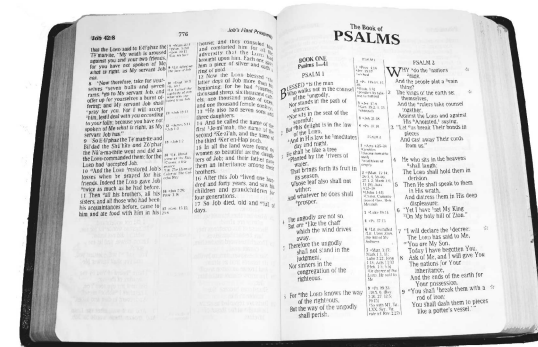


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



July 2017

2 Kings chapters 1 to 12

A covenant ... that they should be the LORD'S people

Jehoiada was a spiritual giant whom God used to bring spiritual reformation to Judah. He put his own life at great risk when he sheltered the young prince in the house of the Lord and when he enlisted the support of the army to overthrow Athaliah (11:3–4). Under his influence, the people removed Baal worship from the land after the death of Athaliah (18).

Then Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD, the king and the people, that they should be the LORD'S people (17). This was a commitment to forsake idolatry, to follow God and obey his commandments. Every Christian has also been brought into a covenant relationship with God through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:6–13). We are not our own but have been purchased at great cost and we must always seek to glorify God in our lives (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

Covenant means commitment! The New Testament takes it for granted and teaches that Christians will become committed to a church where they place themselves under pastoral care and receive faithful instruction in the Word of God (Acts 2:41–47; Hebrews 13:7,17). When we become church members, we identify with a local body of God's people. We involve ourselves in practical Christian fellowship and service. If we move home to live in another part of the country, we should always be sure that we go to live in an area where there is a good church for us to join, where the Bible is faithfully taught and applied.

Jehoash did what was right in the sight of the LORD all the days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him (12:2). One man, Jehoiada, had a great spiritual impact in Judah! The history of the church tells a similar story. Men such as Athanasius, Augustine, Luther and Calvin were used by God to change the course of history. **You may not be a great Christian leader, but if you are faithful to God, he will use you and bless your witness to those around you.**

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He was hidden with her in the house of the LORD

I reminded you in the notes for 24 July that godly king Jehoshaphat of Judah had been very foolish to cultivate a close friendship with wicked Ahab of the northern kingdom. His son married Ahab's daughter, Athaliah, and this led to disastrous consequences for the cause of righteousness and truth. After Jehu had killed Ahaziah and his brothers, wicked Athaliah killed all the royal heirs, except Joash, * and seized the throne. Joash who was only a year old at that time, was rescued by his aunt, Jehosheba. She was also a daughter of Jehoram and Athaliah, but she had married a godly priest, Jehoiada (2 Chronicles 22:11). She was a brave woman whom the Lord used with her husband to thwart Athaliah's desire to obliterate the royal line. *He was hidden with her* (his nurse) *in the house of the LORD for six years* (1–3). Dale Ralph Davis writes concerning Jehosheba that God 'had just the servant he wanted in just the right place at that very time' (2 KINGS: THE POWER AND THE FURY, page 172). We may find ourselves in difficult circumstances but God is with us working out in purposes in our lives. How wonderful!

Satan has opposed the Lord from the beginning and Athaliah was his willing tool. God had purposed and promised that his Messiah ('anointed One') would come through the royal line of David (2 Samuel 7:16; Acts 2:29–30), hence Jesus is sometimes called, '*the Son of David*' (Matthew 21:9). Athaliah was unable to destroy all the royal heirs because God's purposes cannot be thwarted nor can his promise be broken (Psalm 33:11; Isaiah 14:24,27).

Jehoiada the priest made careful plans for the coronation of Joash and the overthrow of Athaliah; this plan was carried out in the seventh year of her reign (4–12). The wicked queen cried out, '*Treason! Treason!*' before she was slain (14) but she had herself been guilty of treason, treachery and mass-murder. **When all seemed lost, God had Joash safely hidden away. We must never lose heart when Satan appears to have the upper hand. The Lord is always in control!**

* Joash is sometimes referred to as 'Jehoash' (12:1,2).

2 KINGS

The two books of the Kings were originally a single book which was divided into 2 volumes by the Greek translators of the Old Testament (a couple of centuries before Christ came to earth). We saw in the notes on 1 Kings that the books cover a period of four hundred years in the history of Israel. The nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms following the death of Solomon.

The turbulent history of the two nations is recorded in 1 Kings 12 to the end of 2 Kings. All the northern kings were evil but Judah was blessed with some good kings. Most of the prophets exercised their ministry during this period — Elijah, Elisha, Joel, Amos, Jonah, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Jeremiah. Some of them prophesied to one kingdom, others to both. The Lord is merciful and slow to anger and he sent the prophets to warn his erring people. Persistent disobedience inevitably brought the judgment of God upon them and Israel went into Assyrian captivity in 722 BC, Judah to captivity in Babylon in 586 BC.

Outline of 2 Kings

1. Ministry of Elijah and Elisha — 1:1 to 9:10
2. Kings of Judah and Israel until captivity of Israel 9:11 to 17:41
3. Kings of Judah until captivity in Babylon — 18:1 to 25:30

For further reading: I always find Dale Ralph Davis to be very helpful and relevant. I commend his commentary on 2 Kings entitled '2 KINGS: THE POWER AND THE FURY' published by Christian Focus. It is rich in pastoral application and is warm and encouraging in the application of the text of 2 Kings to our everyday lives.

Is it because there is no God in Israel ... ?

The Moabites rebelled against Israel following the death of Ahab (1). More is written about this rebellion in chapter 3. Dale Ralph Davis reminds us that ‘Ahab was a conduit that allowed pagan sewage to engulf Israel (1 Kings 16:29–34), one who tolerated injustice (1 Kings 21), and who hated God’s word (eg. 1 Kings 22)’ – ‘2 KINGS: THE POWER AND THE FURY’; page 15. Ahaziah was just as wicked as his father Ahab (1 Kings 22:52–53).

Ahaziah was seriously injured when he fell through the lattice of his upper room. His injury was life-threatening and fearing the worst, he wanted his fortune told. He sent messengers to the Philistine city of Ekron (45 miles or 72 kilometres from Samaria). There, the priests of Baal-Zebub claimed to receive messages from their god (2).

The messengers never reached Ekron, however. They were intercepted by Elijah who sent them back to Ahaziah with a message from the Lord: *‘Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to enquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?’* (This question is repeated in verses 6 and 16). The first and second commandments remind us that the Lord hates idolatry and the worship of other gods provokes him to anger (Exodus 20:3–4; 1 Kings 22:53). Ahaziah would die from his injuries because he had sought to obtain help from an idol rather than from the living God (3–6). Many Christians have strayed from the Lord through other forms of idolatry such as covetousness (Colossians 3:5). *Little children, keep yourselves from idols* (1 John 5:21).

