you go with me to battle against Moab?" He answered, "I will; I am with you, my people are your people, my horses are your horses." ⁸Then he asked, "By which way shall we march?" Jehoram answered, "By the way of the wilderness of Edom."

⁹So the king of Israel, the king of Judah, and the king of Edom set out; and when they had made a roundabout march of seven days, there was no water for the army or for the animals that were with them. ¹⁰Then the king of Israel said, "Alas! YHWH has summoned us, three kings, only to be handed over to Moab." ¹¹But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there no prophet of YHWH here, through whom we may inquire of YHWH?" Then one of the servants of the king of Israel answered, "Elisha son of Shaphat, who used to pour water on the hands of Elijah, is here." ¹²Jehoshaphat said, "The word of YHWH is with him." So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

¹³Elisha said to the king of Israel, "What have I to do with you? Go to your father's prophets or to your mother's." But the king of Israel said to him, "No; it is YHWH who has summoned us, three kings, only to be handed over to Moab."

¹⁴Elisha said, "As YHWH of hosts lives, whom I serve, were it not that I have regard for King Jehoshaphat of Judah, I would give you neither a look nor a glance. ¹⁵But get me a musician."

And then, while the musician was playing, the power of YHWH came on him. ¹⁶And he said, "Thus says YHWH, 'This wadi will be full of pools.' ¹⁷For thus says YHWH, 'You shall see neither wind nor rain, but the wadi shall be filled with water, so that you shall drink, you, your cattle, and your animals.'

¹⁸This is only a trifle in the sight of YHWH, for he will also hand Moab over to you. ¹⁹You shall conquer every fortified city and every choice city; every good tree you shall fell, all springs of water you shall stop up, and every good piece of land you shall ruin with stones."

²⁰The next day, about the time of the morning offering, suddenly water began to flow from the direction of Edom, until the country was filled with water.

Elisha reluctantly agrees to intercede, but only because of his regard for Jehoshaphat (verse 14).

Verse 15 offers an interesting insight into one manifestation of the prophetic gift. Not for the first time (see 1Samuel 10:10-13) music has a role as the prophet goes into a trance (see also 1Samuel 19:23-24).

YHWH promises a miraculous flowing of water in the dry river bed (verses 16-17).

He goes on to promise to 'hand over Moab to you' (verse 18). Again the Deuteronomists seem unaware of the dreadful image of YHWH given in the instruction issued in verse 19. We are reminded of the fact that the biblical text is not the word of God. Rather it is a human response to the word of God, telling us a lot about the mentality of those who receive this word and respond to it.

The first promise is fulfilled (verse 20), giving reason to expect that so will the second.

The Moabite army prepares for war. The water looking like blood reminds us of one of the plagues of Egypt (see Exodus 7:14-25).

The Moabites are tricked into thinking the red is the blood of the attacking armies who must have turned on each other, so they carelessly rush to the enemy camp to collect the spoil only to be forced to flee.

The armies of Israel, Judah and Edom carry out the destruction ordered by YHWH (verse 25; see verse 19).

As a last resort, the king of Moab offers his firstborn son and heir in sacrifice to the god Chemosh (not named here, but see Jeremiah 48:7, 13, 46). Israel is YHWH's firstborn (see Exodus 4:22), victorious over the firstborn of Egypt (see the final plague, Exodus 12:29-30). Here, once again, the firstborn of Moab has to give way before the firstborn of YHWH. The story of Abraham and Isaac states in story form God's opposition to the sacrifice of one's child (see also 2Kings 16:3; 17:17; 21:6; 23:10), though it appears that there were times when even Israel had recourse to this practice of the surrounding cultures (see Jeremiah 32:35).

The final statement comes as a complete shock. Israel is forced to withdraw. Either the god of Moab is stronger than the God of Israel (something unthinkable), or, YHWH in anger has decided to punish Israel (no reasons are given). The editors are offering an explanation for why it was that, in spite of the victory promised by Elisha, Moab was never again subject to Israel.

²¹When all the Moabites heard that the kings had come up to fight against them, all who were able to put on armour, from the youngest to the oldest, were called out and were drawn up at the frontier. ²²When they rose early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water, the Moabites saw the water opposite them as red as blood.

²³They said, "This is blood; the kings must have fought together, and killed one another. Now then, Moab, to the spoil!" ²⁴But when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and attacked the Moabites, who fled before them; as they entered Moab they continued the attack. ²⁵The cities they over-turned, and on every good piece of land everyone threw a stone, until it was covered; every spring of water they stopped up, and every good tree they felled. Only at Kir-hareseth did the stone walls remain, until the slingers surrounded and attacked it.

²⁶When the king of Moab saw that the battle was going against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through, opposite the king of Edom; but they could not. ²⁷Then he took his firstborn son who was to succeed him, and offered him as a burnt offering on the wall.

And great wrath came upon Israel, so they withdrew from him and returned to their own land.

¹Now the wife of a member of the company of prophets cried to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead; and you know that your servant feared YHWH, but a creditor has come to take my two children as slaves." ²Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" She answered, "Your servant has nothing in the house, except a jar of oil." ³He said, "Go outside, borrow vessels from all your neighbours, empty vessels and not just a few. ⁴Then go in, and shut the door behind you and your children, and start pouring into all these vessels; when each is full, set it aside."

⁵So she left him and shut the door behind her and her children; they kept bringing vessels to her, and she kept pouring. ⁶When the vessels were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." But he said to her, "There are no more." Then the oil stopped flowing. ⁷She came and told the man of God, and he said, "Go sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your children can live on the rest."

Chapter four presents a series of five miracles from the folklore surrounding Elisha.

The first miracle (verses 1-7) concerns a woman who is a widow, and so a person with no husband or adult male family member who can come to her aid. She is unable to pay her debts and her creditors are about to take her children into slavery.

Miraculously (and so as an instrument of divine power) Elisha intervenes and redeems her from her situation.

The Deuteronomists are reminding their readers that there is no place for slavery for a people who themselves began as slaves in Egypt and were redeemed from slavery by YHWH (see Deuteronomy 15:12-18). They were allowed to have foreigners as slaves, but not fellow Israelites (see Leviticus 25:44).

There are parallels with the miracle of Elijah (see 1 Kings 17:8-16). It is not an uncommon feature in folklore to have similar wonders attached to different heroes.

The Chronicler

There is no mention of Elisha in the writings of the Chronicler

The second miracle is the gift of a son to a wealthy woman from Shunem who had been kind to Elisha. Shunem is a few kilometres north of Jezreel in the east-west valley to the north of the hill country of Manasseh. She joins a long line of Israelite women who have a son only through divine intervention (see Sarah, Genesis 11:30 and 18:10; Rebekah, Genesis 25:21; Rachel, Genesis 29:1; and Hannah, 1Samuel 1:2).

