

BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY:

2 KINGS

2 KINGS

PREFACE

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Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

2 KINGS CHAPTER 1

2Ki 1:1 Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab-

We last heard of Moab when David subdued them (2 Sam. 8:2). The Moabite stone states that Israel and Moab were in conflict in the time of Ahab's father Omri. Tired of paying the heavy tax of 2 Kings 3:4, Moab seized the opportunity when Ahab died suddenly and Israel were defeated by Syria at Ramoth Gilead.

2Ki 1:2 Ahaziah fell down through the lattice in his upper room that was in Samaria, and was sick-

Elijah had prophesied that all Ahab's sons would be cut off, and here we see the fulfilment.

Ahaziah means 'Yahweh possesses'. Ahab knew this and liked the idea of it, but did exactly the opposite to this spirit in murdering Naboth for not selling him Yahweh's possession. We can know things on one level and yet act otherwise. Realizing this bids us go the way of total, absolute surrender. Or perhaps he named his son this in repentance for not accepting this principle.

The record is full of connection with Elijah's healing of the widow's son in 1 Kings 17. There is an "upper room", the child falls sick and dies just as Ahaziah does, both are on a bed in an upper room (Ahaziah went up onto a bed, 2 Kings 1:4), but clearly Ahaziah is

unfavourably contrasted with the Gentile widow woman. Because the widow's child "revived" (1 Kings 17:22), whereas Ahaziah did not "recover" (s.w. revived, 2 Kings 1:2). He did not come down from the bed in the upper room, whereas the widow's son did. The intention is to demonstrate the superiority of Yahweh and His prophet Elijah over Baal. This is confirmed by Elijah using fire to destroy Ahaziah's men, whereas Baal was supposed to be the god of fire and rain, in that he was the god of fertility and supposedly could revive the dead. But surely this superiority of Yahweh over Baal had been demonstrated for all time by the triumph on Carmel in 1 Kings 18. But again fire is called down from Yahweh in the same way as Elijah had done in 1 Kings 18. We see how people so easily revert to idolatry, and physical, visible evidence is of little long term value.

So he sent messengers and said to them, Go, inquire of Baal Zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I will recover of this sickness-

The Pharisees accused Jesus of doing miracles by the power of a false god called Beelzebub. Jesus said, "If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your children cast them out?" (Mt. 12:27). 2 Kings 1:2 clearly tells us that Beelzebub was a false god of the Philistines. Jesus did not say, 'Now look, 2 Kings 1:2 says Beelzebub was a false god, so your accusation cannot be true'. No, He spoke as if Beelzebub existed, because He was interested in getting His message through to His audience. So in the same way Jesus talked about casting out demons – He did not keep saying, 'actually, they do not exist', He just preached the Gospel in the language of the day.

We note they didn't ask for healing. For only Yahweh heals. They consulted some kind of oracle there to see whether he would recover. It seems the damage from the fall had put him in some kind of condition which appeared to them as a "sickness". "Whether I will recover..." is a tacit acceptance that Baal was not a god known for healing, but simply as a foreteller of the future.

2Ki 1:3 But the angel of Yahweh said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and tell them, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel that you go to inquire of Baal Zebub, the god of Ekron?'

Elijah had been rejected from his ministry as the lead prophet of Israel at the time of 1 Kings 19; and he had called Elisha to replace him. But he is here given another chance to serve God as a prophet. Perhaps he repented of his arrogance in considering nobody else to be a true prophet, and so God was willing to use him in some measure again. Or it could be that Elijah persisted in being a prophet, and God was willing to allow him to continue although He had asked him to resign and anoint Elisha. Elijah arrogantly persisted until God forcibly brought fire down upon *him* and dramatically removed him from his ministry. This reading of things inverts the common idea that Elijah had a wonderful ministry that ended in a blaze of glory and Divine acceptance. The idea that Yahweh was a God only operative in His land, Israel, was widespread. We see it in some of David's Psalms, and in Jonah's vain attempt to flee Yahweh's presence in the land. And yet that wrong idea is 'gone along with' here, in order to make a point to Ahaziah. Just as the language of demons is likewise used in the New Testament, although demons have no real existence.

2Ki 1:4 Now therefore thus says Yahweh, You shall not come down from the bed where you have gone up, but shall surely die'. Elijah departed-

Perhaps his bedroom was not on the ground floor; :2 could imply he had fallen from his upper room, and now was confined there again.

2Ki 1:5 The messengers returned to him, and he said to them, Why is it that you have

returned?-

The messengers obviously took Elijah very seriously, because they did not proceed to Ekron but instead returned to Amaziah. Such disobedience to the king was not normal. They had been deeply struck by God's word, just as those sent to arrest the Lord Jesus returned saying that no man spoke like Him. Again we see how there is a niggling conscience in man towards the one true God, and it is easily aroused. This is a comfort to us in our mission of witnessing to apparent unbelievers and agnostics.

2Ki 1:6 They said to him, A man came up to meet us and said to us, 'Go, return to the king who sent you, and tell him, Thus says Yahweh, Is it because there is no God in Israel that you send to inquire of Baal Zebub, the god of Ekron? Therefore you shall not come down from the bed where you have gone up, but shall surely die' -

This usage of the "Thus says Yahweh" formula is an improvement upon Elijah's earlier way of speaking; he has never previously said this. In 1 Kings 21:21 Elijah simply announced to Ahab: "Behold I will bring evil upon you...". We expect this to be prefaced by a "Thus says Yahweh"- but Elijah was so close to God he assumed he was speaking directly from Him. And yet Elijah didn't then repeat exactly what God had told him to say in 1 Kings 21:19. But now he does much better. Is this a hint at spiritual reformation in him, which was why God continued to use him? Had he previously been too familiar with God? Assuming he knew God's will and words? But now he repeats verbatim what he was told to say. We too know God's word. We know the Bible text well. But this can lead to an assumption that we speak for God; that we must be right in all our attitudes and positions we adopt on issues.

Several times we read that they "returned to the king". Literally, 'Repent the King'. He has been assured that he will die, but there is the hint here that if he repented, even that need not happen. This is how flexible is God's plan of working.

2Ki 1:7 He said to them, What kind of man was he who came up to meet you, and told you these words?-

As with Ahab intuitively guessing what Micaiah's message from Yahweh was going to be, so surely Amaziah guessed who this man was. He has the image of Elijah in his mind as he asks this question. Again we see man's religious conscience; he had a deep fearful premonition that this person would have been Elijah. The call of Christ is to accept that conscience and to totally surrender, moment by moment and day by day in human life.

2Ki 1:8 They answered him, He was a hairy man, and wearing a leather belt around his waist. He said, It is Elijah the Tishbite-

Elijah was characterized by wearing a hairy garment like sackcloth (2 Kings 1:8 RV- "a man with a garment of skin" is a fair translation, and we learn from Zech. 13:4 that a hairy mantle was a sign of a prophet). He had been relieved of his ministry in 1 Kings 19, and told to anoint Elisha to replace him. But he doesn't do that, and only symbolically threw his mantle at Elisha and only had Elisha follow him as his servant, not as his replacement prophet. Clearly he had retrieved his mantle from Elisha and wore it himself, rather than leaving it on Elisha. But despite this stubborn, arrogant disobedience- God still works with him. He calls fire down from Heaven and God does so. He is not told to do this, he presumes God will answer him. And God goes along with him. Because later he was intended to look back and realize with awed shock how patient God had been with him despite his arrogance.

The whole incident on Horeb had been to make Elijah see the supremacy of the still small voice; that it is in humble, quiet service rather than fiery judgment of others that the essence of God and spirituality is to be found. But God had prepared Elijah for this earlier. Elijah had to hide by the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:3) for three and a half years (Lk.

4:25,26). In Rev. 11:3,6 we meet another Elijah figure- also clothed in sackcloth, with the power to bring fire down from Heaven, who for three and a half years... prophesies / preaches. The Old Testament Elijah is famed for his hairy mantle, but the latter day Elijah has not a mantle of hair but the sackcloth of penitence and mourning. The image is of a repentant Elijah. I suggest that this figure is representative of the latter day witnesses to God's truth in the last days. Thereby we are connected with Elijah in his sackcloth. We would expect Elijah to have been preaching during his time hidden by Cherith- but there is not a word of this in the record. We are expected to be how Elijah should have been. Could it not be that the Father wishes to show us what He was then trying to teach Elijah- that the essential prophetic witness is through us being as we are, the still small voice of witness through example...?

2Ki 1:9 Then the king sent a captain of fifty with his fifty to him. He went up to him; and behold, he was sitting on the top of the hill. He said to him, Man of God, the king has said, 'Come down!'

There are several connections between Elijah and Carmel; he may well have had a school of the prophets on that mountain. So that may be the locality in view. Perhaps Elijah lived on it endlessly reminiscent of what he thought to be his most glorious moment there. But he is made to show grace and come down from it. The third group of 50 did what the previous two groups of 50 did. They obeyed a command to take Elijah. They were no morally different. But Elijah is commanded to show them grace.

The squadrons of 50 soldiers were clearly sent to take Elijah by force. Amaziah didn't like the message, and so he wanted to shoot the messenger. We see this so often as the root motive and psychology behind persecution, dislike and slander of Christian preachers.