Ahaziah knew Elijah (7–8) and he knew that Elijah’s God was the only true God, who had sent drought, fire and rain in answer to Elijah’s prayers. He had no excuse for his idolatry and even when faced with death, he remained hardened in his sin. **Many today believe that if we saw a spate of miracles in the church, our nation would turn to God and be saved. Bible history does not support that supposition.** Centuries later, the Lord Jesus performed thousands of miracles, but he was rejected and crucified!

But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD

There were no half-measures with Jehu in his zeal to destroy and remove the religion of Baal from Israel. He gathered all the people together, and said to them, *‘Ahab served Baal a little, but Jehu will serve him much’* (18). He pretended that he wanted to make a great sacrifice to the idol and called for a solemn assembly to which all the worshippers of Baal in Israel were summoned. The temple of Baal was filled and Jehu ascertained that there were no worshippers of the Lord among them. He then ordered his troops to kill all the worshippers in the temple of Baal. The building was afterwards desecrated and destroyed (19–28).

The Lord told Jehu that he had done well to obey him in destroying the house of Ahab and promised that his descendants would reign over Israel to the fourth generation (30). All was not well, however. Jehu allowed idol worship (of the golden calves) to continue at Bethel and Dan (18–29). He purged Israel of Baal-worship but he had not purged his own heart from sin. Moreover, he did not lead a God-fearing life: *But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart* (31). He had earlier boasted of his zeal for the Lord (16) but it was a zeal that lacked wholehearted obedience. He had obeyed the Lord in one thing (the destruction of Ahab’s household) but he had not forsaken the sins of Jeroboam, the first king over the northern kingdom. Sin does not go unpunished and the Lord brought the Syrians against Jehu to take some of the territory of Israel (32–33).

There is a warning for every Christian in these verses. — We may hate false teaching and be very zealous for correct doctrine while failing to be holy. We must not only proclaim what is not acceptable in teaching and practice. We must also be positive by living in obedience to the will of God and in loving our fellow-believers!

Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD

Ahab had seventy sons living in the capital city of Samaria and Jehu challenged them to choose one of these sons to be their king and to lead them against him. They had no stomach for conflict with Jehu and promised to serve him (1–5). He then sent them a letter instructing them to prove their loyalty by killing all of Ahab's seventy sons; they were to bring their heads to him the following day. They knew that they had no option but to obey him if they were to save their own lives.

When the rulers of Samaria delivered their gruesome cargo to Jehu who was in Jezreel. He reminded them that God had spoken through Elijah regarding Ahab's household. It was in Jezreel that Naboth had his vineyard and he was murdered at the behest of Jezebel (1 Kings chapter 21). The prophet's message of judgment had been fulfilled. He stated a very important principle, *'Know now that nothing shall fall to the earth of the word of the LORD'* (10). The Lord's warnings of judgment are not empty words. What he says is true and we must take Scripture seriously. Jehu went on to kill all the acquaintances of Ahab in Jezreel as well as the priests of Baal and Asherah (11).

The brothers of king Ahaziah of Judah were on their way to visit Joram and his family in Jezreel, unaware of all that had happened to their relatives. Jehu met them and slaughtered them too (12–14). He met Jehonadab and ascertained that the man was true to him. He then beckoned him into his chariot saying, *'Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD'* (16). He wanted Jehonadab to see the thoroughness of his purge of Ahab's family and the worship of Baal.

Jehu was zealous in his mission to destroy the household of Ahab but he did not obey the law of God (29–31). **We must beware of pride! We may want everyone to think that we are wonderful Christians and yet be lacking in full obedience to God's will.** It is good to have a zeal for God but we must beware of boasting. *Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth* (Proverbs 27:2).

So Ahaziah died according to the word of the LORD

Ahaziah did not take kindly to Elijah's message from the Lord. He sent a band of fifty soldiers to arrest the prophet. Their captain met Elijah with Ahaziah's command, *'Man of God, the king has said, "Come down"'* (9). The prophet replied, *'If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men'* (10). Fire then fell from heaven, destroying the captain and his fifty soldiers.

Ahaziah would have known about the Elijah calling down fire from heaven a few years earlier on mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:24,37–38). He was again reminded that Jehovah was the true God, not Baal, but he persisted in his rebellion against God. Fire from heaven did not bring him to his senses and like his father, he did not forsake his idolatry. He sent another band of soldiers to arrest the prophet, and the same fate befell them (11–12).

The third band of soldiers were spared when their captain pleaded with Elijah for their lives. He did not doubt that Jehovah was the true and living God and he respected the prophet. The angel of the LORD assured Elijah that he would be safe in going with this man to repeat his message to Ahaziah (13–15). The king had become so hard in heart that he was insensitive to the voice of God. In his greatest need, he did not seek the true God for forgiveness and salvation. How stupid and how sad! He remained in his sin and reigned for just two years before he died (cp. 1 Kings 22:51). He died childless and his brother, Jehoram, succeeded him to the throne.

The Lord was merciful to the captain who humbled himself and pleaded for his life but *Ahaziah died according to the word of the LORD* (17). We need to be constantly reminded to take seriously God's warnings. **If you close your ears to the voice of God, you do so at your own peril!**

You have asked a hard thing

Elijah was a mighty man of prayer but one of his prayers was not answered as he had expected. *He prayed that he might die* (1 Kings 19:4) but he didn't die, and years later, he went up by a whirlwind into heaven (11). The Lord had much work for him to do and a prophetic community was established at Bethel where Jeroboam, first ruler of the northern kingdom, had set up an idol altar (3; cp. 1 Kings 12:28–29). A group of prophets was also found at Jericho, another place where wicked men had defied God (5; cp. 1 Kings 16:33–34). He was also able to prepare Elisha to succeed him. There are times when we do not pray aright because we feel low in spirit. It is a good thing that God does not always take us at our word. When he says to us, 'No', his reasons are always wise and good.

*God shall alone the refuge be
And comfort of my mind;
Too wise to be mistaken, he,
Too good to be unkind.* (Samuel Medley)

Elisha and the sons of the prophets knew that God was about to take Elijah up into heaven, but they did not speak of it openly (3, 5). Elisha was determined to remain with Elijah, though asked three times to remain where he was (2,4,6). Elijah then asked him, 'What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?' Elisha asked for a double portion of his spirit. This does not mean that Elisha was asking for twice the power of the Holy Spirit that was upon Elijah. Under the law of Moses, the first-born son, the heir, was entitled to a double portion of his father's possessions (Deuteronomy 21:17). Elisha knew, that as Elijah's spiritual heir, he needed the hand of God upon his life just as it was upon Elijah. Elijah told him, 'You have asked a hard thing' (10). Subsequent events show that Elisha's request was granted. **Are you bold when you make your requests to God? Do you come to him in faith, expecting him to answer you?** 'Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for you' (Jeremiah 32:17).

Who is on my side?

When Ahaziah king of Judah saw what had happened to Jehoram, he fled for his life. Jehu pursued him and killed him (27; 2 Chronicles 22:1–9). Jehu then went to Jezreel to deal with Jezebel.