⁸One day Elisha was passing through Shunem, where a wealthy woman lived, who urged him to have a meal. So whenever he passed that way, he would stop there for a meal. ⁹She said to her husband, "Look, I am sure that this man who regularly passes our way is a holy man of God. ¹⁰Let us make a small roof chamber with walls, and put there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp, so that he can stay there whenever he comes to us."

¹¹One day when he came there, he went up to the chamber and lay down there. ¹²He said to his servant Gehazi, "Call the Shunammite woman." When he had called her, she stood before him. ¹³He said to him, "Say to her, Since you have taken all this trouble for us, what may be done for you? Would you have a word spoken on your behalf to the king or to the commander of the army?" She answered, "I live among my own people." ¹⁴He said, "What then may be done for her?" Gehazi answered, "Well, she has no son, and her husband is old." ¹⁵He said, "Call her." When he had called her, she stood at the door. ¹⁶He said, "At this season next year, you will embrace a son." She replied, "No, my lord, O man of God; do not deceive your servant." ¹⁷The woman conceived and bore a son at that season, in due time, as Elisha had declared to her.

¹⁸When the child was older, he went out one day to his father among the reapers. ¹⁹He complained to his father, "Oh, my head, my head!" The father said to his servant, "Carry him to his mother." ²⁰He carried him and brought him to his mother; the child sat on her lap until noon, and he died. ²¹She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, closed the door on him, and left. ²²Then she called to her husband, and said, "Send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, so that I may quickly go to the man of God and come back again." ²³He said, "Why go to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath." She said, "It will be all right." ²⁴Then she saddled the donkey and said to her servant, "Urge the animal on; do not hold back for me unless I tell you." ²⁵So she set out, and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

When the man of God saw her coming, he said to Gehazi his servant, "Look, there is the Shunammite woman; ²⁶run at once to meet her, and say to her, Are you all right? Is your husband all right? Is the child all right?" She answered, "It is all right." ²⁷When she came to the man of God at the mountain, she caught hold of his feet. Gehazi approached to push her away. But the man of God said, "Let her alone, for she is in bitter distress; YHWH has hidden it from me and has not told me."

²⁸Then she said, "Did I ask my lord for a son? Did I not say, Do not mislead me?" ²⁹He said to Gehazi, "Gird up your loins, and take my staff in your hand, and go. If you meet anyone, give no greeting, and if anyone greets you, do not answer; and lay my staff on the face of the child." ³⁰Then the mother of the child said, "As YHWH lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave without you." So he rose up and followed her. ³¹Gehazi went on ahead and laid the staff on the face of the child, but there was no sound or sign of life. He came back to meet him and told him, "The child has not awakened."

The third miracle is the restoring to life of a dead child (verses 18-37). Here, too, there are parallels in the legends associated with Elijah (see 1Kings 17:17-24).

The child so wonderfully given her by God dies. She knows where to go: to the 'man of God at Mount Carmel', presumably the site of the 'monastery' for the company of prophets headed by Elisha.

Gehazi asks if everything is 'all right' (the Hebrew is 'shalom'). She says it is, confident that the prophet who was God's instrument in giving her the child can restore him to life.

In his desire to help, Elisha sends his servant Gehazi to the dead boy with his staff, but without success.

Elisha now goes himself, and, having prayed, restores life to the dead boy.

Our wonder at YHWH's power to give life through the actions of the prophet should not blind us to the role played by the determined woman. We are reminded of the accounts of many of the miracles in the Newer Testament, where Jesus says: 'Your faith has restored you' (see Mark 10:52; Matthew 9:22; 15:28; Luke 8:48; 17:19; 18:42).

³²When Elisha came into the house, he saw the child lying dead on his bed. ³³So he went in and closed the door on the two of them, and prayed to YHWH. ³⁴Then he got up on the bed and lay upon the child, putting his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands; and while he lay bent over him, the flesh of the child became warm. ³⁵He got down, walked once to and fro in the room, then got up again and bent over him; the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. ³⁶Elisha summoned Gehazi and said, "Call the Shunammite woman." So he called her. When she came to him, he said, "Take your son." ³⁷She came and fell at his feet, bowing to the ground; then she took her son and left.

³⁸When Elisha returned to Gilgal, there was a famine in the land. As the company of prophets was sitting before him, he said to his servant, "Put the large pot on, and make some stew for the company of prophets." ³⁹One of them went out into the field to gather herbs; he found a wild vine and gathered from it a lapful of wild gourds, and came and cut them up into the pot of stew, not knowing what they were.

⁴⁰They served some for the men to eat. But while they were eating the stew, they cried out, "O man of God, there is death in the pot!" They could not eat it. ⁴¹He said, "Then bring some flour." He threw it into the pot, and said, "Serve the people and let them eat." And there was nothing harmful in the pot.

⁴²A man came from Baal-shalishah, bringing food from the first fruits to the man of God: twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. Elisha said, "Give it to the people and let them eat." ⁴³But his servant said, "How can I set this before a hundred people?" So he repeated, "Give it to the people and let them eat, for thus says YHWH, 'They shall eat and have some left.'" ⁴⁴He set it before them, they ate, and had some left, according to the word of YHWH.

The fourth miracle closely parallels 2Kings 2:19-22. Driven by famine people go in search of anything edible. When they make a stew out of what they have managed to find it is poisonous. Elisha, the prophet of YHWH once again brings life where only death reigned.

In the fifth and final miracle of the chapter (verses 42-44), a man brings to the prophet the first fruits of his harvest. Elisha, aware of the dire situation produced by the drought, is inspired to make the gift available 'to the people' (verse 42). In a scene reminiscent of the gift of manna in Exodus 16, the food is distributed and 'they ate, and had some left, according to the word of YHWH' (verse 44).

There are obvious parallels with the Gospel story of the multiplication of loaves (see Mark 6:42-44; 8:8-9).

Once again, we must remember that the Deuteronomists are not interested in strict historicity as we would define it. They are presenting legends that have come down through the tradition, but in such a way as to underline a key aspect of YHWH, namely, that YHWH is the source of life, wonderful life, if only we would heed the prophets and open ourselves to the surprise of God's mysterious grace.

Chapter five takes us outside Israel to Aram (Syria). We are introduced to Naaman, ‘commander of the army of the king of Aram’ (verse 1). Note that his success in battle is attributed to YHWH. We are told that he is ‘suffering from leprosy’ [מִצֹּרָא, m^cšorā]. This is not Hansen’s disease, which was unknown in the area prior to the time of Alexander the Great whose army brought it back from the east. Naaman has a skin disease that makes the skin scaly and, because of its appearance of ‘death’, is considered to make a person ‘impure’, and so unable to take part in normal social activities (see Leviticus 13-14). In his desperation he explores an idea given to his wife by a servant girl, a captive from a war with Israel. The exiles in Babylon, reading this, would have identified with this young exile.

As one would expect Naaman deals directly with the king, who, since he cannot effect the cure, judges that this is a ruse from the king of Aram to pick a quarrel (verses 5-7).