2Ki 1:10 Elijah answered to the captain of fifty, If I am a man of God, let fire come down from the sky, and consume you and your fifty! Fire came down from the sky, and consumed him and his fifty-

This incident of calling fire down from Heaven is specifically rebuked by the Lord Jesus as not being of His Spirit (Lk. 9:54,55). And He rebukes His followers for assuming that their natural prejudice against others can be justified by an appeal to Elijah's example. When Elijah was asked to "come down" from the hill, he responds by saying that fire would come down (2 Kings 1:9,10); he saw himself as the fire / judgment of God. Yet behind that bold façade was a very insecure man; for the Angel had to assure him not to fear, and to go down with the third captain (2 Kings 1:15). Beneath his apparent zeal for Yahweh, Elijah was basically fearful, of himself, of others, even perhaps of God. So often, fear is the basic reason for our failures and misperceptions and harsh judgments. His motives were mixed; he clearly saw the similarity with how he had called fire down to consume the sacrifice on Carmel, in order to convert Israel back to God. But he clearly failed to see the value of those 100 lives he had now taken by doing the same thing in consuming people. The value and meaning of persons was lost on him. All he could think of was fighting apostasy and judging it. Elijah called the fire down in evident allusion to how fire came down from the Lord to destroy Nadab and Abihu and also Sodom (Lev. 10:2; Gen. 19:24). He did the wrong thing from wrong motives and yet he Biblically justified it- for the prophets themselves saw an apostate Israel as being like Sodom (Is. 1:10). Now this is probably how most Christians sin. We rarely harden ourselves and sin in willful defiance. In the heat of the moment the 'devil' of our own self-talk persuades us to find a pseudo-spiritual justification for actions which only later we reflect were wrong. The Lord's wilderness temptations were all about doing justifiable things for wrong motives, based on a self-justifying recollection of Bible passages. And this in essence is how it is with most of our failures. The Lord's victory and Elijah's failure should serve to stop us in our tracks in careful and sustained self-examination.

The idea of fire from Heaven is found in the Lord's teaching in Lk. 12:49-54, where He associates it with division in the brotherhood. And the Lord went on to say that the Pharisees could interpret a cloud arising in the West as a sign that rain was coming, but they could not forgive their brethren, which was what was essential (Lk. 12:54). This just has to be a reference to Elijah, who saw a cloud arising from the West as a sign of rain. The Lord is, it seems, sadly associating Elijah with the Pharisees. And yet... despite all this, Jesus likens Himself to Elijah. Jesus sent fire on earth as Elijah did (Lk. 12:49). And the context of the Lk. 9:54 reference to Elijah is that the Lord's time had come that he should be "received up", and "he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:51). This is all very much the language of Elijah (2 Kings 2:1). And elsewhere Jesus quotes Elijah's words "Your son lives" (1 Kings 17:23 = Jn. 4:50-53). What this shows is that the Lord saw what was good in Elijah, and He didn't separate Himself from someone who didn't have His Spirit. He simply wanted His followers to learn better from him.

Fire from Heaven is a clear symbol of Divine judgment; we think of Sodom's judgment and the fire that fell on Job's home. Elijah calls fire down from Heaven apparently at will- both on Carmel and in destroying the soldiers sent to take him. God is not recorded as telling him to do this. He is extremely confident that God's judgment must fall, and his faith is rewarded. But he was so far from God in his spirit, as the Lord's allusion to the incident shows. But God patiently doesn't forcibly stop him nor force him out of ministry. He allows us leeway in how we serve Him; as in the parable of the talents, we are given the ability to serve but aren't told specifically how to in practice. And we will make mistakes and be unbalanced in our positions as we work towards maturity. God's patience with us is amazing.

Finally God sends fire from Heaven to remove Elijah from his ministry, as he was refusing to quit it as asked. The fire that came from Heaven to remove Elijah was therefore some kind of judgment of him, although he was not slain by it and was apparently removed to live in obscurity elsewhere. The chariots of fire that came to remove him were not therefore the blaze of glory in which a glorious ministry ended- but rather the opposite. It was God's judgment upon him, although he was not destroyed by it, but forcibly removed to obscurity. And in that obscurity, he apparently repented- for the transfiguration appearance make it clear that he will be in God's Kingdom. Jonah is very similar to Elijah, and we are left to infer his similar repentance after the narrated events finished.

2Ki 1:11 Again he sent to him another captain of fifty and his fifty. He answered him, Man of God, the king has said, 'Come down quickly!'-

Elijah sees himself as the fire sent from God; he associates himself directly with God and His judgments. He hadn't learnt the lesson that God wasn't in the fire but in the small voice. The captain wanted Elijah to come down from the high hill (cp. Heaven), so Elijah calls fire to come down from Heaven. He sees himself as the fire, as God coming down. He had the wrong attitude and yet God still heard his prayers; God worked with Elijah as Elijah wanted. And so we perceive the subtleties of a man's relationship with God. Prayer may be answered, and the extent of Elijah's faith in 'commanding' the fire to come down is indeed awesome, but we may even then still be 'playing God' in a wrong way. This playing of God, this over certainty that God was behind him, led Elijah into some arrogance. Elijah was being sarcastic in quipping that they had asked him to "come down", but he would call fire to "come down" upon them. But God still worked with him, as with his calling of fire down on Carmel despite again being sarcastic about Baal being in the toilet. God does work with people despite their immaturity. The situations repeat- and so does Elijah's failure. We are tested with situations and we may fail each time.

2Ki 1:12 Elijah answered them, If I am a man of God, let fire come down from the sky, and

consume you and your fifty! The fire of God came down from the sky, and consumed him and his fifty-

Elijah like the disciples thought that he was the judge on God's behalf, and that he was justified in calling down fire, evocative as that was of the way God Himself judges sinners. But Jesus puts it all another way- our focus, if we have His spirit, should be on saving people by getting them to destroy / lose their own fleshly lives through following Him. Jn. 12:25,26 makes the same point- he who loves his life loses / destroys it, but he who picks up the cross and follows Jesus will save it. Our absolute focus must be on the salvation of others through helping them condemn / destroy / lose themselves for the Lord's sake; and we achieve this by following Jesus in the life of the cross, not by destroying others ourselves. The Lord came to save not destroy; to save the lost / destroyed (Lk. 6:9; 19:10- the same words are used; note how this theme is developed specifically by Luke). But He did this through getting people to destroy their lives. And He begged- and begs- His followers to have His spirit / attitude in all this. And His point was that Elijah didn't have His Spirit. Note that God worked with Elijah- He heard his prayers. Elijah like the disciples had the "Spirit", the power that God was willing to let them have; and yet the Spirit of Jesus is more than raw power. And so it could be said of us, that we so often know not what manner of spirit we are of. We may be correctly reflecting the judgment of God, we may have Biblical justification for the hard line we adopt; but this doesn't mean that we fully have the spirit of Christ. Yet as with Elijah, the fact our prayers are heard, that Scripture appears to back us, can make us blind to such major insufficiencies in our spirituality. We have a choice in how we respond to others' weakness; there are different levels of response. "If thy brother sin against thee", the Lord said- we can ultimately take others with us and then treat him as a Gentile or tax collector. But He continues- if our brother sin against us, we should forgive to an unlimited extent. This is the higher level of response to your brother's weakness. Elijah and the disciples took the first of those options, as many of us do; but in doing so we so easily forget what manner of spirit we are of; for we are to be of the spirit of Christ, not Elijah. And His attitude / spirit was most definitely to save rather than to destroy, to share table fellowship rather than disassociate... The Lord Jesus purposefully inverted the common assumption that the duty of a righteous man was to condemn the sinners. When He said that there is much joy in Heaven over one sinner that repents (Lk. 15:10), the Lord was purposefully inverting the common contemporary Jewish saying that there was much joy in Heaven whenever one sinner is destroyed in judgment. His desire is to seek to save rather than to destroy. And Elijah had not attained to this spirit of Christ when he called fire down from Heaven.

The same words are used as in 1 Kings 18:38 for how Elijah called down fire to "consume" the sacrifice. Probably Elijah is again on Carmel. He was not told to do what he did on Carmel, but rather he exercised his initiative. And the same here. This is my angle on the morality of the miracle. The fire came from God and consumed 50 men, all somebody's sons and fathers... and then, another 50. But I suggest God had delegated His power to Elijah, and he chose to use it this way. Elijah confidently states that fire shall come down- the Hebrew is emphatic. Just as he said there would be no rain according to *his* word. There is no "Thus says the Lord". Rather does he present as so strong in faith that he was confident that what he said would happen. Although he lacked the love which is so necessary.

2Ki 1:13 Again he sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. The third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah and begged him and said to him, Man of God, please let my life, and the life of these fifty your servants, be precious in your sight- Twice Elijah has said that if he is a "man of God", a prophet, then fire would come down. His ministry as Israel's lead prophet had been removed in 1 Kings 19 because of his arrogant refusal to accept the other faithful in Israel. So it's as if he really wants to demonstrate that he

is still a "man of God", a prophet. And the third captain perceives that, and therefore addresses Elijah as "Man of God". But he implies that a true man of God would perceive the value and meaning of the human person, and not slaughter people in such a light hearted manner.

We wonder if this slaying of two groups of 50 contrasts with how Obadiah [whom Elijah had despised as insincere] had saved the lives of two groups of 50 prophets of Yahweh- whom Elijah had discounted as insincere, since he had protested that he was the only prophet of Yahweh. Elijah thought nothing of taking two groups of 50 lives, whereas Obadiah (whom he despised) risked his life to *save* two groups of 50. Time and again, Elijah is presented poorly. Defence of God's truth trumped, in a word, people. And he is condemned for this attitude, both by the record, and the Lord's interpretation of these events. We must not think that these things don't apply to us- for each of us has a strong tendency towards judgmentalism, seen from toddlers to old ladies facing their grave planks. And some of the greatest 'defenders of the faith' in Christianity have shown no care for people.

2Ki 1:14 Behold, fire came down from the sky, and consumed the two former captains of fifty with their fifties. But now let my life be precious in your sight-

The captain chose his phrase carefully, for these were the very words of Saul to David (1 Sam. 26:21). He is asking Elijah to show the spirit of grace which David showed to Saul; and David showed that spirit because he was but reflecting the extreme preciousness of human life in the sight of God. He uses the same phrase of how the Messianic King would likewise consider the life of others to be precious in his sight (Ps. 72:14). Elijah is apparently unmoved by this appeal to show grace. He only goes down because an Angel tells him to (:15).