Jezebel was defiant to the end! She came to a palace window and addressed Jehu as a murderer. She would have heard that he had killed her son Jehoram. She also called him 'Zimri' (another army officer who had assassinated his king; 1 Kings 16:8–10). Jehu called to those in Jezebel's palace, 'Who is on my side?' (32). The eunuchs who responded to his call were ordered to seize Jezebel and to throw her down from the window. Jezebel was trampled under the horses of Jehu and his men, and the dogs ate her flesh, just as Elijah had prophesied after she had organised the murder of Naboth (33–37; 1 Kings 21:23). The Lord does avenge his elect Romans 12:19!

Those who were with Jezebel could no longer remain neutral. They had to choose whether to give their allegiance to Jezebel or to Jehu. **We too must respond to the call of the Lord. Are you on his side?** If you are, seek first the interests of the kingdom of God and lead a godly life (Matthew 6:33).

*Who is on the Lord's side?
Who will serve the King?
Who will be his helpers
Other lives to bring?
Who will leave the world's side?
Who will face the foe?
Who is on the Lord's side?
Who for him will go?
By thy call of mercy,
By thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side;
Saviour, we are thine.*

(Frances Ridley Havergal)

Jehu ... shot Jehoram between his arms

King Joram of Israel (also called Jehoram, not to be confused with King Jehoram of Judah; cp. 1:17), had been injured in battle against the Syrians and had returned to Jezreel to recover from his wounds (14–15; cp. 8:28–29). Jehu went to Jezreel where King Ahaziah of Judah was visiting his wounded relative. The city watchman warned them of the approach of Jehu and his company. Joram sent a messenger to enquire if Jehu was coming with peaceful intentions. This man defected to Jehu and then a second messenger did the same.

Joram and Ahaziah went out in their chariots to meet Jehu. They met him on the property which Ahab and Jezebel had seized after plotting the murder of Naboth (16–21). Joram and Ahaziah turned their chariots to flee when they discovered that Jehu was not on an errand of peace. *Jehu ... shot Jehoram between his arms and the arrow came out bat his heart (24)*. His body was thrown into the field of Naboth.

Joram had seen the power of Jehovah throughout his reign and the futility of Baal worship. Seven years of his twelve year reign were blighted with famine but Baal was supposed to guarantee good harvests (8:1). Joram had witnessed or was aware of miracles through the ministry of Elisha (3:9–24; 5:1–19; 6:8–23; 7:1–20). He was fascinated by the miraculous ministry of Elisha and sought to know more from Gehazi (8:1–6); it is obvious that he highly esteemed the prophet. God was gracious and kind to Joram but the king did not forsake his wicked ways and he died in his sins (3:1–3). There comes a point where opportunity to repent of sin and trust in the Lord is taken away. **If your heart is not right with God, I urge you to seek the Lord while he may be found (Isaiah 55:6–7). Tomorrow may be too late!**

*There is a line by us unseen,
That crosses every path;
The hidden boundary between
God's patience and his wrath.*

(Joseph Addison Alexander)

Where is the LORD God of Elijah?

Elisha came from a farming family at Abel Meholah which was situated a few miles north of the city of Samaria. After taking leave of his parents, he followed Elijah and served him (cp. 3:11; 1 Kings 19:16,19–21). This kind of service involved menial tasks and no public ministry as long as Elijah lived; it was however a valuable period of preparation during which he observed the prophet and learned from him. If humble jobs are beneath your dignity, do not imagine that God will entrust you with greater tasks. Stephen and Philip served tables and cared for widows before they were used in wider ministry (Acts 6:1–5).

After Elijah's translation to heaven, Elisha took up his master's mantle and faced his first challenge. He needed to part the waters of the Jordan just as Elijah had done. Taking the mantle, Her struck the water of the river just as Elijah had done (14; see verse 8) saying, '*Where is the LORD God of Elijah?*' The river was divided so that he could cross over and the observing sons of the prophets recognised him as God's choice to be their leader (12–15). They sent fifty men to look for Elijah, though Elisha had warned them that it was a futile task. The prophet was not upon a mountain or in a valley. He was with his Lord in heaven (16–18).

Where is the God of Elijah today? This question is often asked with a sense of despair rather than hope. Elijah had departed, but Elijah's God remained! He is still the same God, wonderfully working out his sovereign purpose. He was with Elijah and Elisha during desperately wicked and difficult times. He has been with his people over the centuries in both good and evil times. Faith shines brightest in the darkness! **The God of Elijah will always be with us if we follow him and obey him. Let us now come to the Lord in prayer with renewed trust and confidence in him.**

The water is bad, and the ground barren

Our reading today is an illustration of the Scripture which urges us, *Consider the goodness and severity of God* (Romans 11:22). We see the goodness of the Lord to the men of Jericho and his severity toward the mocking youths in Bethel.

While Elisha was in Jericho, the men of the city came to him with a problem. Though Jericho was pleasantly situated, they reported, *'The water is bad, and the ground barren'* (19). He told them to bring him a new bowl containing salt and he then cast the salt into the polluted water. He brought a word from the Lord promising that the waters had been healed and so they were (20–22). The prophet of Jehovah spoke as his mouthpiece and prophetic utterances often began with the words, *'Thus says the LORD'* (21). Elijah had used the same words in his prophetic ministry (cp. 1 Kings 21:19; 2 Kings 1:4,16).

Jericho had been rebuilt and inhabited in defiance of God and it was under a curse (Joshua 6:26; 1 Kings 16:33–34) but it now had a prophetic community. God took away the barrenness of the place. Many of us labour in places which are spiritually barren and the work is very tough and often discouraging. Let us persevere and be 'salt' among all the corruption that is around us (Matthew 5:13). May God be pleased to bring forth fruit from our barren ground. *

Elisha had quite a different reception when he arrived at Bethel, the home of another prophetic community. He was mocked and insulted by a mob of youths who had probably heard that he had assumed leadership over the sons of the prophets. Elisha was not intimidated and *he pronounced a curse on them in the name of the LORD*. Two female bears then came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of them (23–24). **Those who despise or insult God's servants also show contempt for God. He will surely deal with them.**

* Dale Ralph Davis has some encouraging words of pastoral application in his exposition of this passage (2 KINGS – 'THE POWER AND THE FURY,' page 37).

That I may avenge the blood of my servants

Elisha sent one of the sons of the prophets to anoint Jehu as King of Israel. He instructed the young man to perform the ceremony in secret and then to leave in haste (1–3). Jehu commanded troops who were defending the strategic town of Ramoth Gilead against the Syrians (Ramoth Gilead was near to the border of Syria; see map, page 13). The young prophet anointed Jehu and gave him a message from the Lord. *'You shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD, at the hand of Jezebel'* (6–7).

Jehu's officers saw the hasty departure of the prophet and commented that he was a madman. They asked Jehu the purpose of the visit but were not satisfied with his evasive answer. They urged him to tell them the truth and he told them that he had been anointed as king of Israel at the command of God. They placed their garments under him on the steps as an act of homage and they acknowledged him as their king (11–13).