With the admission by the king of Israel of his own powerlessness, Elisha intervenes and instructs the king to send Naaman to him ‘that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel’ (verse 8; note ‘Israel’, not ‘Samaria’, the royal city, as in verse 3).

¹Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favour with his master, because by him YHWH had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. ²Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman’s wife. ³She said to her mistress, “If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.” ⁴So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. ⁵And the king of Aram said, “Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel.”

He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. ⁶He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, “When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy.” ⁷When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, “Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me.”

⁸But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, “Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.” ⁹So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha’s house.

¹⁰Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." ¹¹But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of YHWH his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! ¹²Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage.

¹³But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean'?" ¹⁴So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

¹⁵Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel; please accept a present from your servant." ¹⁶But he said, "As YHWH lives, whom I serve, I will accept nothing!" He urged him to accept, but he refused.

¹⁷Then Naaman said, "If not, please let two mule-loads of earth be given to your servant; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god except YHWH. ¹⁸But may YHWH pardon your servant on one count: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow down in the house of Rimmon, when I do bow down in the house of Rimmon, may YHWH pardon your servant on this one count." ¹⁹He said to him, "Go in peace."

Elisha is not impressed by Naaman's show of power (see verse 9). He doesn't even bother to come out to meet the general, instructing him to go and bathe seven times in the Jordan River.

Naaman is angry. Furthermore the rivers that flow through Damascus, The Awaj ('Pharpar') and the Barada ('Abana') are superior to any river in Israel.

He is persuaded to follow the prophet's instructions. Now humbled, he obeys, and is healed (verses 13-14).

Now the prophet meets the general, who declares his faith in YHWH, the God of Israel. He takes an oath to worship only YHWH. We are reminded of the 'leper' in the Gospels who, like Naaman, came back to give thanks (see Luke 17:17-19).

Since he cannot in his position avoid the customary rituals of the king, he asks for, and is given, permission to be with the king when the king goes into the temple of the Syrian god, 'Rimmon' (the thunderer). The reference is to the god Haddadrimmon.

Into the scene comes Gehazi, Elisha's servant, who featured in chapter 4. He sees an opportunity to cash in on the miraculous cure. Elisha has rejected 'payment' (see verse 16). Gehazi goes after Naaman and makes two untrue claims. One is that he is speaking on behalf of Elisha. The other is that he is concerned with the needs of two of the members of the company of prophets. Naaman responds generously, but Gehazi stores the gifts in his own house (verse 24).

Elisha accuses Gehazi, for he knows 'in spirit' what has transpired (verse 26).

Gehazi's punishment is to inherit Naaman's 'leprosy', an indictment on the vice of covetousness and greed. Compare Paul's words in Colossians 3:5, where he identifies greed with idolatry.

¹⁹But when Naaman had gone from him a short distance, ²⁰Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, thought, "My master has let that Aramean Naaman off too lightly by not accepting from him what he offered. As YHWH lives, I will run after him and get something out of him." ²¹So Gehazi went after Naaman. When Naaman saw someone running after him, he jumped down from the chariot to meet him and said, "Is everything all right?" ²²He replied, "Yes, but my master has sent me to say, 'Two members of a company of prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim; please give them a talent of silver and two changes of clothing.'" ²³Naaman said, "Please accept two talents." He urged him, and tied up two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of clothing, and gave them to two of his servants, who carried them in front of Gehazi. ²⁴When he came to the citadel, he took the bags from them, and stored them inside; he dismissed the men, and they left.

²⁵He went in and stood before his master; and Elisha said to him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" He answered, "Your servant has not gone anywhere at all." ²⁶But he said to him, "Did I not go with you in spirit when someone left his chariot to meet you? Is this a time to take money and clothing, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves?" ²⁷Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you, and to your descendants forever." So he left his presence leprous, as white as snow.

¹Now the company of prophets said to Elisha, "As you see, the place where we live under your charge is too small for us. ²Let us go to the Jordan, and let us collect logs there, one for each of us, and build a place there for us to live." He answered, "Do so." ³Then one of them said, "Please come with your servants." And he answered, "I will." ⁴So he went with them. When they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees. ⁵But as one was felling a log, his axe head fell into the water; he cried out, "Alas, master! It was borrowed." ⁶Then the man of God said, "Where did it fall?" When he showed him the place, he cut off a stick, and threw it in there, and made the iron float. ⁷He said, "Pick it up." So he reached out his hand and took it.

Here we have another miracle. Those involved in the story seem to almost take it for granted. Certainly there is no indication of amazement. The reader, however, is expected to marvel at the power of God to meet the needs of ordinary human beings in trouble.

The anecdote concerning Naaman demonstrates that YHWH cannot be restricted within the confines of Israel. This anecdote warns us not to restrict God within the confines of the logic and science that is within our control.

True, we are dealing with legend, but we must not lose our sense of wonder, and our openness to the God of surprises.

In 1Samuel 13:19-21 we heard that work with iron was something jealously guarded by the Philistines, who seem to have brought the art with them when they came to Canaan as part of the 'Sea Peoples'. From this anecdote we learn that the Israelites are also working with iron.

Neither the king of Aram nor the king of Israel is named. All we know is that the story is linked with Elisha, who, being a prophet, can see what the Syrian army is doing and time and again warns the king of Israel to avoid an ambush.

When the king of Aram finds out that it is Elisha who is responsible he sends a huge force to surround the city of Dothan, some 25ks north of Shechem, where Elisha is staying at the time.

Elisha's attendant is understandably alarmed. Not so the prophet, for he 'knows' that God, the Lord of hosts, will protect him with 'horses and chariots of fire' (verse 17). In answer to Elisha's prayer the servant is able to see this otherwise invisible force. We are reminded of the horses and chariots that escorted Elijah into heaven (see 2Kings 2:11).

Again Elisha prays, and the Aramaean soldiers are struck blind. Elisha himself offers to take them to the prophet they are seeking, but tricks them by taking them to the royal city, Samaria, some 20 ks away.

⁸Once when the king of Aram was at war with Israel, he took counsel with his officers. He said, "Attack at such and such a place." ⁹But the man of God sent word to the king of Israel, "Take care not to pass this place, because the Arameans are going down there." ¹⁰The king of Israel sent word to the place of which the man of God spoke. More than once or twice he warned such a place so that it was on the alert.

¹¹The mind of the king of Aram was greatly perturbed because of this; he called his officers and said to them, "Now tell me who among us sides with the king of Israel?" ¹²Then one of his officers said, "No one, my lord king. It is Elisha, the prophet in Israel, who tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedchamber." ¹³He said, "Go and find where he is; I will send and seize him." He was told, "He is in Dothan." ¹⁴So he sent horses and chariots there and a great army; they came by night, and surrounded the city.