2Ki 1:15 The angel of Yahweh said to Elijah, Go down with him. Don't be afraid of him. He arose, and went down with him to the king-

Despite all the bravado of Elijah against these captains and their soldiers, one simple reason he called down fire was because he was "afraid" of them. The "him" of whom Elijah was afraid was perhaps the young king Ahaziah.

2Ki 1:16 He said to him, Thus says Yahweh, '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 shall not come down from the bed where you have gone up, but shall surely die'-

As noted on :6, Elijah's verbatim repetition of God's words, prefaced with a "Thus says Yahweh", was an improvement on his previous attitudes. Earlier it seems Elijah had preached Yahweh's word to Ahab and Jezebel with no fear of consequences, ready to die. But now he fears Ahaziah (see on :15), even though the man was sick and incapacitated. His repentance about his pride led him to open himself up as a real person, true to himself. His bravery came largely from his pride. Now he had repented of his pride, he is less brave. It is all so very psychologically credible, as we would expect of a Divinely inspired record; and of a man who really did repent and become humble.

2Ki 1:17 So he died according to the word of Yahweh which Elijah had spoken. Jehoram began to reign in his place in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah; because he had no son-

We note that both Israel and Judah had a king called Jehoram at this time. This was perhaps intentional, because Jehoshaphat's son had married Ahab's daughter. "The accession of the Israelite Jehoram (Ahab's brother) took place, according to 2 Kings 3:1, in the eighteenth

year of Jehoshaphat. Jehoram of Judah perhaps received the royal title from his father as early as his father's sixteenth year, when he was about to join Ahab against the Syrians; the same year might then be called either the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat or the second year of Jehoram".

2Ki 1:18 Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah which he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-

This is not necessarily the books of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 2

2Ki 2:1 It happened, when Yahweh would take up Elijah-

The Lord Jesus likens Himself to Elijah at times. Jesus sent fire on earth as Elijah did (Lk. 12:49). He quotes Elijah's words "Your son lives" (1 Kings 17:23 = Jn. 4:50-53). What this shows is that the Lord saw what was good in Elijah, and He didn't separate Himself from someone who didn't have His Spirit. And here we have another example. The context of the Lk. 9:54 reference to Elijah is that the Lord's time had come that he should be "received up", and "he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:51). This is all very much the language of Elijah being received up into the sky / heaven. Elijah set his face to do this; but it was a setting of his face to have the humility to give up his much coveted ministry to Elisha. We could possible reason[although see later] that Elijah set his face, he was determined... to be humble. To not cavil against God's word that Elisha was to replace him. And so the Lord set His face to the humility required for the cross, and the ascension not into the sky [as Elijah did] but into Heaven itself.

By a whirlwind into heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal-

Elijah didn't go to Heaven itself, for no man has ascended to Heaven (Jn. 3:13). He was a sinner and the wages of sin is death. The time for reward and eternal life is not after death, but at the return of the Lord Jesus. We know from 2 Chron. 21:12-15 that Elijah died, and wrote a letter soon before his death. So indeed he was snatched away and taken to another point on earth. Obadiah had implied this was a regular occurrence. Hence the young men later went out looking for Elijah. Elijah was taken away to a life of obscurity, during which he repented of his narcissism. He wrote a letter to Joram king of Judah, meaning he lived for quite some time after his snatching away.

Gilgal was where there was a school of the prophets (2 Kings 4:38). Before being snatched away, Elijah was it seems touring the groups of "sons of the prophets".

2Ki 2:2 Elijah said to Elisha, Please wait here, for Yahweh has sent me as far as Bethel. Elisha said, As Yahweh lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you. So they went down to Bethel-

"Leave" is "deny". Elijah's ascension into the sky has remarkable similarities with that of the Lord, into Heaven itself- a group of men sent to take him; Elisha cp. Peter saying 'I will not deny you' (2 Kings 2:2 Heb.); a cloud of Angels receive him; men stand watching on earth; the Holy Spirit given on his ascension...

Elijah tells his servant to remain whilst he goes out into the desert alone, intent on committing suicide (1 Kings 19:3). When he is finally snatched away, he tried to get his servant Elisha to likewise remain whilst he went further alone. Again he intended suicide and Elisha likely perceived this. And so God did snatch him away, either to death or to make him end his ministry.

2Ki 2:3 The sons of the prophets who were at Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, Do you know that Yahweh will take away your master from your head today? He said, Yes, I know it. Hold your peace-

The day for Elijah to be publically removed and Elisha to take his place had been set, and the other prophets knew this. Elisha was to take over as their chief. We can appreciate how hopeless it was for Elijah to be leader of the various schools of the prophets, if he had been persuaded that they were all insincere and he alone was left Yahweh's only true prophet. For this reason he was removed from the office. See on :5,23.

Elijah was told to replace himself with Elisha, but it seems he only called Elisha to be his servant and didn't anoint him as asked. Hence the section about this finishes with the comment that Elisha served him (1 Kings 19:21). 2 Kings 3:11 describes Elisha as the one 'who used to pour water on the hands of Elijah' - he was his servant. That was not at all what God asked of Elijah. His taking up and snatching away was God forcing him to end his ministry; Elisha was told that Yahweh would take away his master from above his head, indicating Elijah was in the role of Elisha's master [and Elisha was his servant] right up to the moment he was carried away in the whirlwind. Taken away from above his head (2 Kings 2:3 "Yahweh will take away your master from your head today") is a strange phrase. Perhaps it indicates that Elijah was forcibly removed from having Elisha as his servant, and the way Elijah refused to relinquish his role was displeasing to God. But we note how in the gap between being fired from his ministry and being forcibly stopped from continuing it, God graciously still used him. See on :9.

2Ki 2:4 Elijah said to him, Elisha, please wait here, for Yahweh has sent me to Jericho. He said, As Yahweh lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you. So they came to Jericho-

It seems Elijah was being sent around the various schools of the prophets (all of whom, as noted on :3, he had despised as apostate). They were to see him as their leader for one last time. There is no sense that they were that distressed about losing him, unlike the weeping at Troas when Paul told the disciples they would see his face no more. This is understandable, seeing he had claimed he was the only true prophet and they were all astray on this or that point of doctrine or practice.

2Ki 2:5 The sons of the prophets who were at Jericho came near to Elisha and said to him, Do you know that Yahweh will take away your master from your head today? He answered, Yes, I know it. Hold your peace-

We note that all the sons of the prophets speak to Elisha of Elijah as "your master" rather than "our master" (also :3). Perhaps Elijah had formally disfellowshipped them for some apostacy or other, and demanded they never call him their master. No wonder he needed to be replaced. Or perhaps they didn't share Elisha's huge respect for Elijah.

2Ki 2:6 Elijah said to him, Please wait here, for Yahweh has sent me to the Jordan. He said, As Yahweh lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you. They both went on-

It seems Elijah didn't want Elisha to be present when he was snatched away. Or as suggested above, the similarity with his attempted suicide near Beersheba suggests that he wanted to do the same again. And although Elisha had been told Elijah would

be snatched away, the record carefully avoids saying that Elijah knew he would be snatched away at that time. He keeps asking him not to follow him. Perhaps he knew that his mantle would then drop to the earth and Elisha would have it. And he was resistant, still, to the idea of another man taking his ministry. He knew that if Elisha saw him ascend into the sky, then Elisha would have a double portion of his spirit (:10), making him greater than Elijah. And Elijah apparently didn't want that.

2Ki 2:7 Fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood opposite them at a distance; and they both stood by the Jordan-

We recall how Obadiah had hidden prophets by groups of 50 in a cave; and yet Elijah didn't accept them as legitimate, considering himself the only true prophet of Yahweh and Obadiah as a servant of Ahab rather than Yahweh. So their relationship was somewhat strained. Perhaps these meetings with them were intended by God to lead Elijah to repentance. But he refused, and so was snatched away from any public ministry in a clear, dramatic way. There had been one cave for the two groups of 50 (1 Kings 18:4). So perhaps a 'group of 50 prophets' was not a literal group of 50 men, but a kind of prophetic division of prophets. Rather like a "thousand" likewise refers to a family or military subdivision of an army, rather than literally 1000.

2Ki 2:8 Elijah took his mantle, wrapped it together and struck the waters, and they were divided here and there, so that they two went over on dry ground-

This recalls the great miracles of Joshua and Moses. The crossing of the Jordan was near Jericho (:4), exactly where Joshua dried up the Jordan and passed also to Gilgal (Josh. 3:16; 4:13,19). To ask for a double portion of this Spirit was reflective of quite some spiritual ambition on Elisha's part. We see here Elijah acting as Moses; although when in Moses' cave on Sinai, he had been shown that he was not as Moses because he lacked Moses' humility. Although he had been set up to be as Moses; see on 1 Kings 19:11. Perhaps he was trying still to assert himself as Moses; or maybe he had finally arrived at the required humility, and so was permitted to act as Moses. And that is why he is given a role parallel to Moses at the transfiguration. See on :21.

2Ki 2:9 When they had gone over, Elijah said to Elisha, Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you-

Maybe he knew that he would be snatched away east of Jordan, and so now they had crossed the river, he knew the end was near. However, it could be argued that he had no idea that he would be taken away as and when he was- although surely he had a premonition about it. The Hebrew could equally mean "What shall I do for you, seeing I've not yet been taken from you". The same word for "before" is found in 1 Sam. 3:7 "Samuel *did not yet* know Yahweh". So he could even be hinting that seeing he had not yet been forced out of the ministry, he could still do miracles, and so he enquired what he might do for Elisha personally. This position was what called forth the abrupt, dramatic, public ending of his ministry by the fire coming down from Heaven to remove him.