Ahab and Jezebel had murdered many godly people and the Lord was not indifferent to their wickedness. He had sent Elijah to Ahab to pronounce their doom and Ahab had already died in the manner prophesied (1 Kings 21:19–24; 22:37–38). Jehu was God's chosen instrument to destroy the remainder of this wicked family.

There are many who scoff at the teaching of the Bible that God will *avenge the blood* of his people but they are perverse in their refusal to submit to the teaching of the Bible. God is just and he will avenge his elect (Luke 18:7–8). His martyrs cry out in heaven for divine vengeance where God is praised because he punishes those who *have shed the blood of saints and prophets* (Revelation 6:9–10; 16:5–6). **If you are suffering for your Christian testimony, do not retaliate, but commit your cause to God (Romans 12:19–21).**

For the daughter of Ahab was his wife

Our attention is now directed to the southern kingdom of Judah. Jehoram (not to be confused with the king of Israel bearing the same name) was a very wicked man who reigned for eight years. He killed all his brothers after he became king and led Judah into idolatry (2 Chronicles 21:11). The dynasty of the house of David deserved to be cut off because of this wicked man, but God had made a covenant with David that his descendants would rule over his people for ever (18–19; the human descent of the Lord Jesus came from the line of David).

No one can defy God and escape his judgment! The Lord later struck Jehoram with an incurable disease which led to a very painful and gruesome death (2 Chronicles 21:4,18–19). His reign was also marked with revolts against his rule by Edom and Libnah (20–22). Jehoram had a good father but a bad wife — *for the daughter of Ahab was his wife* (18). His life was marred by Athaliah whose influence was far greater than that of his father. Jehoram would hardly have known Athaliah but for the foolish friendship of Jehoshaphat with Ahab (2 Chronicles 18:1–7). This wicked woman also had an evil influence over her son, Ahaziah, who succeeded Jehoram as king of Judah (25–27).

I plead with those of my readers who are single. Be very careful and prayerful in your choice of a marriage partner. Be sure to seek the Lord for a godly partner in marriage. I am not suggesting that every non-Christian is evil in the Athaliah sense, but if they do not belong to the Lord, you must not marry them. Many a young person who once appeared to be keen to serve the Lord, has drifted into spiritual apathy and worldliness after marrying an unbeliever. The Bible is quite clear in its warnings against such a sin (eg. Deuteronomy 7:3–4; 2 Corinthians 6:14–15). If you marry an unbeliever or a professing Christian who shows little desire to please God, your life will be sapped of its spiritual vitality.

The word of the LORD is with him

Ahaziah died after two years on the throne and was succeeded by his brother Jehoram (also called Joram; 8:16,25). Jehoram seemingly made a good start by getting rid of the pillar of Baal that his father had made. He did not turn away from idolatry, however (*the sins of Jeroboam*; 2–3). Ahab's death, two years earlier, had left Israel weak and unstable and the Moabites rebelled against paying tribute (4–5; cp. 1:1).

The new king was determined to teach the rebels a lesson and he enlisted the help of Jehoshaphat, whose son had married his sister. The king of Judah had already enjoyed a great victory over the Moabites (2 Chronicles chapter 20). The Edomites who were vassals of Judah at that time (2 Chronicles 21:8) were also brought into this alliance (6–9).

The kings decided to attack Moab from the south, going through the wilderness of Edom. They marched for seven days and ran into trouble because there was no water for the army and their animals (9). It is interesting to compare the reaction of the kings of Israel and Judah to this crisis. Wicked Jehoram blamed God for the trouble in which they found themselves (10). Have you noticed how the ungodly unwittingly acknowledge the sovereignty of God when in trouble, but they do not repent of their sin nor trust in him?

Jehoshaphat asked, '*Is there no prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of the LORD by him?*' (10–11). They should have sought direction from God before they embarked on such a venture! We sometimes make the same mistake. We do not commit our way to the Lord and only pray when things start to go wrong!

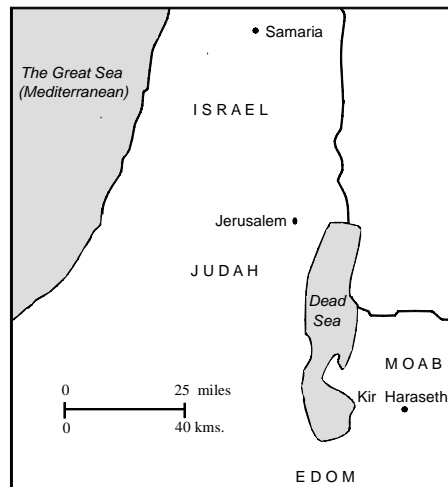
When Elisha's name was mentioned, Jehoshaphat responded, '*The word of the LORD is with him*' and Elisha's counsel was sought (12). We all face difficulties at one time or another. We need to know the Word of God to help us in times of need. **Are you walking with the Lord so that his word is with you? Can you be trusted to give sound, godly counsel to those who share their problems with you?**

This is but a trivial thing in the sight of the LORD

Elisha was quite forthright with Jehoram telling him to go and consult the prophets of Baal whom his parents had so trusted (13). The prophet told him that he was only considering his request out of respect for Jehoshaphat. He called for a musician and the Lord spoke through him as the musician played. God instructed them to dig ditches in the valley, promising that they would be filled with water though there would not be any rain. They would have enough water for themselves and their animals (14–17). The prophet told them that such a miracle was easy for God and that they would defeat the Moabites: *'This is but a trivial thing in the sight of the LORD'* (18). At the time of the grain offering in the morning, water came gushing into the land from the direction of Edom, filling the ditches.

The water reflected the early morning sun, appearing red like blood. The Moabites, thinking that some catastrophe had befallen their enemies, rushed into battle confident of victory. They suffered a crushing defeat and the armies of Israel, Judah and Edom destroyed the cities and wells in the south of Moab and they ruined their land. The desperate king of Moab offered his eldest son as a human sacrifice on the wall of Kir Haraseth; this caused great anger against the Israelites who returned to their own country (19–27).

Christian, you may have problems and needs that are far from trivial, but remember that our sovereign, almighty God is able to do the impossible (Luke 18:27). Take heart as you come before him, as you meet him at his throne of grace (Hebrews 4:15–16).

*The man of God wept*

Elisha was respected as a prophet beyond the boundaries of Israel and his counsel was sought by the king of Syria when he went to Damascus. Ben-Hadad (the name means 'Son of the Mighty') was ill and he sent to Elisha asking him to inquire of the Lord to find if he would recover from his sickness (7–8). The king was a cruel tyrant who knew about God's power (1 Kings 20) and had seen it in the healing of Naaman, in revealing his plans for battle to Elisha, and in the blinding of his army which rendered them helpless (chapters 5 and 6). Ben-Hadad was more concerned for his physical well-being than for the welfare of his soul. His heart was hardened! He sent Hazael to enquire of Elisha on his behalf. We can understand the yearning for those who are very ill to know recovery and to survive, but how terribly sad that so many of them have no desire to repent of their sin and to be right with God.