¹⁵When an attendant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. His servant said, "Alas, master! What shall we do?" ¹⁶He replied, "Do not be afraid, for there are more with us than there are with them." ¹⁷Then Elisha prayed: "YHWH, please open his eyes that he may see." So YHWH opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw; the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. ¹⁸When the Arameans came down against him, Elisha prayed to YHWH, and said, "Strike this people, please, with blindness." So he struck them with blindness as Elisha had asked. ¹⁹Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, and this is not the city; follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." And he led them to Samaria.

The enemy is spared

²⁰As soon as they entered Samaria, Elisha said, "YHWH, open the eyes of these men so that they may see." YHWH opened their eyes, and they saw that they were inside Samaria. ²¹When the king of Israel saw them he said to Elisha, "Father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?" ²²He answered, "No! Did you capture with your sword and your bow those whom you want to kill? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink; and let them go to their master." ²³So he prepared for them a great feast; after they ate and drank, he sent them on their way, and they went to their master. And the Arameans no longer came raiding into the land of Israel.

The eyes of the soldiers are miraculously opened and they see that they are trapped. The king of Israel wants them killed, but Elisha reminds him that they are Elisha's prisoners, not the king's.

It is YHWH's intention to free them, and to send them off having enjoyed a feast. The result is an end to the raids! What does this say about the logic of continuing the spiral of war? The Deuteronomists are telling us that we need to see things differently if we are to discern the way of YHWH.

Once again an invasion from Aram. Ben-hadad is a commonly repeated name among its kings. The reference here is probably to Ben-hadad III who succeeded Hazael (see 2Kings 8:15; 13:3). Samaria is under siege and food is scarce and expensive. 'Dove's dung' is a familiar name for the seed of a carob tree. The people were so desperate that they paid for inedible husks.

The agreement between the two mothers indicates how desperate the situation is. The king is focusing on the war. His duty is to care especially for the needy. As is to be expected the cost of war is borne by the most needy. She is right to address her plea to him.

The king shifts the blame to Elisha, who, after all, is supposed to be in contact with YHWH, the God of Israel, and, as a prophet, to intercede for Israel. Clearly this is not working.

The king confronts Elisha, and blames YHWH. Why should he trust this God who claims to be the God of Israel?

²⁴Some time later King Ben-hadad of Aram mustered his entire army; he marched against Samaria and laid siege to it. ²⁵As the siege continued, famine in Samaria became so great that a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and one-fourth of a kab of dove's dung for five shekels of silver. ²⁶Now as the king of Israel was walking on the city wall, a woman cried out to him, "Help, my lord king!" ²⁷He said, "No! Let YHWH help you. How can I help you? From the threshing floor or from the wine press?" ²⁸But then the king asked her, "What is your complaint?" She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give up your son; we will eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.' ²⁹So we cooked my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, 'Give up your son and we will eat him.' But she has hidden her son." ³⁰When the king heard the words of the woman he tore his clothes – now since he was walking on the city wall, the people could see that he had sackcloth on his body underneath – ³¹and he said, "So may God do to me, and more, if the head of Elisha son of Shaphat stays on his shoulders today." ³²So he dispatched a man from his presence.

Now Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. Before the messenger arrived, Elisha said to the elders, "Are you aware that this murderer has sent someone to take off my head? When the messenger comes, see that you shut the door and hold it closed against him. Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?" ³³While he was still speaking with them, the king came down to him and said, "This trouble is from YHWH! Why should I hope in YHWH any longer?"

¹But Elisha said, "Hear the word of YHWH: thus says YHWH, Tomorrow about this time a measure of choice meal shall be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, at the gate of Samaria." ²Then the captain on whose hand the king leaned said to the man of God, "Even if YHWH were to make windows in the sky, could such a thing happen?" But he said, "You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat from it."

³Now there were four leprous men outside the city gate, who said to one another, "Why should we sit here until we die? ⁴If we say, 'Let us enter the city,' the famine is in the city, and we shall die there; but if we sit here, we shall also die. Therefore, let us desert to the Aramean camp; if they spare our lives, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die."

⁵So they arose at twilight to go to the Aramean camp; but when they came to the edge of the Aramean camp, there was no one there at all. ⁶For the Lord had caused the Aramean army to hear the sound of chariots, and of horses, the sound of a great army, so that they said to one another, "The king of Israel has hired the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt to fight against us." ⁷So they fled away in the twilight and abandoned their tents, their horses, and their donkeys leaving the camp just as it was, and fled for their lives.

⁸When these leprous men had come to the edge of the camp, they went into a tent, ate and drank, carried off silver, gold, and clothing, and went and hid them. Then they came back, entered another tent, carried off things from it, and went and hid them.

⁹Then they said to one another, "What we are doing is wrong. This is a day of good news; if we are silent and wait until the morning light, we will be found guilty; therefore let us go and tell the king's household." ¹⁰So they came and called to the gatekeepers of the city, and told them, "We went to the Aramean camp, but there was no one to be seen or heard there, nothing but the horses tied, the donkeys tied, and the tents as they were."

Elisha assures the king that 'tomorrow' food will be available at a reasonable price (verse 1). The king's aide doesn't believe him.

YHWH's word is fulfilled in a comic and most complicated way (verses 3-20). Lepers (see comment on page 157) decide there is no hope where they are. They decide to desert to the Syrians. Meanwhile, back in the Syrian camp, YHWH causes a sound like that of an approaching army (compare 6:17), and the Syrian army flee, leaving the camp empty.

The lepers ransack the camp, decide they should tell the king of Israel, and do so.

At first the king thinks this is a Syrian trick, but is persuaded to send an advance party to investigate. They report that the Syrians have indeed departed.

The food obtained from the Syrian camp ends the famine. YHWH gives food to the starving, and all through the initiative of those who are outcasts from society.

The king's aide who scorned the prophet's words in verse 2 is trampled to death by the crowd of starving people desperate to get to the food. He does not enjoy the new-found plenty 'just as the man of God had said'(verse 17).

¹¹Then the gatekeepers called out and proclaimed it to the king's household.

¹²The king got up in the night, and said to his servants, "I will tell you what the Arameans have prepared against us. They know that we are starving; so they have left the camp to hide themselves in the open country, thinking, 'When they come out of the city, we shall take them alive and get into the city.'" ¹³One of his servants said, "Let some men take five of the remaining horses, since those left here will suffer the fate of the whole multitude of Israel that have perished already; let us send and find out." ¹⁴So they took two mounted men, and the king sent them after the Aramean army, saying, "Go and find out." ¹⁵So they went after them as far as the Jordan; the whole way was littered with garments and equipment that the Arameans had thrown away in their haste. So the messengers returned, and told the king. ¹⁶Then the people went out, and plundered the camp of the Arameans. So a measure of choice meal was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of YHWH.

¹⁷Now the king had appointed the captain on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate; the people trampled him to death in the gate, just as the man of God had said when the king came down to him.