Elisha said, Please let a double portion of your spirit be on me-

The allusion may be to the double portion of the firstborn (Dt. 21:17). The "sons of the prophets" had Elijah as their father; and so Elisha as now the senior prophet is asking to be treated as the firstborn of Elijah amongst the sons of the prophets (:12). That Elijah should have rejected them all, considering himself the only prophet of Yahweh, was as bad as a father disowning his children. No wonder Elijah had to be replaced as the 'father' of the sons of the prophets. But by asking to be treated as the

firstborn, Elisha is showing that he considers himself just another son of the prophet Elijah, even if the firstborn. Elisha has not grasped that he is to replace Elijah because Elijah had failed the test of humility, as explained in 1 Kings 19. And Elijah had clearly not explained that to him. But he is thereby not making any claim to be a new father to them. He therefore considered Elijah an impossible act to follow, even though Elijah had earlier condemned him. He focused on the positive in Elijah rather than being fazed by his arrogant rejection of all his brethren. This is indeed a challenge to us; for self congratulatory brethren who condemn all others are some of the hardest people to be positive about. It is so hard to make ourselves see the good in them, as Elisha clearly did to Elijah.

If indeed Elisha is asking to be treated as Elijah's spiritual firstborn, he is apparently ignorant of the fact that Yahweh had told Elijah on Carmel to replace himself with Elisha by anointing him. But it seems Elijah hadn't told Elisha that, reflective of how he so struggled against the command to retire. See on :3. Elisha shouts out to Elijah as he departs "My father, my father!", as if he wishes to stake his claim as Elijah's spiritual firstborn. But Elijah considered all the other prophets to be fake, probably including Elisha and Elisha's family, and only himself sincere. As he departs, he throws his mantle onto Elisha, as if finally accepting that he has been replaced by Elisha.

2Ki 2:10 He said, You have asked a hard thing. If you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so-

It's difficult to see why the gift of a double portion should be predicated upon this. Maybe Elijah means that if Elisha will continue to follow him to the absolute end, then he would support this idea. But the giver of the Spirit was God and not Elijah. So Elijah may mean that if Elisha truly follows Elijah to the very end, when none of the other sons of the prophets apparently wanted to personally accompany him, then he was sure that God would indeed do so. See on :6.

The Hebrew for "hard" means 'unpleasant', rather than difficult. It was bitter and unpleasant for Elijah to have to give his prophetic spirit to Elisha. This indicates how bitterly he resented having to accept that he was fired from the prophetic ministry, and had been replaced by Elisha.

We enquire why Elijah should reason that if Elisha saw him taken away, then he would receive the requested gift of Elijah's spirit. Most expositors glide over this question. "When I am..." is in italics in the KJV. These are words added to try to make sense of a difficult text. The idea is, 'If you see me taken from you... then you will receive my spirit'. Elijah had been told to anoint Elisha, the oil representing his spirit being placed on Elisha. He had refused to do so, and only treated Elisha as his servant and run around. They are on the road together, visiting the sons of the prophets. Elijah had a premonition God might cut short his ministry but had no idea how that might happen. He ought to have anointed Elisha with his spirit, but he doggedly insisted on keeping on in his ministry when God had fired him from it on Horeb. It's as if he is saying: 'Elisha, I'd need to be taken forcefully away from my ministry for you to get my spirit. If you live to see that, then I guess you will get it'. This was arrogant disobedience to the command to anoint Elisha and thus give him his spirit. And so... woosh, God does indeed forcibly remove Elijah from his ministry. And Elijah gets that and throws his mantle (the sign of his prophetic office) down to Elisha as he is snatched away, in some kind of last minute acceptance that he has indeed been replaced by Elisha.

2Ki 2:11 It happened, as they still went on, and talked-

This has similarities with the lead up to the Lord's ascension (Lk. 24:50,51).

That behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into the sky-

This may have been visible only to Elisha and Elijah, just as Elisha's servant alone saw the horses and chariots at Dothan (2 Kings 6:17). Horses, fire from Heaven and whirlwind are all the language of Divine judgment. And Elijah himself had called fire from Heaven in judgment. It is hard not to get the impression of God's wrath- with Elijah. This was not the ending of a ministry in a blaze of glory. The ministry had been ended on Horeb when God fired Elijah from the prophetic ministry. And yet Elijah had continued to want to work for God, and he had been accepted- so far. But his attitude to giving his spirit to Elisha was enough to trigger this dramatic, enforced ending of his ministry.

It could be that after the triumph on Carmel, there had been another vision of God's glory in order to humble Elijah. I say this on the basis that the description of the cloud in 1 Kings 18:44 "like a man's hand" recalls "the likeness of a man's hand" under the cherubim in Ezekiel's visions. Clouds and rain are invariably part of theophanies. Elijah spoke of how, by faith, he heard "the feet of rain" (1 Kings 18:41 LXX), as if he believed that the Angels were coming with rain. Perhaps Elijah therefore told Ahab "prepare *your* chariot" and ride with the rain- i.e. 'be part of the vision of glory / cherubim chariots on the ground as it passes overhead'. This was the point of Ezekiel's vision; Israel were to reflect the Cherubim on earth, just As David moved in step with the Spirit / the sound of marching in the mulberry trees. Therefore in 1 Kings 19:42 when in the face of all this, Elijah places his face between knees, he may be doing the same thing as when he hides his face in the mantle. He sensed the glory of God near him but didn't want to face up to it personally. He didn't want to become part of the Cherubic vision of glory, even though he advised Ahab to do so. We must identify ourselves with the vision of God's glory, and face up to the life-changing implications of it.

Elijah ultimately did this, although it took him a lifetime- he was caught up in another cherubic vision and threw away his mantle and became part of the vision of glory; and hence he was called "the chariot of Israel and the [great] horseman thereof" [reading "horsemen" as an intensive plural]. The chariots and horsemen of God appeared; and Elisha perceived that Elijah had finally become identified with them. For Elisha sees them and then describes Elijah as being them- the chariot and horseman of Israel (2 Kings 2:11,12). Finally, Elijah became part of God's glory; He merged into it rather than resisting it for the sake of his *own* glory. He was the charioteer of the cherubim; for his prayers had controlled their direction. This identification of ourselves with God's glory, this losing of ourselves and our own insistence upon our rightness, and our focus on others' wrongness... this is the end result of our lives if they are lived out after the pattern of Elijah's.

Fire from Heaven is a clear symbol of Divine judgment; we think of Sodom's judgment and the fire that fell on Job's home. Elijah calls fire down from Heaven apparently at will- both on Carmel and in destroying the soldiers sent to take him. God is not recorded as telling him to do this. He is extremely confident that God's judgment must fall, and his faith is rewarded. But he was so far from God in his spirit, as the Lord's allusion to the incident shows. But God patiently doesn't forcibly stop him nor force him out of ministry. Finally God sends fire from Heaven to remove Elijah from his ministry, as he was refusing to quit it as asked. The fire that came

from Heaven to remove Elijah was therefore some kind of judgment of him, although he was not slain by it and was apparently removed to live in obscurity elsewhere. The chariots of fire that came to remove him were not therefore the blaze of glory in which a glorious ministry ended- but rather the opposite. Chariots and whirlwind are all the language of Divine judgment. It was God's judgment upon him, although he was not destroyed by it, but forcibly removed to obscurity. And in that obscurity, he apparently repented- for the transfiguration appearance make it clear that he will be in God's Kingdom. Jonah is very similar to Elijah, and we are left to infer his similar repentance after the narrated events finished.

We note how in Lk. 9:8, Herod enquires whether the Lord is in fact Elijah, and then in Lk. 9:19 we learn that many people thought that He was Elijah. In between those two questions about whether the Lord was Elijah, we have the feeding of the five thousand- a miracle framed in terms of how Elisha, not Elijah, fed 100 men in a similar way (2 Kings 4:43.44). It could be that the Lord is replying that He is not Elijah, but He is more in the spirit of Elisha, the prophet intended to replace Elijah. This all again hints that the Lord is pointing out that He was not of Elijah's spirit.

2Ki 2:12 Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father-

We saw on :9 that Elisha considered himself as Elijah's spiritual son, indeed his firstborn.

The chariots of Israel and its horseman! He saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and tore them in two pieces-

Although Elijah had been rejected from his ministry as lead prophet of Israel because of his refusal to accept other prophets and believers as valid, and those included Elisha, Elisha really respects Elijah and the tearing of his own clothes reflects that. In this he showed the humility which was so necessary for the prophetic office.

Israel had been forbidden horses and chariots in Dt. 17. Elisha is saying that Elijah was the true horse and chariot of Israel, it was his ministry which had brought victory. And yet it seems Elisha had a wrong view of Elijah. Elisha had been chosen to be the prophet of Israel, from Horeb onwards. But Elisha had not risen up to this, and instead his loyalty to Elijah had reinforced Elijah in his rebellion against God's intentions. And this is so true to how things are amongst God's people. God may seek to remove a man from ministry, but this is militated against by his followers' blind loyalty and mesmerization with him. This is a phenomena seen in politics, religion, companies, families... someone who ought not to be leader any longer is upheld in power by unwise loyalists. Perhaps this is why in 2 Kings 6:17, Elisha is shown again who are the true horsemen and chariots of Israel- hosts of Angels, not Elijah: "The mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha".