Elisha's told Hazael to tell Ben-Hadad that he would recover from this illness, but he added that the king would die. Hazael whose name means, 'God sees' did not see his own potential for wickedness. The prophet made Hazael feel uncomfortable and ashamed as he stared at him with a fixed gaze and wept. When Hazael asked him why he was weeping, Elisha told him that he would commit terrible atrocities against the people of Israel. Hazael protested that he would not be able to do such a thing but the very next day, he murdered his master (9–15). Hazael knew that he would be king of Syria (1 Kings 19:15) but he was not prepared to wait God's time. Hazael had a treacherous heart and he should have recognised that God sees not only our deeds but also the intentions of our hearts (cp. Hebrews 4:12).

The man of God wept (11). Elisha was a tough, rugged character, but he had a heart full of compassion in the face of human suffering. He wept over the plight of the people of Israel. **We do not weep enough for those who are lost in their sins and we are often so cold in our prayers.** May God give each one of us a heart which is moved with compassion for those who suffer and perish without Christ.

Now it happened as he was telling the king ...

Dale R. Davis suggests that the events of 2 Kings chapter 5 came later in Elisha's ministry, hence Gehazi had not been struck with leprosy at the time of the incidents recorded here (2 KINGS – 'THE POWER AND THE FURY,' page 131). The Lord had already richly rewarded the Shunammite woman for her kindness to Elisha (4:8–37) and now he took care of her during a time of famine. These verses also teach us that God is absolutely sovereign over nature and over men. He sent the seven years of famine to Israel (1–2) and his good providence was displayed in the way that he dealt with the Shunammite and her son.

The woman had gone to the land of the Philistines on Elisha's instructions for the duration of the famine. On her return to Israel, she found that her house and land had been confiscated, either by the crown or by someone who had no right to it. Her plight was so desperate that she was obliged to appeal to the king. The Lord was wonderfully working in all these events. He caused the king to enquire of Gehazi concerning the miraculous ministry of Elisha. At the very time that Gehazi was telling the king about the raising of the Shunammite's son from the dead, they walked into the palace. *Now it happened, as he was telling the king how he had restored the dead to life, that there was the woman whose son he had restored to life, appealing to the king for her house and for her land* (5).

Can you imagine the amazement of the king and Gehazi at the appearance of the woman and her son? She took up the story and the king's heart was prepared to act on her behalf. He ordered that all her property and any gains made in her absence be restored to her. **God prepares the way and goes on ahead of all those who love him and obey him.** *Now it happened ...* (5). God is behind all that 'happens' to us. Many Christians can testify of God's working in their lives in similar fashion. We know that God exists and that he is personal and real. Hallelujah!

*True religion's more than notion;
Something must be known and felt*

(Joseph Hart)

Nothing in the house but a jar of oil

Seven thousand in Israel had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18) and the miracles described in this chapter demonstrate how God cared for some of those people. The widow of a godly man would have lost her two sons to be sold into slavery but for the miraculous supply of oil (1–7). The Shunammite woman received her son back from death (20–37). The poisoned stew was purified (38–41) and one hundred men were fed from twenty loaves of barley bread (42–44).

The widow of one of *the sons of the prophets* was in a desperate situation. She had debts that she was unable to repay and her creditor was about to take her two sons into slavery as payment for the debt. This poor woman had lost her husband, who had been faithful to God, and now her sons were to be taken from her. She did the best thing possible in her distress – she sought help from the Lord through his prophet.

Elisha asked her, *'What shall I do for you? ... Tell me, what do you have in the house?'* She told him that she had *'nothing in the house but a jar of oil'* (2). He told her to borrow as many empty vessels as possible from her neighbours and others, *'not a few'*. She should then shut the door of her house and fill the vessels from the jar of oil. She believed that the Lord was able to honour the promise of his prophet and all the empty vessels were filled them from the jar of oil. She was able to sell the oil and have sufficient money to pay off her debts and to provide for the future (3–7).

God supplies the needs of his people in his own way. The widow's sons would never forget the miracle that was enacted before their own eyes. The creditor would also have been amazed to see how God had supplied the need. **The way we react to trials and distress, especially when shared with members of our family, or seen by others who do not know the Lord is most important.** Trials can become great opportunities for us to trust in God and for our testimony to be used to his glory.

A notable woman

Shunem was a town on the rich, fertile plain of Esdraelon, situated about 5 miles to the north of Jezreel where the king of Israel had his summer palace. We are introduced in our reading to an unnamed woman from Shunem. She is described as *a notable woman* which indicates that she was wealthy (8). She was ‘notable’ not only for her wealth but also for her godliness. Let us consider how practical she was in her religion:–

- She gave regular hospitality to Elisha and she asked her husband to have their house extended to provide a room for this ‘*holy man of God.*’ The prophet would have greatly appreciated this kindness as Shunem was some 25 miles from Carmel (a day’s journey) where Elisha was living at that time (8–11, 25). The Word of God instructs us, *Be kind to one another* (Ephesians 4:32). Are you thoughtful and kind?
- She appears to be more spiritual than her husband. She took the spiritual initiative in her home, but never usurped her husband’s authority (9–10, 22).
- She was contented. Her good works and kindness to God’s servant were not motivated by self-interest. Elisha asked if there was anything that he could do for her or to speak on her behalf to the king. He did have access to the wicked king of Israel and had been able to assure him of victory over the Moabites (3:13–18). She did not seek a higher station in life but was content to dwell among her own people (13). *Godliness with contentment is great gain* (1 Timothy 6:6).

Elisha did not take her kindness for granted; he wanted to show his appreciation to her. She was childless and past the age of child-bearing but the Lord honoured her beyond her wildest dreams and gave a son to the childless couple (14–17). *God is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love which you have shown toward his name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister* (Hebrews 6:10). **Men and women may forget the kindness that you show to them, but God does not forget. He will reward you and bless you (Matthew 10:41).**

... according to the word of the LORD

Elisha’s message for the king the previous day had been that there would be an abundance of food within twenty-four hours (1). On hearing news from the gatekeepers that the Syrians had deserted their camp, the king did not recall the prophet’s message. He was convinced that the Syrians had set a trap for him. His soldiers and the starving people of Samaria would leave their city to obtain food, only for the Syrians to walk in after them (11–12).

The king sent men in the direction of the Syrian camp and they discovered that the message of the lepers was quite true. They returned to report the good news to the king (13–15). The people left their city to plunder the tents of the Syrians. *So a seah of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the LORD* (16).

The unbelieving royal officer was trampled in the rush of the people coming out of the city. Elisha’s prophecy that he would see there would be plenty of food within twenty-four hours but that he would not eat any of it, was fulfilled (16–20). Dale Ralph Davis points out that this tragedy was brought about by the man’s own unbelief.