¹⁸For when the man of God had said to the king, "Two measures of barley shall be sold for a shekel, and a measure of choice meal for a shekel, about this time tomorrow in the gate of Samaria," ¹⁹the captain had answered the man of God, "Even if YHWH were to make windows in the sky, could such a thing happen?" And he had answered, "You shall see it with your own eyes, but you shall not eat from it." ²⁰It did indeed happen to him; the people trampled him to death in the gate.

¹Now 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 YHWH has called for a famine, and it will come on the land for seven years." ²So 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 seven years. ³At 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.

⁴Meanwhile, the king was talking with Gehazi the servant of the man of God, saying, "Tell me all the great things that Elisha has done." ⁵While 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." ⁶When 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."

In a world that sees everything that happens as an expression of God's will, it is automatic to see a famine as a fulfilment of a divine punishment for disobedience.

When I break your staff of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in a single oven, and they shall dole out your bread by weight; and though you eat, you shall not be satisfied. But if, despite this, you disobey me, and continue hostile to me, I will continue hostile to you in fury; I in turn will punish you myself seven-fold for your sins. You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters.

– Leviticus 26:26-29

The situation recalls 2Kings 6:24-29.

We met this woman in 4:8-37. Here, Elisha warns her to leave Israel to avoid the famine, and she settles in Philistia.

On her return she discovers that her property has reverted to the crown. She appeals to the king to have it restored. Upon hearing Elisha's servant tell of the miracles performed by Elisha, including the fact that this is the woman whose son Elisha had restored to life, the king judges in her favour.

We might recall here the legislation for the year of Jubilee, legislation which honours the ultimate inalienability of land.

The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land.

– Leviticus 25:23-24

This scene brings to an end the stories of Elisha as wonder-worker.

Behind this narrative stand the instructions given to Elijah.

YHWH said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill.

– 1Kings 19:15-17

King Ben-hadad II of Aram has already featured in 1Kings 20. Here we find him ill. He sends Hazael to Elisha to find out his prospects of recovery. The prophet's reply is that Hazael is to tell the king that he will certainly recover. He adds: 'but he will certainly die'(verse 10).

Elisha gazes at Hazael who knows that the prophet can read his thoughts and so is ashamed. Is he already thinking of doing away with the king? Elisha 'sees' that Hazael will soon be king, and 'sees', too, how he will use his reign to oppress Israel. Hazael demurs, claiming he is too insignificant to become king. Elisha assures him that YHWH has revealed to Elisha that Hazael will, indeed, be king (verse 13).

Hazael gives Elisha's reply to the king, but then carries out YHWH's will by assassinating Ben-hadad, and succeeding him (verses 14-15).

Hazael became king in the last year of the reign of Jehoram in Israel (841) and ruled till the end of the century. He proved to be an implacable enemy of Israel.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler omits these verses.

7Elisha went to Damascus while King Ben-hadad of Aram was ill. When it was told him, "The man of God has come here," ⁸the king said to Hazael, "Take a present with you and go to meet the man of God. Inquire of YHWH through him, whether I shall recover from this illness." ⁹So 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?'" ¹⁰Elisha said to him, "Go, say to him, 'You shall certainly recover'; but YHWH has shown me that he will certainly die."

¹¹He fixed his gaze and stared at him, until he was ashamed. Then the man of God wept. ¹²Hazael 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." ¹³Hazael said, "What is your servant, who is a mere dog, that he should do this great thing?" Elisha answered, "YHWH has shown me that you are to be king over Aram." ¹⁴Then 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." ¹⁵But 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.

¹⁶In the fifth year of King Joram son of Ahab of Israel, Jehoram son of King Jehoshaphat of Judah began to reign. ¹⁷He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. ¹⁸He 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 YHWH. ¹⁹Yet YHWH 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 forever.

²⁰In his days Edom revolted against the rule of Judah, and set up a king of their own. ²¹Then 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. ²²So Edom has been in revolt against the rule of Judah to this day. Libnah also revolted at the same time.

²³Now 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? ²⁴So Joram slept with his ancestors, and was buried with them in the city of David.

Jehoram of Judah began his reign 'in the fifth year of King Joram son of Ahab', that is, in the year 848. It would appear that he was 2 years as co-regent with his father, Jehoshaphat, who died in 846 (see page 141). Jehoram 'reigned eight years in Jerusalem' (verse 17), 848-841. This picks up the line of the kings of Judah, last mentioned in 1Kings 22:50 where we were informed that Jehoram succeeded his father Jehoshaphat as king.

The Deuteronomists give him the kind of negative judgment we have come to expect for the kings of Israel. It is enough that he has married a member of the house of Ahab, and in that sense 'daughter'. Athaliah was actually Ahab's sister (see verse 26).

YHWH put an end to the dynasties of the north because of their infidelity. The only reason this does not happen in Judah is because of the promises given to David. For the image of the 'lamp' see 2Samuel 21:17; 1Kings 11:36).

It was during the reign of King Jehoram of Judah that Edom (see 2Kings 3) gained its independence (verses 20-22). Libnah appears to be a town in the southwest region of Judah bordering Philistia.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler has omitted 2Kings 1-7. Here, for the first time, he picks up the narrative, since the focus is on a king of Judah. In 2Chronicles 21:5-10 he copies 2Kings 8:16-22. He omits the reference to King Joram son of Ahab of Israel, replaces 'Judah' (verse 19) with 'house of David', speaks explicitly of 'the covenant with David', and gives as the reason for Libna's revolt: '**because Jehoram had forsaken YHWH, the God of his ancestors**' (verse 10).

His negative judgment is reinforced by details found only in Chronicles which tell of Jehoram's assassinating 'all his brothers, along with some officials' (2Chronicles 21:4).

The Chronicler

Verse 11 is to be expected.

Verses 12-15 repeat a legend that does not fit with what we know of Elijah from the Deuteronomists' account.

Verses 16-19 are presented as fulfilling what was foreseen by the prophet Elijah (see verses 12-15).

¹¹Moreover he made high places in the hill country of Judah, and led the inhabitants of Jerusalem into unfaithfulness, and made Judah go astray. ¹²A letter came to him from the prophet Elijah, saying: "Thus says YHWH, the God of your father David: Because you have not walked in the ways of your father Jehoshaphat or in the ways of King Asa of Judah, ¹³but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem into unfaithfulness, as the house of Ahab led Israel into unfaithfulness, and because you also have killed your brothers, members of your father's house, who were better than yourself, ¹⁴see, YHWH will bring a great plague on your people, your children, your wives, and all your possessions, ¹⁵and you yourself will have a severe sickness with a disease of your bowels, until your bowels come out, day after day, because of the disease."

¹⁶YHWH aroused against Jehoram the anger of the Philistines and of the Arabs who are near the Ethiopians. ¹⁷They came up against Judah, invaded it, and carried away all the possessions they found that belonged to the king's house, along with his sons and his wives, so that no son was left to him except Jehoahaz, his youngest son. ¹⁸After all this YHWH struck him in his bowels with an incurable disease. ¹⁹In course of time, at the end of two years, his bowels came out because of the disease, and he died in great agony. His people made no fire in his honor, like the fires made for his ancestors. ²⁰He was thirty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned 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.