2Ki 2:13 He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of the Jordan-

In 1 Kings 19:13, Elijah had wrapped *his face* [s.w. "before" the Lord] in his mantle and "stood" [s.w. 'stand' before the Lord] in the cave mouth before the Angel. In Hebrew, the words for 'face' and 'before' are the same. Too ashamed to really stand before the Lord, Elijah therefore wrapped his face. Earlier, he had been so keen to use this phrase of himself (1 Kings 17:1; 18:15); he had prided himself on the fact that he stood before the Lord. But now he hid his face, a common idiom often used by God for withholding fellowship. The fact we too are God's covenant people can initially be a source of pride to us as we do our theological gladiatorship with others. But the implications are so far deeper; and through Angelic work in our lives, we too are

brought to see this. The word for “Mantle” is translated “glory” in Zech. 11:3; Elijah wrapped his presence in his own glory, rather than face up to the implications of God’s glory. A desire for our own glory prevents us perceiving God’s glory. Perhaps Elijah was being pseudo-humble, misquoting to himself a Biblical precedent in all this, namely that the cherubim wrapped their faces (Is. 6:2). In this case, Elijah was doing a false impersonation of the cherubim, manifesting himself before God’s manifestation of Himself. Only at the very end does Elijah cast away his mantle (2 Kings 2:13), his human strength, allowing himself to merge with God’s glory. He should have cast away his mantle earlier, when he stood before the still small voice on Horeb. The question of 1 Kings 19:13 “Why are you still here, Elijah?” may imply that Elijah should have allowed himself to be carried away by the cherubim, he should have surrendered himself to the progress of God’s glory, rather than so obsessively insist upon his own personal rightness and the wrongness of others. And this was why God’s ultimate response to Elijah’s attitude on Horeb was to dismiss him from his prophetic ministry and instate Elisha as his successor (1 Kings 19:16). Elijah seems to have finally learnt his lesson, for he calls Elisha to the ministry by ‘passing by’ Elisha as in a theophany, taking off his mantle and throwing it upon Elisha (1 Kings 19:19). He realized that he had hidden behind that mantle, using it to resist participating in the selfless association with God’s glory [rather than his own] to which he was called. But he got there in the end; hence the enormous significance of Elijah giving up his mantle when he finally ascends to Heaven in the cherubim chariot (2 Kings 2:13).

Elijah's mantle doesn't have a good history. He went to Horeb / Sinai at his own initiative, trying to force himself to be the predicted prophet like unto Moses. He goes to the same cave Moses was in, the cleft in the rock, where Yahweh Himself hid Moses' face as He passed by him. Elijah expects this same intimacy with God and hides his face in his mantle in expectation of a similar theophany. But it was an empty theophany- Yahweh was not in the earthquake, wind nor fire, but in the sound of silence- that was the message to Elijah. "What are *you* doing here?" is a way of rebuking his attempt to put himself in Moses' place. He was not Moses, he prayed to God against Israel rather than as Moses did, offering himself for them. He was then fired from the ministry and told to anoint Elisha to replace him. He doesn't do this, but throws his mantle on Elisha as a sign that Elisha is to become his personal servant- an abuse of the mantle, a sign of his prophetic office. So in :14 we read that when Elisha tried to part the waters by striking them with Elijah's mantle, it seems it didn't work- and so he has to ask "Where is Yahweh, the God of Elijah?". The mantle of itself is shown not to be powerful. Elijah had rather abused it, considering that because he was a prophet therefore he could do anything.

2Ki 2:14 He took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and struck the waters, and said, Where is Yahweh, the God of Elijah?-

The LXX says that the first time Elisha smote the waters, they didn't open. Hence his question. Perhaps this happened, as such things happen to us, to make Elisha realize that the action of God is not automatic. It requires intense personal faith, and not merely following the pattern of other believers.

When he also had struck the waters, they were divided here and there; and Elisha went over-

Elisha is being taught that indeed, the spirit and power of Elijah had fallen upon him. He could perform the same miracles. The parting of water at the Red Sea and by Joshua at the same Jordan river had all been for the salvation of God's people, towards their entry into the kingdom. And so it was with Elisha's work too. This was the

reason he was being given this power. Elisha is being set up as a second Joshua, who did the same in crossing the Jordan miraculously at the same place. Elijah was intended to have been the prophet like unto Moses, but he failed; and we wonder whether the lack of further allusions to Joshua in Elisha's life might suggest he likewise failed to be the second Joshua.

2Ki 2:15 When the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho opposite him saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha. They came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him-

The present site of Jericho is about four miles from the Jordan, but perhaps "Jericho" is being used of the region around the city. "Which were over against him" (AV) could imply, as we shall see later, that they were not particularly supportive of Elisha.

2Ki 2:16 They said to him, See now, there are with your servants fifty strong men. Please let them go and seek your master-

They still call Elijah "your master" rather than "our master". A noted earlier, this suggests a lack of respect toward Elijah. And yet I will suggest on :18 that they respected Elisha even less. I suggested on :7 that a 'group of 50 prophets' was not a literal group of 50 men, but a kind of prophetic division of prophets.

Perhaps the spirit of Yahweh has taken him up, and put him on some mountain, or into some valley. He said, You shall not send them-

As Obadiah earlier pointed out, such snatching away of Elijah, from one place on earth to another, had been quite common (1 Kings 18:12). It was just as Philip was snatched away from the Ethiopian and then found at Azotus, and Ezekiel likewise (Ez. 37:1). It further indicates that Elijah was snatched away into the sky, not to Heaven itself.

2Ki 2:17 When they urged him until he was ashamed-

Probably a figure of speech meaning that he finally reluctantly agreed, for their benefit rather than his. He wanted them to accept the Divine word that Elijah had been removed and replaced by himself.

He said, Send them. They sent therefore fifty men; and they searched for three days, but didn't find him-

This strong desire to find Elijah likely reflected their dissatisfaction at the prospect of having Elisha as the 'father' of their school of sons of the prophets. Although they could not doubt that Elisha did now have the spirit of Elijah.

2Ki 2:18 They came back to him while he stayed at Jericho; and he said to them, Didn't I tell you, 'Don't go?'

Elisha appeared angry that they were so persistent in trying to find Elijah. By being so desperate to have Elijah back with them, they were effectively going against the Divine intention that he be replaced by Elisha. So in political terms, things didn't start well for Elisha. The sons of the prophets at Jericho hankered after Elijah rather than Elisha; and those at Bethel despised both Elijah and Elisha (see on :23).

2Ki 2:19 The men of the city said to Elisha, Behold, please, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees; but the water is bad, and the land miscarries-

2 Kings 2:19 (AV mg.) records how the people complained that "the water is naught, and that ground causing to miscarry". This was evidently an incorrect superstition of the time; barren ground cannot make the women who live on it barren. But Elisha

does not blow them into next week for believing such nonsense. Instead he performed the miracle of curing the barrenness of the land. The record says that there was no more barrenness of the land or women “*according to the word of Elisha which he spoke*” (:22). Normally the people would have resorted to wizards to drive away the relevant demon which they thought was causing the problem. But the miracle made it evident that ultimately God had caused the problem, and He could so easily cure it. This was a far more effective way of sinking the people’s foolish superstition than a head-on frontal attack upon it. The Lord's attitude to the ideas of demon possession in the NT is similar.

2Ki 2:20 He said, Bring me a new jar, and put salt in it. They brought it to him-
The Jordan valley, especially around Jericho, is full of salty springs which don't give good water. The Dead [Salt] Sea is not far from there. So putting salt into the salty spring to change it is a way of showing that God uses that which appears the problem in order to cure the problem. We think of the Lord Jesus having our human nature in order to make a way to overcome it. The jar perhaps represented the well.

We note that sprinkling salt on a city is a symbol of its destruction (Jud. 9:45). It's as if the just judgment upon Jericho is accepted, but through that acceptance, blessing and healing comes.

2Ki 2:21 He went out to the spring of the waters, and threw salt into it, and said, Thus says Yahweh, 'I have healed these waters. There shall not be from there any more death or miscarrying'-

Immediately after Moses had parted the waters, he made bitter waters "sweet" through casting a tree into them, looking ahead to the cross, so that the people could drink from them (Ex. 15:25). Elisha had just parted the waters, and he does a similar miracle to Moses. I discussed on :8 and 1 Kings 19:11 how Elijah was set up as another Moses, but he failed to completely attain that potential because unlike Moses, he was not meek enough. Elisha is being shown that he too is called to be as Moses. See on 2 Kings 3:9. This is how much of Bible prophecy works. A potential is set up [in this case for Elijah to be the prophet like Moses]; if the person failed, then another option is tried, in this case Elisha. When that person failed, the prophecy became reapplied and reinterpreted in the ultimate fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. And those failed fulfilments become, as some see them, 'types' of Christ- in that their experiences do partially point forward to Him.

2Ki 2:22 So the waters were healed to this day, according to the word of Elisha which he spoke-

The miracle was essentially by the word of Yahweh which Elisha spoke; the use of the salt in the new jar was shown not to essentially be the cause for the cure. See on :19.

2Ki 2:23 He went up from there to Bethel-

Now the mantle had fallen upon Elisha, he visits the schools of the prophets at Jericho, Bethel (:3) and then at Carmel (see on :25).

As he was going up by the way, some youths came out of the city and mocked him, and said to him-

"Youth" is the same word used of Solomon when he became king. It can apply to young men and not just children. "The city" may not be Bethel but Jericho, because

Elisha was going to Bethel from Jericho, and he turned behind him to address the youths (:24). They may have been young men who had worked as water carriers who were now out of work because Elisha had healed the bitter waters; but I suggest they are young men of the sons of the prophets who were bitter with Elisha because they were loyal to Elijah, and shared his bitter attitude and perspective that he could not be replaced- for he never anointed Elisha as asked, and resisted the Divine call to retire and give place to Elisha. The Hebrew *qereah* translated "baldy" is a form of "Korah", who had rebelled against Moses' authority. The implication would be that they considered Elijah the prophet like unto Moses, and Elisha to be a usurper of Elijah. They saw Elisha as Elijah had taught them to. And this is an essay in his arrogant resistance to God's firing of him as lead prophet, and replacing him with Elisha. So the position of these young men actually says much about what Elijah's position was. But they were in fact the "Korah" usurpers of Divine authority; they were "torn" by the bears (:24), using the same word for how the ground 'tore open' beneath Korah and consumed him (Num. 16:31). The bears "went out" (:24), the same word for how the fire "went out" from Yahweh to destroy Korah's group (Num. 16:35).