The lesson that is driven home by these verses is that God’s Word is true: *... according to the word of the LORD* (16) *... just as the man of God had said* (17) *... just as the man of God had spoken to the king* (18). We reject the warnings of God’s Word at our peril. *See that you do not refuse him who speaks* (Hebrews 12:25). I personally know of people who have mocked the Word of God and rejected it, who have later died in tragic circumstances. **I urge you to take seriously what the Lord says. If you have never repented of your sin or called upon God for forgiveness, do so today. The Lord will not turn you away. He will hear your prayer.**

A day of good news and we remain silent

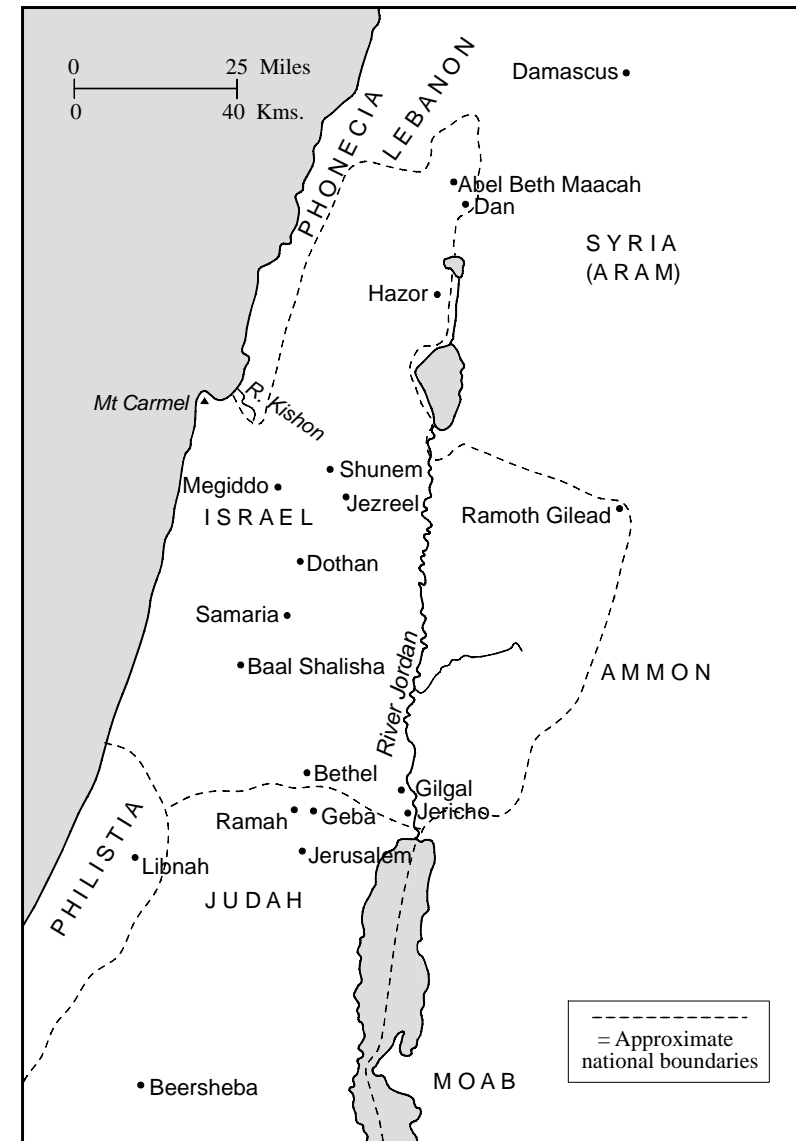
There were four leprous men who were not allowed into the city of Samaria because of their disease. They knew that they would die of starvation if they remained at the gate of Samaria. They decided that it would be better to surrender to the Syrian army in the hope that they would not be killed but fed. The men *rose at twilight to go to the camp of the Syrians* and found that it was deserted (3–5).

God had previously struck Israel's enemies with blindness (6:18) and he now worked to confuse their hearing. He caused them to hear the noise of a great army and they thought that the king of Israel had enlisted the help of powerful neighbouring states. *Therefore they arose and fled at twilight, and left the camp intact* with treasure and great stores of food and clothing (6–8). At the same time, twilight, the four lepers began to walk to the camp (5).

The lepers were amazed to find the camp deserted. They feasted and then went from one tent to another, gathering up as much treasure as they could carry, to hide it away. They then realised that they had a great responsibility. They must share their good news with the starving people of Samaria. They said to one another, *'We are not doing what is right. This day is a day of good news and we remain silent'* (9). They returned to the city and told the gatekeepers the good news (10).

The leprous men would have been selfish and heartless if they had not taken their good news to the suffering, tragic, beleaguered city. They certainly expected God to judge them if they remained silent (9). **We have the most wonderful news in all the world!** We have news of a Saviour who died to save poor, needy sinners; who rose again to give pardon and eternal life to all who trust in him. People around us are perishing in their sin without our Saviour; we must not veil our gospel (good news) from them (cp. 2 Corinthians 4:3). **We know that we are not doing what is right if we remain silent. Can we, dare we, be ashamed of the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16)?**

Sketch-map showing places mentioned in 2 Kings, chapters 4 to 9



Why are you going to see him today?

It is not difficult to imagine the happiness and joy of the Shunammite couple as they watched their beloved son grow. That happiness was to be snatched from them (*so the child grew ... and then he died*; 18,20).

One day, as the lad went out to see his father in the field with the reapers, he complained of pain in his head. The father, not suspecting that there was a serious problem, sent a servant to carry the lad to his mother. She held him on her knees where he died at noon (18–20). She laid the lifeless body of the lad on the bed of Elisha. She asked her husband to send one of the young men to her with a donkey so that she could hurry to see the man of God.

Her husband asked her, ‘*Why are you going to see him today? It is neither the New Moon nor the Sabbath*’ The woman assured him, ‘*It is well*’ (23). From her husband’s remarks, it is apparent that the woman regularly travelled to Carmel to worship God (a round trip of fifty miles). She was prepared to put up with a long, uncomfortable journey by donkey in order to worship God in spirit and in truth. **Far better travel some distance to worship and to be fed by good Biblical preaching than to compromise by attending a non-evangelical church or a place where Biblical teaching is despised.**

Who could the woman turn to in her grief? She went to God’s representative for spiritual help and poured out her heart, refusing to leave him (27,30). — Dale Ralph Davis asks, ‘Where can she go? Only to the same God who has perplexed her — there is no one else to whom she can go. What can you do when God’s mercy has turned to malice? Take the bitter distress and in it keep clutching at the God you don’t understand. We have a word for that: faith. (Which tells us, by the way, that faith is not serenity). – 2 KINGS – ‘THE POWER AND THE FURY,’ page 65.

Windows in heaven

The Syrians did not respond well to the kindness shown by the king of Israel to their troops. They took all of their army to invade Israel and they besieged Samaria. The siege of Samaria led to widespread starvation. Money was of little use and it took a small fortune to purchase the head of a donkey, an unclean animal to the Jews (eighty shekels of silver is almost a kilogramme). Dove droppings, probably a derisive term for weeds lacking in nutrition, were also sold at a high price (about sixty grammes of silver; 24–25).