²⁴His son Ahaziah succeeded him.

²⁵In the twelfth year of King Joram son of Ahab of Israel, Ahaziah son of King Jehoram of Judah began to reign. ²⁶Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned one year in Jerusalem.

His mother's name was Athaliah, a daughter of King Omri of Israel.

²⁷He also walked in the way of the house of Ahab, doing what was evil in the sight of YHWH, as the house of Ahab had done, for he was son-in-law to the house of Ahab.

²⁸He went with Joram son of Ahab to wage war against King Hazael of Aram at Ramoth-gilead, where the Arameans wounded Joram.

²⁹King Joram returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds that the Arameans 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.

Ahaziah became king 'in the twelfth year of King Joram son of Ahab'; that is, in 841. He reigned for only one year. His mother Athaliah was the daughter of Omri (verse 26), and the sister of Ahab (verse 18). This is given by the Deuteronomists as the reason for their negative judgment.

Hazael has just taken command in Aram (see 8:15), and Judah and Israel combine to fight against Aram at Ramoth-gilead (Ramah), repeating an earlier battle involving Ahab and Jehoshaphat (see 1Kings 22).

The king of Israel is wounded in the battle, and retires to Jezreel. His cousin Ahaziah, visits him there.

The Chronicler

There are a number of changes to 1Kings 24-27:

¹The inhabitants of Jerusalem made his youngest son Ahaziah king as his successor; for the troops who came with the Arabs to the camp had killed all the older sons. So Ahaziah son of Jehoram reigned as king of Judah. ²Ahaziah was forty-two years old when he began to reign; he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of Omri. ³He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counsellor in doing wickedly. ⁴He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH as the house of Ahab had done; for after the death of his father they were his counsellors, to his ruin.

– 2Chronicles 22:1-4

The Chronicler copies 1Kings 8:28-29 (see 2Chronicles 22:5-6).

Here is the culminating event of the authority given by YHWH to Elijah (see 1Kings 19:15-16). Elisha has been anointed. Hazael has been made king of Aram, and now Jehu is anointed king of Israel. This is presented as God's way of ridding Israel of the Omri dynasty ('the house of Ahab'). Verse 9 makes it clear that it is to suffer the fate of the Jeroboam dynasty (see 1Kings 14:13-16) and the Baasha dynasty (see 1Kings 16:1-7).

Elisha's instruction is carried out by 'a member of the company of prophets'(verse 1).

The oracle pronounced by Elisha's messenger includes a statement on the fate of Jezebel, the Phoenician mother of Jehoram of Israel (verse 10; see 1Kings 21:23).

The other officers pledge themselves to support Jehu's act of treason (verse 13).

The Chronicler

The Chronicler is not interested in the politics of Israel, and so omits this scene.

¹Then the prophet Elisha called a member of the company of prophets and said to him, "Gird up your loins; take this flask of oil in your hand, and go to Ramoth-gilead. ²When you arrive, look there for Jehu son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi; go in and get him to leave his companions, and take him into an inner chamber. ³Then take the flask of oil, pour it on his head, and say, 'Thus says YHWH: I anoint you king over Israel.' Then open the door and flee; do not linger."

⁴So the young man, the young prophet, went to Ramoth-gilead. ⁵He arrived while the commanders of the army were in council, and he announced, "I have a message for you, commander." "For which one of us?" asked Jehu. "For you, commander." ⁶So Jehu got up and went inside; the young man poured the oil on his head, saying to him, "Thus says the YHWH the God of Israel: I anoint you king over the people of YHWH, over Israel. ⁷You shall strike down the house of your master Ahab, so that I may avenge on Jezebel the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of YHWH. ⁸For the whole house of Ahab shall perish; I will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. ⁹I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha son of Ahijah. ¹⁰The dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and no one shall bury her." Then he opened the door and fled.

¹¹When Jehu came back to his master's officers, they said to him, "Is everything all right? Why did that madman come to you?" He answered them, "You know the sort and how they babble." ¹²They said, "Liar! Come on, tell us!" So he said, "This is just what he said to me: 'Thus says YHWH, I anoint you king over Israel.'" ¹³Then hurriedly they all took their cloaks and spread them for him on the bare steps; and they blew the trumpet, and proclaimed, "Jehu is king."

¹⁴Thus Jehu son of Jehoshaphat son of Nimshi conspired against Joram. Joram with all Israel had been on guard at Ramoth-gilead against King Hazael of Aram; ¹⁵but King Joram had returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds that the Arameans had inflicted on him, when he fought against King Hazael of Aram. So Jehu said, "If this is your wish, then let no one slip out of the city to go and tell the news in Jezreel." ¹⁶Then Jehu mounted his chariot and went to Jezreel, where Joram was lying ill. King Ahaziah of Judah had come down to visit Joram.

¹⁷In Jezreel, the sentinel standing on the tower spied the company of Jehu arriving, and said, "I see a company." Joram said, "Take a horseman; send him to meet them, and let him say, 'Is it peace?'" ¹⁸So the horseman went to meet him; he said, "Thus says the king, 'Is it peace?'" Jehu responded, "What have you to do with peace? Fall in behind me." The sentinel reported, saying, "The messenger reached them, but he is not coming back." ¹⁹Then he sent out a second horseman, who came to them and said, "Thus says the king, 'Is it peace?'" Jehu answered, "What have you to do with peace? Fall in behind me." ²⁰Again the sentinel reported, "He reached them, but he is not coming back. It looks like the driving of Jehu son of Nimshi; for he drives like a maniac."

We have already been told that King Jehoram is in Jezreel recuperating from wounds received in the battle against the Syrian army at Ramoth-gilead, and that King Ahaziah is visiting him there (see 8:29). This is repeated here. The king's sickness, and the fact that he is not with his army, offer a providential moment to carry out YHWH's will, revealed through his prophet. His comrades in arms agree to support Jehu's determination to carry out the will of YHWH by finishing off the Omri dynasty.

When Jehoram hears that Jehu is galloping towards Jezreel he sends a messenger to enquire about Jehu's intentions. The messenger decides to throw in his lot with Jehu. It is the same with a second messenger.

The two kings ride out to meet Jehu, whose response makes it abundantly clear that he intends to kill Jehoram. The main criticism is directed at Jezebel who has infected the realm with 'whoredoms and sorceries', that is, with infidelity to YHWH by the cult of Baal. Jehoram tries to escape but is killed 'at the property of Naboth the Jezreelite'. We are reminded of the command given to Elijah when Ahab, at Jezebel's instigation, had Naboth killed so that the king could take his vineyard:

You shall say to him, "Thus says the YHWH: Have you killed, and also taken possession?" You shall say to him, "Thus says YHWH: In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, dogs will also lick up your blood."

– 1Kings 21:19

The Deuteronomist gives a brief account of the death of Ahaziah (verses 27-28).