Go up, you baldy! Go up, you baldhead!-

I suggest they were challenging him to "go up" into the sky as Elijah had. They mock him as being bald, rather than being as Elijah, who was famed for being a hairy man (2 Kings 1:8). These young people from Bethel were doubtful that Elisha could indeed carry the mantle of Elisha, which he was presumably wearing. Elijah and Elisha had visited the "sons of the prophets" in Bethel just before Elijah was snatched away (:3), and at that time they had spoken of Elijah as Elisha's master, "your master", rather than "our master". They were not great enthusiasts for Elijah, and it seems they were the "youths" here. They disliked the way Elisha was now claiming to be as Elijah, a prophet for whom they had no respect. I suspect therefore that it is some of them who were these youths, and they were not just random cheeky kids who were punished for their cat calling.

Another view would be that young men are always "the sons of the prophets" in this section of scripture. They may have been Elijah loyalists who like Elijah, considered all other prophets fake- including Elisha. "Go up" is also used to going up to a sanctuary to worship, e.g. Hos. 4:15 "Do not go up to Beth Aven" ['house of sin', another name for Bethel where Elisha was heading towards]. We note the frequent references to 'going up' to worship at Jerusalem or the sanctuary. They may have been challenging him to "go up" to the nearby sanctuary at Bethel and worship the golden calves there. Because they as Elijah loyalists considered him fake. But any such attempt to incite another to sin would account for the severe judgment of them. For to make others sin is the worst sin.

Despite these suggestions, we can also opt for the simplest view- that these were youngsters who were catcalling a bald man with no particularly malicious intent nor hidden meaning. Elisha calls down severe judgment upon them, apparently out of proportion to their naughtiness. He did this with all the immaturity and impatience of a young, prematurely bald man- for he lived around 60 years after this. This would then be exactly like Elijah calling down fire from Heaven to destroy the two groups of 50 soldiers- an act criticized by the Lord as being not of His spirit. But as discussed on 2 Kings 1, Elijah had been delegated God's power and had a wide leeway of parameters within which to use it. It could be that Elisha in a moment of irritation and embarrassed anger followed the bad example of his one time master Elijah. He did just the same. The old covenant cursed those who went after Baal, and it's possible the "go up" was to the fake sanctuary at Bethel. Balaam could only curse those whom God

had cursed (Num. 23:8), and "an undeserved curse does not come to rest" (Prov. 26:2). And so Elisha felt he could curse any idolators including these kids. This curse did come to rest, although it seems so extreme and uttered in irritation and short temper. Maybe Elisha was aware of Hos. 13:8 "Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and rip them open"; or Am. 5:19 "It will be as though a man fled from a lion and a bear met him". So perhaps, as with Elijah bringing drought upon Israel because this was the punishment for breaking the covenant, so Elisha is reasoning that these youngsters were cursed by God anyway, so he could curse them in God's Name. Breaking the covenant would lead to God sending "wild animals against you, who will rob you of your children" (Lev. 26:22). The threat of wild beasts being sent against God's covenant breaking people is quite common (Jer. 5:6; 8:17; Ez. 5:17; 14:15,21 etc.). And so God went along with that, as He did with allowing Elijah to bring fire down from Heaven even if that was not how He wished His Spirit to be used. The spirit of Christ is to bless those who curse us and bless and not curse (Rom. 12:14; Mt. 5:44), to not repay cursing for cursing (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12; 2 Pet. 1:5-7).

2Ki 2:24 He looked behind him and saw them, and cursed them in the name of Yahweh. Two female bears came out of the woods, and mauled forty-two of those youths-

That he "looked behind him" shows they did not confront him, but called out these words from a secluded place. The extreme punishment, as explained on :23, was because they were the sons of the prophets at Bethel who had refused Elijah's leadership (probably because he despised them as unfaithful and rejected them when he should have accepted them)- and now refused that of Elisha, seeing he was acting as Elijah. The death of 42 of them may have meant the entire community of sons of the prophets there was virtually wiped out. For it could be argued from :16 that there were only 50 sons of the prophets at Jericho, and perhaps there were only the same at Bethel. There seems a connection with the disobedient prophet who was killed by a lion near this same city of Bethel (1 Kings 13:24). And these were disobedient sons of the prophets.

2Ki 2:25 He went from there to Mount Carmel-

Elijah seems often associated with Mount Carmel, and it seems likely he had a school of the prophets there, which Elisha now visited- having just visited the school of the prophets at Bethel (:3,23). This would corroborate the suggestion on :23 that the disrespectful youths were sons of the prophets.

And from there he returned to Samaria-

We learn from the account of Naaman in 2 Kings 5 that Elisha had a house there. Hence Naaman's maid talks of Elisha as "the prophet that is in Samaria".

2 KINGS CHAPTER 3

2Ki 3:1 Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years-

We noted on 2 Kings 1:17 that both Israel and Judah had a king called Jehoram at this time. This was perhaps intentional, because Jehoshaphat's son had married Ahab's daughter. "The accession of the Israelite Jehoram (Ahab's brother) took place, according to 2 Kings 3:1, in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat. Jehoram of Judah

perhaps received the royal title from his father as early as his father's sixteenth year, when he was about to join Ahab against the Syrians; the same year might then be called either the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat or the second year of Jehoram".

2Ki 3:2 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, but not like his father or his mother; for he put away the pillar of Baal that his father had made-

Even amongst those who ultimately fail, God recognizes degrees of sin, and graciously takes note of the good things they do. We see in all this His extreme sensitivity to human behaviour. And yet we also see that He judges the overall state of heart and spiritual thrust of a person's life, and occasional, isolated acts of righteousness [such as putting away the Baal pillar of Ahab] do not count for much, just as specific acts of failure likewise do not preclude God from saying that men like David and Jehoshaphat followed Him with all their hearts all their days.

2Ki 3:3 Nevertheless he held to the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin; he didn't depart from them-

2 Kings 3:2,3 implies that Jeroboam did not actually worship Baal. Jehoram put away the image of Baal, but he cleaved to the sins of Jeroboam. The implication is that Jeroboam was not a Baal worshipper, which is what the majority of the wicked kings were guilty of. Instead he mixed true and false worship of Yahweh.

2Ki 3:4 Now Mesha king of Moab was a sheep breeder; and he rendered to the king of Israel the wool of one hundred thousand lambs, and of one hundred thousand rams-

This Mesha is mentioned on the very first line of the Moabite stone. Whilst the stone records history from the Moabite perspective, it is a powerful corroboration of the Biblical account here.

2Ki 3:5 But it happened, when Ahab was dead, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel-

We last heard of Moab when David subdued them (2 Sam. 8:2). The Moabite stone states that Israel and Moab were in conflict in the time of Ahab's father Omri. Tired of paying the heavy tax of 2 Kings 3:4, Moab seized the opportunity when Ahab died suddenly and Israel were defeated by Syria at Ramoth Gilead (2 Kings 1:1).

2Ki 3:6 King Jehoram went out of Samaria at that time, and mustered all Israel-

The 'going out' was to war. That it was the figure of speech means. "Mustered" is 'numbered' and we recall from David's numbering the people that Israel would be plagued whenever they were numbered and didn't pay the required temple tax. But the ten tribes had no temple, so we can assume this tax was not paid. And yet God gave Israel a victory at this time. God responds differently to the same sins being committed, because He weighs up the context and dimension of the sin in a way which we cannot. We are not to judge not least because we in fact cannot judge. We lack the huge and total background factoring which God alone has access to.

2Ki 3:7 He went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me against Moab to battle? He said, I will go up. I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses-

This was the same request made to Jehoshaphat by Ahab, and he responds in the same positive way with the same language he used to him (1 Kings 22:4). And yet by doing

that, he had incited the wrath of God against him for helping those who hated Yahweh (2 Chron. 19:2). He very nearly lost his life at Ramoth Gilead for doing this. But he didn't learn. So he was tested again by various requests from Ahaziah, Ahab's son, to do further joint ventures. He agreed, wrongly, and his ships were destroyed (1 Kings 22:48), Chronicles adding that this was because of God's wrath at his working with Ahaziah. After that Ahaziah made another such request, and it seemed Jehoshaphat learned his lesson and refused to work with him again (1 Kings 22:49). But he hadn't. For now he again works with Ahab's son. And yet he was finally counted righteous with God because his basic state of heart was for Him. We marvel again at God's patience with men. This means that we are to continue seeking the repentance of men and never cut them off, as is typically done by small minded churches 'disfellowshipping' people.

Jehoshaphat agreed, partly because the sister of Jehoram had married his son, and partly because he himself had been attacked by Moab recently (2 Chron. 20:1). He allowed family pressures and the desire for personal security to override spiritual principle; and that in essence is our abiding temptation likewise.

2Ki 3:8 He said, Which way shall we go up? He answered, The way of the wilderness of Edom-

This answer perhaps came from Jehoshaphat, who as noted on 1 Kings 22:47 had installed his own deputy in Edom. The idea was that supportive Edomite forces, or perhaps the garrison of Judah in Edom, would join this assault upon Moab. There were two ways to attack Moab, from the north or from the south, and Jehoshaphat advises from the south. The northern route would have been through Ramoth Gilead, where Jehoshaphat had nearly lost his life supporting Ahab. So it is understandable he wished to avoid that.

2Ki 3:9 So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom; and they made a circuit of seven days' journey-

I suggested on 1 Kings 22:47 ("There was no king in Edom: a deputy was king") that Jehoshaphat had installed a Jewish deputy over Edom, so this "king" was likely a Jew governing Edom for Jehoshaphat. See on :8. The language of making a circuit in the wilderness is to point up the similarities with Israel in the wilderness; for they were to be tested likewise, and saved by the prophet Elisha, just as they had been saved by Moses. See on 2 Kings 4:3.