A woman called upon the king for help as he walked through his besieged city. He confessed his own helplessness to provide food. The woman then told him her distressing story. She had made a pact with another woman to kill and to eat their own sons. They were so desperate to survive that they resorted to cannibalism. The woman had killed her son and had shared his flesh but the other woman hid her son so that he was not killed (26–29).

The king was deeply moved when he heard the woman’s story. He blamed Elisha for the calamity brought about by the Syrians and vowed to kill him (30–31). Elisha had previously told the king of Israel not to destroy the Syrian soldiers when he had them at his mercy (22). Elisha had nothing good to say about wicked king Jehoram (32) but he had a great message of hope which promised an abundance of food within twenty-four hours. The king’s officer refused to believe the prophet and said, ‘*Look, if the LORD would make windows in heaven, could this thing be?*’ (7:1–2). Elisha told the unbelieving officer that he would see this provision with his own eyes, but he would not eat of it. **There is a great spiritual famine throughout the world but God is able to change things in an instant. Let us pray much that he will be pleased to open heaven’s windows and send us revival.**

Revive thy work, O Lord.

Thy mighty arm make bare,

Speak with the voice that wakes the dead,

And make thy people hear!

(Albert Midlane)

Those who are with us

The Syrian king was repeatedly thwarted in his battle plans against Israel because the Lord revealed them to Elisha who passed on the information to the king of Israel. The Syrian king became frustrated and angry and he suspected that he had a spy in his own court. One of his servants had apparently heard of the reason for their continual failure to ambush the king of Israel. He told his master that Elisha the prophet knew all that he said in private and was passing on the information to the king of Israel. The Lord was very gracious in sending his prophet with this vital military intelligence to inform the idol-worshipping king.

The Syrians heard that the prophet was at Dothan, about 10 miles north of Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom. They sent troops to capture the prophet, surrounding him and his servant at Dothan (8–15). The young man was terrified when he saw the Syrians and their chariots surrounding the city. Elisha said to the frightened young man, *‘Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them’* (16). The prophet prayed that the Lord would open his eyes and his prayer was answered. The young man saw the invincible army of God all around Elisha (17). The Syrian army was temporarily blinded through another prayer of the prophet and the helpless soldiers were led into the city of Samaria. The king of Israel wanted to kill them, but on Elisha’s instructions he spared them and fed them. They returned to their own country to leave Israel in peace for a while (18–23).

How could Elisha remain calm in the face of such danger (15–16)? He knew that he was surrounded by God’s army (17) and that no harm could befall him except by God’s permission. Do you feel threatened? Are you fearful? If you belong to God, you have no need to fear. Take time to feast your soul on Psalm 91. Be encouraged, and worship and adore your great God. *For he shall give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways* (Psalm 91:11). **Why are we often fearful? We do not spend enough time in the secret place of the Most High (Psalm 91:1) and we forget about those who are with us (16).**

Deep distress

Elisha’s servant, Gehazi, was quite insensitive to the woman’s distress and he tried to push her away as she clung to the feet of Elisha. The prophet told him. *‘Let her alone; for her soul is in deep distress and the LORD has hidden it from me’* (27) She then poured out her heart to tell Elisha what had happened (28). God had given her a son, only to take him from her. Dale Ralph Davis asks, ‘Does Yahweh make glad only to increase the pain? Does he lift us up in order to drop us all the harder ... Note by the way, that this problem is not recent. Many saints have sobbed in bitter distress (v. 27) because they do not know why God has crushed them?’ (2 KINGS – ‘THE POWER AND THE FURY,’ page 64).

Men of God do not always have the answers to a perplexing or distressing situation. Elisha confessed his own limitations (27); it was time to listen, rather than attempt a glib answer. There are occasions when we can only *weep with those who weep* (Romans 12:15). The prophet told Gehazi to go ahead of him to the woman’s house where he should lay his staff on the face of the child. He did this but heaven was silent and the child remained lifeless (29). The woman insisted, however, that she would remain with Elisha.

The prophet was met by Gehazi who reported that the child had not awakened. When Elisha arrived at the house, he went into his room with Gehazi, *shut the door behind the two of them, and prayed to the LORD* (30–33). He stretched himself out on the body of the child, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, and hands on hands. The flesh of the lad became warm. Elisha then got up and walked back and forth in the house before returning to the room where he again stretched himself out on the body of the child. The child then sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. God had heard Elisha’s prayer and the lad was raised from the dead (34–37). Gehazi called the woman to the room to receive her son. She was no longer clutching Elisha’s feet, but falling at his feet and bowing to the ground (27, 37). **Her son was alive! I guess there were many ‘Hallelujah’s’ rising to heaven that day.**

What? Shall I set this before one hundred men?

There was a famine in the land when Elisha returned to Gilgal to instruct the sons of the prophets. The prophet told his servant to prepare a stew for them and one of the men went out to gather herbs and found some wild gourds which he harvested for the stew. No one realised that these gourds were poisonous but as soon as they tasted the stew, they realised that it was deadly. They cried out to Elisha, telling him that there was *death in the pot*. Elisha told them to bring him some flour which he put into the pot and the Lord miraculously purified it (38–41).

There was a man who loved the Lord in Baal Shalisha, a town which had added to its title the name of the god, Baal. He brought twenty barley loaves (the first-fruits of his harvest) to Elisha. The first-fruits of the harvest were normally given to the priests (Numbers 18:13; Deuteronomy 18:4–5) but this man would not support those who had compromised with Baal worship. He rightly preferred to support a true servant of God and his companions. There is a vital principle here for us today. Christians are finding themselves increasingly isolated because so many churches have departed from the faith. As the Lord prospers us, we should prayerfully support those who are faithful to God's Word rather than prop up apostate churches.

Elisha instructed his servant to feed the one hundred men with them. Though the servant had seen the stew miraculously purified, he was lacking in faith and said, '*What? Shall I set this before one hundred men?*' (43). Five of these small loaves would have only fed one man but God promised that all would be fed and that there would be a surplus. This miracle reminds us of the feeding of the multitudes by the Lord Jesus when there was a surplus (Matt. 14:13–21; 15:32–39). **We may criticise Elisha's servant for his lack of faith, but there are times when we too fail to trust the Lord. If your faith is at a low ebb, think about the Lord's mercies to you in the past and look to him. He is still the same and he will not fail you!**

The iron axe head fell into the water

The sons of the prophets were godly men who were led first by Elijah and then by Elisha. Their name does not indicate that they were children of prophets, but that they were serving the Lord, though some may have had the prophetic gift. The incident in today's reading probably refers to the community of these men who were in Jericho (cp 2:5). They had increased in number and needed larger premises. They went to obtain timber for their new building from the banks of the river Jordan, and Elisha was with them (1–4). As one of the men was felling a tree, *the iron axe head fell into the water* (5). It would have been almost impossible to locate and recover it from the muddy river bed and the men were distressed because the axe was borrowed. It is a godly principle that we always take care of things that we borrow and return them.