The Chronicler

The Chronicler gives a different account:

⁷But it was ordained by God that the downfall of Ahaziah should come about through his going to visit Joram. For when he came there he went out with Jehoram to meet Jehu son of Nimshi, whom YHWH had anointed to destroy the house of Ahab. ⁸When Jehu was executing judgment on the house of Ahab, he met the officials of Judah and the sons of Ahaziah's brothers, who attended Ahaziah, and he killed them. ⁹He searched for Ahaziah, who was captured while hiding in Samaria and was brought to Jehu, and put to death. They buried him, for they said, "He is the grandson of Jehoshaphat, who sought YHWH with all his heart." And the house of Ahaziah had no one able to rule the kingdom.

– 2Chronicles 22:7-9

²¹Joram said, "Get ready." And they got his chariot ready. Then King Joram of Israel and King Ahaziah of Judah set out, each in his chariot, and went to meet Jehu; they met him at the property of Naboth the Jezreelite. ²²When Joram saw Jehu, he said, "Is it peace, Jehu?" He answered, "What peace can there be, so long as the many whoredoms and sorceries of your mother Jezebel continue?" ²³Then Joram reined about and fled, saying to Ahaziah, "Treason, Ahaziah!" ²⁴Jehu drew his bow with all his strength, and shot Joram between the shoulders, so that the arrow pierced his heart; and he sank in his chariot. ²⁵Jehu said to his aide Bidkar, "Lift him out, and throw him on the plot of ground belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite; for remember, when you and I rode side by side behind his father Ahab how YHWH uttered this oracle against him: ²⁶'For the blood of Naboth and for the blood of his children that I saw yesterday, says YHWH, I swear I will repay you on this very plot of ground.' Now therefore lift him out and throw him on the plot of ground, in accordance with the word of YHWH."

²⁷When King Ahaziah of Judah saw this, he fled in the direction of Beth-haggan. Jehu pursued him, saying, "Shoot him also!" And they shot him in the chariot at the ascent to Gur, which is by Ibleam. Then he fled to Megiddo, and died there. ²⁸His officers carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him in his tomb with his ancestors in the city of David.

²⁹In the eleventh year of Joram son of Ahab, Ahaziah began to reign over Judah.

³⁰When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; she painted her eyes, and adorned her head, and looked out of the window. ³¹As Jehu entered the gate, she said, "Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?" ³²He looked up to the window and said, "Who is on my side? Who?" Two or three eunuchs looked out at him.

³³He said, "Throw her down." So they threw her down; some of her blood splattered on the wall and on the horses, which trampled on her. ³⁴Then he went in and ate and drank; he said, "See to that cursed woman and bury her; for she is a king's daughter." ³⁵But when they went to bury her, they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. ³⁶When they came back and told him, he said, "This is the word of YHWH, which he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, 'In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel; ³⁷the corpse of Jezebel shall be like dung on the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say, This is Jezebel.'"

Verse 29 informs us that Ahaziah began to reign in the eleventh year of Jehoram's reign (841). He was killed the same year.

Jehu now proceeds to carry out the mandate already mentioned in 1Kings 21:23 and 2Kings 9:10. He is to rid Israel of the woman who is blamed by the Deuteronomists as the key one responsible for Israel's failure to live Yahwism.

Jezebel is no pushover. She dresses as a queen, stands on the royal balcony in full view, and likens the usurper to Zimri (verse 31), who assassinated King Ellah (see 1Kings 16:16), and who took his own life when confronted by Omri, Jezebel's father-in-law (1Kings 16:18). In fulfilment of the divine edict, Jezebel is killed and her body is trampled by horses and devoured by dogs. In this way she is denied burial – her memory wiped out.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler makes no mention of Jezebel.

Having killed Jehoram of Israel (9:14-26), Ahaziah of Judah (9:27-29) and Ahaziah's mother, Jezebel (9:30-37), Jehu proceeds to wipe out all members of the royal family, and then everyone connected to the royal household.

Recognising that there is no gain in opposing Jehu, the palace officials declare themselves in favour of the new regime (verse 5), and to prove their loyalty they comply with Jehu's demand that they kill all the members of the royal household.

Jehu admits that he killed the king, but the killing of the members of the king's household is the responsibility of the officials. They must pay the price and this gives 'justification' for Jehu's having them killed.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler omits 1Kings 10.

¹Now Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. So Jehu wrote letters and sent them to Samaria, to the rulers of Jezreel, to the elders, and to the guardians of the sons of Ahab, saying, ²"Since your master's sons are with you and you have at your disposal chariots and horses, a fortified city, and weapons, ³select the son of your master who is the best qualified, set him on his father's throne, and fight for your master's house." ⁴But they were utterly terrified and said, "Look, two kings could not withstand him; how then can we stand?" ⁵So the steward of the palace, and the governor of the city, along with the elders and the guardians, sent word to Jehu: "We are your servants; we will do anything you say. We will not make anyone king; do whatever you think right."

⁶Then he wrote them a second letter, saying, "If you are on my side, and if you are ready to obey me, take the heads of your master's sons and come to me at Jezreel tomorrow at this time." Now the king's sons, seventy persons, were with the leaders of the city, who were charged with their upbringing. ⁷When the letter reached them, they took the king's sons and killed them, seventy persons; they put their heads in baskets and sent them to him at Jezreel. ⁸When the messenger came and told him, "They have brought the heads of the king's sons," he said, "Lay them in two heaps at the entrance of the gate until the morning." ⁹Then in the morning when he went out, he stood and said to all the people, "You are innocent. It was I who conspired against my master and killed him; but who struck down all these?" ¹⁰Know then that there shall fall to the earth nothing of the word of YHWH, which YHWH spoke concerning the house of Ahab; for YHWH has done what he said through his servant Elijah."

¹¹So Jehu killed all who were left of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, all his leaders, close friends, and priests, until he left him no survivor.

¹²Then he set out and went to Samaria. On the way, when he was at Beth-eked of the Shepherds, ¹³Jehu met relatives of King Ahaziah of Judah and said, "Who are you?" They answered, "We are kin of Ahaziah; we have come down to visit the royal princes and the sons of the queen mother." ¹⁴He said, "Take them alive." They took them alive, and slaughtered them at the pit of Beth-eked, forty-two in all; he spared none of them.

¹⁵When he left there, he met Jehonadab son of Rechab coming to meet him; he greeted him, and said to him, "Is your heart as true to mine as mine is to yours?" Jehonadab answered, "It is." Jehu said, "If it is, give me your hand." So he gave him his hand. Jehu took him up with him into the chariot. ¹⁶He said, "Come with me, and see my zeal for YHWH." So he had him ride in his chariot. ¹⁷When he came to Samaria, he killed all who were left to Ahab in Samaria, until he had wiped them out, according to the word of YHWH that he spoke to Elijah.