There was no water for the army, nor for the animals that followed them-

The language recalls Israel's crisis after they had come out of the Red Sea into that same wilderness. Elisha had been raised up to be, potentially, another Moses, as explained on 2 Kings 2:21. This was why he accompanied them (:11). See on :21.

2Ki 3:10 The king of Israel said, Alas! For Yahweh has called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab-

We note the idolatrous king of Israel speaks of "Yahweh". The ten tribes believed that Baal worship was a form of Yahweh worship, and never totally rejected Yahweh. He wrongly assumes that Yahweh had called them all together to attack Moab, when clearly the campaign had been on his initiative. Yahweh had not been inquired of at this point (:11). So we see the theme continued of men wrongly assuming they know the will of Yahweh, as Nathan thought when he told David to go ahead and build a temple. This is a warning to us too. Our gut feeling, what seems right, following our own hearts and native intuition... is just that, and we are playing God if we assume

those things are the same as God telling us to do things. In this we see the huge value and necessity of the Bible as God's word to us.

2Ki 3:11 But Jehoshaphat said, Isn't there here a prophet of Yahweh, that we may inquire of Yahweh by him? One of the king of Israel's servants answered, Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah-

Jehoshaphat repeats, more or less, his words at the time of the expedition against Ramoth Gilead (1 Kings 22:7). He surely fears that he is about to almost lose his life as he did then. He sensed situations were repeating in his life, and didn't want to be disobedient to the prophetic word as he had been then. We too are intended to learn from situations which repeat in our lives. Jehoshaphat was apparently unaware that Elisha was present. For he seems to know Elisha (:12) but didn't realize he was with the army. As Elijah's personal assistant, 'pouring water on his hands', he would have been visible when Elijah had been.

2Ki 3:12 Jehoshaphat said, The word of Yahweh is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him-

To 'go down to' doesn't mean Elisha was somewhere else. They were all together in the desert, about to die of thirst. Typically men are spoken of going up to and down from Jerusalem. The idea is that the kings humbled themselves before God's prophetic word, and went down to His prophet from their higher estate in life. This needs to be our pattern every time we come to God's word, as we have it today in the Bible.

2Ki 3:13 Elisha said to the king of Israel, What have I to do with you?-

An idiom meaning 'go away' (Mk. 5:7; Lk. 8:28; Jn. 2:4). The next verse therefore says "Go [away from me] to the prophets of your father".

Go to the prophets of your father, and to the prophets of your mother-

He is recalling the 400 false prophets who had wrongly advised Ahab at the time of the campaign against Ramoth Gilead.

The king of Israel said to him, No; for Yahweh has called these three kings together to deliver them into the hand of Moab-

"No" would seem to be a denial of Baal worship, although it could have been some kind of repentance. More likely he was still arguing that Baal worship was a form of Yahweh worship, and so he denied Elisha's attitude to him as being legitimate. This was and is always the problem for God's people- to worship the flesh in the name of serving God. Again Jehoram dogmatically assumes he knows Yahweh's plan, even though he has not inquired of His prophet.

2Ki 3:14 Elisha said, As Yahweh of Armies lives, before whom I stand-

The very style and language of Elijah in 1 Kings 17:1. Elisha was clearly imitating Elijah.

Surely, were it not that I respect the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward you, nor see you-

Elisha was accustomed to thinking of himself in terms of a man who stood before Yahweh, in His presence, before His face (Heb.- 2 Kings 3:14). Later, Naaman and his "company" 'stood before' Elisha (2 Kings 5:15,16). Remember that this was the Syrian army General, standing with a "company" in Israelite territory, at Elisha's house- at a time when 'companies' of Syrian soldiers carried out raids upon Israel (2 Kings 5:2). Any Israelite would've been terrified. But Elisha responds that he 'stands

before' Yahweh. Elisha was so aware of how we live in God's presence, before His very face, that he wasn't the least phased by this. If only we can share this sense, of standing in God's presence... the most frightening of human situations will have little effective 'presence' because we know we are ultimately in God's presence, 24/7. See on 2 Kings 6:17.

Israel were God's people, His 'world', and the other nations were "not a people"; effectively, they weren't people, in God's eyes (Dt. 32:21). Is this Biblical evidence for a social Gospel? These words are true of all those who are out of covenant relationship with Him, including those who have fallen away. Thus Elisha told the apostate king of Israel: "Were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, *I would not look toward you, nor see you*" (2 Kings 3:14). We have an example here of how a man is positively dealt with by God for the sake of third parties with whom he is associated. The sick man was forgiven for the sake of his friends' faith (Mk. 2:5). This opens up huge responsibilities for us to intercede for others.

God 'looking toward' men means His salvation of them in Ps. 102:19,20; Is. 63:15 (s.w.). God 'looks toward' those who humbly tremble at His word (Is. 66:2), and not toward those who are sinners (Hab. 1:13 s.w.); and that person was Jehoshaphat and not Jehoram. But although God disapproved of Jehoshaphat's association with Jehoram, He doesn't practice 'guilt by association', and still responded to Jehoshaphat. There is a mutuality between God and man. The faithful look toward Him (s.w. Ps. 34:5; Is. 22:11; 51:1; Zech. 12:10; Jonah 2:4), and He looks toward them in salvation.

2Ki 3:15 But now bring me a minstrel. It happened, when the minstrel played, that the hand of Yahweh came on him-

It's unclear whether the "him" is the minstrel or Elisha. The sons of the prophets were musical (1 Sam. 10:5), and the hand of Yahweh coming upon a person effectively means they received a revelation of God's word (e.g. Ez. 33:22). "Minstrel" is a word multiple times used of David as he harped [LXX has "harper"] and sung his Psalms. So maybe this minstrel sung Psalms of David, which were then accompanied by this new prophetic revelation.

2Ki 3:16 He said, Thus says Yahweh, 'Make this valley full of trenches'-

As with the woman told to borrow empty pots to have oil multiplied in them (2 Kings 4:3), the extent of this miracle was controlled by the degree to which the people were obedient. The more ditches [LXX "pits"] were dug, the greater the amount of water would be provided, and the greater the effect of the illusion upon the Moabites. And in essence it is the same with us. The greater our faithful response, the further God works with us. God can do anything, but the extent of His working is in some sense limited by our faith and response, rather than His possibility- which is boundless. Hence when the man asks Jesus to help him "if You can do anything", the Lord replies that if *he* can believe, all things would be possible to him (Mk. 9:22,23).

The miracle is repeated in essence with the filling of the widow's pots in 2 Kings 4. The same word for "full" is used about the filling of the ditches and the filling of the pots. The scale of Elisha's work in 2 Kings 3 was national, saving the lives of thousands of soldiers and giving victory to God's people. Now the scale is different- one obscure widow woman. The same saving Divine hand at work amongst the nations is at work in one obscure life.

2Ki 3:17 For thus says Yahweh, 'You will not see wind, neither will you see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, and you will drink, both you and your livestock and your animals-

Wind after a drought usually preceded rain in Palestine, and it could be "seen" in that wind blew the dust. I see this as meaning that the provision of water was by a miracle and not some cloudburst (see on :22), although see on :20. The allusion is clearly to the way Elijah did see wind and the approach of rain in 1 Kings 18:41,45, again in response to his prayer. But God was working at a far greater extent through Elisha than He had done through Elijah. For now they would not see the rain or wind coming, but rain would come. And the rain came in response to Elijah's seven prayers for it, whereas there is no recorded, verbalized prayer here. God perceived their need and Elisha's presence as prayer, and responded even more mightily.

2Ki 3:18 This is but a light thing in the sight of Yahweh. He will also deliver the Moabites into your hand-

This is an example of answered prayer being above all we ask or think. God sees our unexpressed desires as prayer. He knew that they wanted victory over the Moabites as well as preservation from death by dehydration. Just as the desire of Mary and Martha was that Lazarus would be immediately resurrected, and not just at "the last day". Those desires weren't verbalized, but the power and nature of prayer doesn't depend upon our ability at verbalizing. For some can do this better than others. God sees our core desires as prayer, and responds. Perhaps this idea of a "light thing" inspired Hezekiah to have the spiritual ambition shown in 2 Kings 20:10.

2Ki 3:19 You shall strike every fortified city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all springs of water, and spoil every good piece of land with stones'-

Here we have an example of how prophecy merges into commandment, and if that commandment isn't fulfilled, then the prophecy doesn't have its fulfilment. The apparent prophecy of a temple in Ez. 40-48 is likewise more command than prediction, and most of it was not obeyed. The command to fell good trees presumably refers to fruit trees, for that was how a tree was defined as "good". A good tree brings forth fruit (Mt. 3:10; 7:17). But fruit trees were not to be cut down in military operations (Dt. 20:19). I see this as an example of where within the Biblical text, Divine laws can be overridden or changed according to situation. Even within the structure of the Mosaic law there are examples of this, and the Lord points out the apparent tension between the Sabbath laws and the need at times to work on the Sabbath. These tensions are not a case of situational ethics, whereby we allow situations to change ethics; but rather to demonstrate that God is not a literalist or legalist and neither should we be. The apparent conflicts within the Divine legal code are to elicit an appreciation of the spirit of the law. And we must note that it is God not man who can make these amendments to Divine law.

2Ki 3:20 It happened in the morning, about the time of making the offering, that behold, water came by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water-

It could be implied by :17 that the water was totally miraculously provided, and not from any cloudburst. However it is possible in that mountainous region that there was a cloudburst the other side of a mountain, unseen by them, which resulted in water pouring towards them from the direction of Edom. But we note that the fulfilment of

the promise was at the time of the morning daily sacrifice. The promise was potential, and required their continuance in regular daily obedience.