The axe head was miraculously made to float through the intervention of the prophet and it was recovered (6–7). There is a vital lesson for us here: God is concerned with all that happens to those who belong to him, however trivial some things may appear (cp. Matthew 6:31–34). Are you beset by anxious thoughts? Perhaps you have not brought your concerns to God in prayer because you think that they are not important enough for him? **God is concerned for his children and he cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). Bring those things that trouble you to God in prayer. He will not fail you!**

*If God, in such a small affair,
A miracle performs;
It shows his condescending care
Of poor unworthy worms.*

*Not one concern of ours is small,
If we belong to him;
To teach us this, the Lord of all
Once made the iron swim.*

(John Newton)

All is well

Gehazi had shown little faith in an incident recorded in the previous chapter (4:43). Here, he showed himself to be a covetous hypocrite. He was puzzled that Elisha could have acquired great wealth from Naaman but had shown no interest in the Syrian's offer (20). He dreamed of wealth, of possessing fine clothes, olive groves, vineyards, livestock and servants (26). He was determined to obtain something from Naaman and he concocted a story to achieve his purpose.

The Lord Jesus said, *'Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses'* (Luke 12:15). Scripture has many other warnings against this sin (eg. Exodus 20:17; Joshua 7:21). Covetousness is dangerous because it leads to other sins:

- Gehazi treated God with contempt. He swore by the name of the Lord saying, *'as the LORD lives'* (20; cp. verse 16), but he did not think that God could see his wicked deeds. He was also foolish to think that he could deceive Elisha.
- He told two lies to Naaman. Elisha had not sent him nor were there two sons of the prophets who needed changes of garments (22).

We would never dream of bowing down to worship images of wood, metal or stone, but there is a more subtle form of idolatry which has ensnared many a Christian – covetousness (Colossians 3:5). This sin ruined Gehazi, leading him to lie and to steal. Covetousness led David to murder (2 Samuel 12:9). You may be like Gehazi and give the impression that *all is well* (22) but if you are nursing a covetous heart, all is not well! Repent and renounce your worldliness and learn to be content with the things that God has given to you. Are you content or covetous? – *Godliness with contentment is great gain* (1 Timothy 6:6).

*I would not change my blest estate
For all the world calls good or great;
And while my faith can keep her hold
I envy not the sinner's gold.*

(Isaac Watts)

A young girl from the land of Israel

Life for those who loved and served God had been very difficult in northern Israel in the years leading up to the ministry of Elisha. They had been relentlessly persecuted when King Ahab reigned and idolatry was rampant. We must always remember, however, that God is absolutely sovereign and this is seen throughout the pages of the Bible. He is sovereign over all nations and individuals.

Naaman the Syrian had everything that many people seek after – success, wealth and popularity. He was a national hero, but his life was blighted by leprosy which was a dreaded and incurable disease in those times. There is a very important item of information in verse 1: *By him the LORD had given victory to Syria.* Jehovah, the true and living God had given him victory. God is sovereign!

God also uses the tragedies and set-backs in life to work out his glorious purposes: *We know that all things work together for good to those who love God* (Romans 8:28). *A young girl from the land of Israel* had been taken from her family as a captive to Syria. Her parents were probably among the godly remnant in Israel and may have lost their lives in the Syrian raid on their country. The Lord had a wonderful purpose in the sad and perplexing events that befell this family. The witness of the young girl to Naaman's wife (1–4) was instrumental in the commander of the Syrian army coming to faith in the living God. John Ryland (1753–1825) wrote these words shortly after his wife had died in childbirth:

*Sovereign Ruler of the Skies
Ever gracious, ever wise,
All my times are in thy hand,
All events at thy command.*

We must never forget that God is in sovereign control of all that happens to us. This is a great encouragement, especially when we are baffled and bewildered by personal loss, heartache or tragedy.

He shall know that there is a prophet in Israel

The grace of God is truly wonderful in reaching all kinds of people. Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, had contracted leprosy but the Lord used this affliction as a means of bringing Naaman to himself. There is a contrast in these verses between the faith of *a young girl from the land of Israel* and the lack of faith in the king of Israel (Jehoram).

It appears that the young girl was treated very well in the home of Naaman. She showed no antagonism toward the Syrian whose army had brought such unhappiness to her. Had she been full of bitterness or self-pity, she would have been a poor witness to her faith in the Lord. She showed concern for her master and mistress in their difficult situation and they responded to that concern. She was convinced that God was able to heal Naaman through the ministry of Elisha. **We must show a genuine interest in people and concern for them if we are to be successful witnesses.**

Naaman went to Israel laden with great riches in the hope of rewarding the prophet for curing him of his disease. The godless king of Israel did not welcome his visitor from Syria thinking that Naaman's impossible request was an excuse for picking a quarrel with him. The Syrians obviously imagined that the king of Israel would command the prophet to heal Naaman (4–7). Though he was aware of the prophet Elisha, he did not trust in Elisha's God. The young girl knew that there was a prophet in Samaria who could bring healing to Naaman. When Elisha heard of the king's distress, he sent a message that Naaman should be sent to him that he should *know that there is a prophet in Israel* (8).

Most of us feel inadequate when we speak to others of the Lord but he often uses a weak and faltering witness to accomplish his purposes. **It is an awesome thought to realise that men and women are lost and perishing without Christ, but that we know the answer to their need.**

Now I know

Naaman had to learn a fundamental lesson about God. That lesson is that his thoughts and ways are different to our thoughts and ways (cp. Isaiah 55:8–9). He was angry that Elisha did not come to speak to him personally. He wanted some dramatic display of God's power and was enraged at the prophet's instruction to dip seven times in the Jordan. The Bible does not inform us where Elisha was located at this time, but the Jordan is about 20 miles (32 kilometres) from Samaria, the capital of Israel (10–12).

Proud Naaman needed to be humbled if he was to know God. J.B. Phillips wrote that such people usually 'set up in their minds what they think God ought or ought not to do, and when he apparently fails to toe their particular line they feel a sense of grievance' (YOUR GOD IS TOO SMALL) quoted by Dale Ralph Davis. Naaman's servants rightly pointed out that if Elisha had told him to do something great, he would have gladly complied. When he was persuaded to do things God's way, he was healed (13–14).

If you are not a Christian, could it be that your proud heart needs to be humbled? You may insist that you have your own ideas about God (and so do many others), but if those ideas are not those revealed in the Bible, you are wrong and ignorant. You cannot come to God except through the Lord Jesus Christ who says, '*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*' (John 14:6). The apostle Paul wrote, '*The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*' (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Naaman returned to Elisha saying, '*Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel*' (15). He was also to find that God's grace is free and unmerited when the prophet refused his gift. He began to discover that we serve a wonderful and awesome God. **Do you know God? Is he real in your life and experience?**