Members of the royal house of Judah are on their way north to visit their relatives in Israel, oblivious of the actions of Jehu just mentioned. Jehu meets them and has them slaughtered (verses 12-14).

Jehu meets Jehonadab, a Rechabite. This was a movement of extreme Yahwism, resistant to anything that smacked of compromise (mentioned only here and in Jeremiah 35). Seeing the advantage for his Yahwist credentials of appearing in public with a Rechabite leader, Jehu gets him to sit with him in the chariot, and proceeds to wipe out any remnants of those sympathetic with the Ahab dynasty who were still alive in Samaria.

Here again, Jehu's killing is presented by the Deuteronomists as being 'according to the word of YHWH that he spoke to Elijah'(verse 17).

Posing as a devotee of Baal, Jehu commands all the adherents of Baal, to come to a grand royal ceremony in honour of their god. Yahwists are excluded.

The gullible Baalists crowd into the temple, only to be slaughtered, with no one escaping.

Then he has the main cult object, the pillar, destroyed and the temple of Baal demolished (verse 27).

18Then Jehu assembled all the people and said to them, "Ahab offered Baal small service; but Jehu will offer much more.

19Now therefore summon to me all the prophets of Baal, all his worshippers, and all his priests; let none be missing, for I have a great sacrifice to offer to Baal; whoever is missing shall not live." But Jehu was acting with cunning in order to destroy the worshippers of Baal. **20**Jehu decreed, "Sanctify a solemn assembly for Baal." So they proclaimed it. **21**Jehu sent word throughout all Israel; all the worshippers of Baal came, so that there was no one left who did not come. They entered the temple of Baal, until the temple of Baal was filled from wall to wall. **22**He said to the keeper of the wardrobe, "Bring out the vestments for all the worshippers of Baal." So he brought out the vestments for them. **23**Then Jehu entered the temple of Baal with Jehonadab son of Rechab; he said to the worshippers of Baal, "Search and see that there is no worshipper of YHWH here among you, but only worshippers of Baal." **24**Then they proceeded to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings.

Now Jehu had stationed eighty men outside, saying, "Whoever allows any of those to escape whom I deliver into your hands shall forfeit his life." **25**As soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering, Jehu said to the guards and to the officers, "Come in and kill them; let no one escape." So they put them to the sword. The guards and the officers threw them out, and then went into the citadel of the temple of Baal. **26**They brought out the pillar that was in the temple of Baal, and burned it. **27**Then they demolished the pillar of Baal, and destroyed the temple of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day.

²⁸Thus Jehu wiped out Baal from Israel.

²⁹But Jehu did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to commit – the golden calves that were in Bethel and in Dan.

³⁰YHWH said to Jehu, “Because you have done well in carrying out what I consider right, and in accordance with all that was in my heart have dealt with the house of Ahab, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel.” ³¹But Jehu was not careful to follow the law of YHWH the God of Israel with all his heart; he did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam, which he caused Israel to commit.

³²In those days YHWH began to trim off parts of Israel. Hazael defeated them throughout the territory of Israel: ³³from the Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the Wadi Arnon, that is, Gilead and Bashan.

³⁴Now the rest of the acts of Jehu, all that he did, and all his power, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

³⁵So Jehu slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in Samaria. His son Jehoahaz succeeded him. ³⁶The time that Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria was twenty-eight years.

Jehu is acknowledged for having wiped out the cult of Baal in Israel (verse 28), and so he is given a guarantee that his dynasty will last four generations (verse 31). As we are told in verse 36, Jehu’s violent, ruthless, reign lasted 28 years, that is from c. 841-814. When his great grandson, Jeroboam II, died, Jehu’s dynasty had been reigning in Israel for almost a hundred years.

However, there is no way he can get a positive verdict from the Deuteronomists. He is, after all, a king in Israel. ‘He did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam’ (verse 31).

We have independent testimony to Jehu’s reign in the Black Obelisk of King Shalmaneser II of Assyria, which records Jehu’s paying of tribute in the eighteenth year of Shalmaneser’s reign; that is, in 841, which according to our calculations is at the beginning of Jehu’s reign (see ANET, 280).

Verses 32-33 record the territory lost to Hazael, king of Aram, focusing especially on the whole of the territory east of the Jordan.

In 835 Hazael caused violent destruction also in the northern section of Israel’s territory west of the Jordan. He built forts at Hazor, Bethsaida and Dan.

Jehu reigned over Israel for ‘twenty-eight years’, 841-814.

The end of the Omride dynasty

The killing of King Jehoram marks the end of the Omride dynasty, which began with an army coup in 885 and ended the same way in 841. The Deuteronomist account reads like a Greek tragedy. Omri, Ahab, and Ahab's two sons, Ahaziah and Jehoram, are portrayed as carrying on the betrayal of Yahwism initiated by the founder of the northern kingdom, Jeroboam. The Deuteronomists have nothing good to say about these kings. From the beginning it is clear that YHWH is determined to destroy them for their infidelity. The plot is played out according to the words of the prophets Elijah and Elisha.

The Deuteronomists are drawing on the records kept in the Annals of the Kings of Israel. The logic of their judgment of this dynasty is straightforward. They are composing their commentary after the fall of Samaria. The kingdom of Israel was destroyed, and by YHWH. Since YHWH is just, the only explanation is that the destruction was divine punishment for sin. This sin began with Jeroboam. Its worst offenders were the kings of the Omride dynasty, influenced especially by Ahab's queen, Jezebel of Phoenicia.

Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman in their book *The Bible Unearthed: archaeology's new vision of ancient Israel and the origin of its sacred texts* (The Free Press, Simon & Schuster, New York 2001) devote a chapter to the Omride dynasty, entitled 'Israel's Forgotten First Kingdom' (pages 169-185).

After detailing the achievements of this dynasty, including the massive building projects, the size of the standing army, and the sophistication of its administration, as well as the extent of the kingdom of Israel (implied by 2Kings 10:32-33 opposite), they conclude (pages 194-195):

Omri and his successors earned the hatred of the Bible precisely because they were so strong, precisely because they succeeded in transforming the northern kingdom into an important regional power that completely overshadowed the poor, marginal, rural-pastoral kingdom of Judah to the south. The possibility that the Israelite kings who consorted with the nations, married foreign women, and built Canaanite-type shrines and palaces would prosper was both unbearable and unthinkable.

Moreover, from the perspective of late monarchic Judah, the internationalism and openness of the Omrides was sinful. To become entangled with the ways of the neighbouring peoples was, according to the seventh century Deuteronomistic ideology, a direct violation of divine command. But a lesson could still be learned from that experience. By the time of the compilation of the books of Kings, history's verdict had already been returned. The Omrides had been overthrown and the kingdom of Israel was no more.

Yet with the help of archeological evidence and the testimony of outside sources, we can now see how the vivid scriptural portraits that doomed Omri, Ahab, and Jezebel to ridicule and scorn over the centuries skilfully concealed the real character of the first true kingdom of Israel.