2Ki 3:21 Now when all the Moabites heard that the kings had come up to fight against them, they gathered themselves together, all who were able to put on armour, young and older, and stood on the border-

This matches the way Israel had gathered themselves together for this conflict (:6). "The border" may refer to the Arnon river (Jud. 11:18; Num. 21:13,15). The more spiritually minded would have recalled that God had won a great victory against Moab in the time of the wilderness journeys, associated with the waters which formed their border (Num. 21:13-15). That victory was won by Moses, and so this would be another encouragement to Elisha that he was being used as a new Moses. This had been God's intention with Elijah, but Elijah lacked the meekness of Moses; see on :9. Now Elisha was being led to fulfil that potential.

2Ki 3:22 They rose up early in the morning, and the sun shone on the water, and the Moabites saw the water over against them as red as blood-

This was a time of major drought, so they would have been sure this was not water, as there had been no rain. This confirms the suggestion that the water was provided by a total miracle and not be an observable cloudburst. See on :20. The redness of the soil combined with the rays of the sun at dawn would have created the optical illusion they experienced.

2Ki 3:23 They said, This is blood. The kings are surely destroyed, and they have struck each other. Now therefore, Moab, to the spoil!-

In this spirit, they ran towards the Israelites in an undisciplined way, each soldier bent on only personal gain rather than obedience to military formation or command. They were therefore very vulnerable to an orderly Israelite attack.

2Ki 3:24 When they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and struck the Moabites, so that they fled before them; and they went forward into the land smiting the Moabites-

"The camp of Israel" may refer specifically to that of the ten tribes under Jehoram, as the camp of Edom is mentioned separately in :26.

2Ki 3:25 They beat down the cities; and on every good piece of land they cast every man his stone, and filled it. They stopped all the springs of water, and felled all the good trees, until in Kir Hareseth only they left its stones; however the men armed with slings surrounded it, and struck it-

I will suggest on :27 that this destruction of the Moabites' land was the maximum judgment God had decreed upon Moab. The kings are to be commended for doing just this, and nothing further, even when it was in their power to do so. See on :19 for the issue of felling the "good trees".

2Ki 3:26 When the king of Moab saw that the battle was too severe for him, he took with him seven hundred men who drew sword, to break through to the king of Edom; but they could not-

He may have considered that the Edomite contingent was the weakest out of the three kings. But he was wrong. I suggested on :8 that the king of Edom was in fact an

Israelite deputy, and the soldiers with him were perhaps the garrison of Judah in Edom.

2Ki 3:27 Then he took his eldest son who would have reigned in his place, and offered him for a burnt offering on the wall. There was great wrath against Israel, who departed from him, and returned to their own land-

Perhaps he was trying to imitate Abraham offering Isaac, in an attempt to desperately turn to Israel's God. As a Moabite, Abraham was also his ancestor. We wonder why Israel departed from him. Perhaps they were awed by God's grace, and realized that the destruction of Moabite land and property was the extent of judgment God required, and they should not go beyond that. Maybe the sight of the man sacrificing his son was so tragic that they realized he had been punished enough and it would be inappropriate to press further the man's judgment. Anything further than what they did in destroying Moabite land would have been personal bloodlust rather than Divine judgment.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 4

2Ki 4:1 Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets to Elisha, saying, Your servant my husband is dead-

Josephus (*Antiquities* 9.4.2) says this woman was the widow of Obadiah, Ahab's servant. Many of the Elisha and Elijah incidents concern obscure characters. The widow woman with whom Elijah lived for three years was so obscure that Ahab's search for Elijah never led anyone there. And so it is with the widow of one of the sons of the prophets, Naaman's wife's servant girl, a guy who borrows an axe and the axe head goes plop in the river etc. Perhaps the obscurity of these people was a foil for the high profile life of Elijah and Elisha. They were being shown that humble spirituality in obscurity and personal suffering and difficulty is the essence, and not public work for its own sake. We observed this difference between Obadiah's more private spirituality, and Elijah's.

You know that your servant feared Yahweh-

This is exactly how Obadiah described himself (1 Kings 18:12). Obadiah also tells Elijah that Elijah "knows" that he fears Yahweh, and the widow says the same. We have here another example of how Elijah was so wrong to insist that he alone feared Yahweh; and for this arrogance he was removed from his post as chief prophet of Israel. Elisha 'knew' of this man's faithfulness to Yahweh, and therefore realized Elijah was wrong in his attitude; and yet Elisha clearly respected Elijah very deeply, looking at the whole man rather than one area of life in which he failed. This is an example to us.

Now the creditor has come to take for himself my two children to be slaves-

The sons of the prophets were not wealthy. We think of the borrowed axe head, and their cooking stew of whatever they could find. They would have been discriminated against in Israelite society. Such behaviour by a creditor was contrary to the spirit of the Mosaic law, but clearly it was the kind of thing which went on in Israel at the time. The children could be taken as servants, but not as slaves (Lev. 25:39-41 uses the same word for "slaves" as used here). Instead of challenging the creditor as to his disobedience to the Mosaic law, Elisha chose to resolve the situation another way. Head on confrontation with people over their disobedience to Divine law may have been the way of the spirit of Elijah and John the Baptist, but the Lord Jesus like Elisha tended to tackle such issues in a more oblique manner. As discussed on :7, a far more powerful witness and appeal was made to the man when the

woman paid her debt, than if he had simply been challenged point blank regarding his breaking the spirit and letter of the law.

According to Lev. 25:39,40 a poor Israelite could work as a hired servant until the year of Jubilee. To take the woman's children into such servitude was therefore technically in line with the law. We instinctively see a problem with this creditor- but we are thereby set up to want the spirit rather than the letter of Divine law. But Elisha worked to show grace above law through the oil of the Spirit. We see here how one can 'legally' treat brethren in a way that may be just about in line with the letter of a law, but which is in fact the opposite of the way of grace and the Spirit.

The creditor could have taken the sons of the widowed woman according to the law; but Elisha was taught that there was a higher way, and that the legalistic example and position of his idol Elijah wasn't the right way. See on :42 for more examples.

2Ki 4:2 Elisha said to her, What shall I do for you?-

The Lord Jesus appears to quote this in Mk. 10:36. Elisha is alluding to Elijah's words to him: "What shall I do for you?" (2 Kings 2:9). Elisha had asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit. And he had apparently received that. And so his question to the woman is seeking for an opportunity to use that spirit. The woman doesn't answer this question. She simply expects Elisha to do a miracle. But Elisha wants her to have more involvement, to do her human side; hence he asks her what she has in the house.

"What can I do for you?" is a question Elisha asks twice (:13 also). But it is exactly the question Elijah had asked him (2 Kings 2:9). We wonder whether this reflects how he was too much in a personality cult behind Elijah, using his very terms and language. Or whether Elijah's grace to him was now being reflected by him to others, just as grace does have a natural way of being reflected.

"What shall I do?" could suggest Elisha was poor and couldn't help. He had once owned yokes of oxen, but true giving to the Lord leaves us minus for life and isn't always compensated. He could also however have been focusing her upon her need, like the Lord asking the blind man what he wanted, and appearing to walk on past the disciples on the lake or to take leave of those on the way to Emmaus. This focusing of man upon what he really wants is a feature of God's dealings with men.

Tell me: what do you have in the house? She said, Your handmaid has nothing in the house, except a pot of oil-

"Pot" is from the same root as 'anoint'; it refers to oil used for anointing, not for cooking. Hence LXX "save the oil with which I shall anoint myself". It is the same word translated "jewels" in Ex. 3:22. She had no food. She was worse than the widow of Zarephath who had a little oil and a little flour. This widow had no food at all. So this is an example of Elisha doing greater miracles than Elijah, having a double portion of his spirit. The sale of a large amount of such anointing oil would really have been enough to clear her debts and to live on for the rest of her days, whereas multiplying cooking oil would not have had the same effect.

The idea is "an anointing of oil" - "so much oil, as would serve me for one anointing of my person". The hint may be that by faith, she could provide for the anointing of many others. The oil of the Spirit was to be provided for others through her plight and the resolution of her desperate situation. The oil may have been used for anointing, as her husband had been a "son of the prophets". It may have been what he was anointed with. And now through her suffering, this anointing was shared with others, mainly women.

2Ki 4:3 Then he said, Go, borrow containers, empty ones, from of all your neighbours-
The word for "container" is translated "jewels" in Ex. 3:22; 11:2, where the same three Hebrew words are found. The Israelite women were to "borrow" from their "neighbours" such "jewels / containers" and place them on their "sons" (Ex. 3:22). The connection is in that once again Elisha is being set up as Moses. Elijah had been set up to be as Moses; see on 1 Kings 19:11. But when in Moses' cave on Sinai, he had been shown that he was not as Moses because he lacked Moses' humility. And he had been sent to anoint Elisha to replace him. Elisha therefore is being set up as Moses, as noted throughout 2 Kings 3. It could be that now he takes the initiative, and himself now structures a miracle in order to present himself as Moses. The obvious connection was also to lift the woman up to a higher level, to see beyond her immediate problem of debt. She was not only going to get out of the debt problem, an exodus from her immediate 'Egypt'. She was to be given wealth which was to be used as the Israelites used what they borrowed from their immediate neighbours- to build God's tabernacle / dwelling place. But she was to do that through spending the wealth on raising her sons in the faith. That for her was building the tabernacle.

Don't borrow just a few-

See on 2 Kings 8:10. The idea was, Don't just give God a half hearted try. Believe Him to the maximum, and act accordingly. The word / Gospel will inevitably have a result, and yet it is also limited by the attitudes of men. The widow woman was told to borrow pots in which to place the oil which would be miraculously provided. The extent of the miracle was limited by the number and size of the pots she borrowed in faith. The same principle is seen in 2 Kings 3:16; the more trenches were dug, the more water was provided. And so the exhortation is to us, to not "borrow just a few", to not be minimalists in our approach to God's ways but seek to realize our spiritual potentials to the maximum. "Few" is the same word used for how the widow whom Elijah helped had a "little" oil in a container (1 Kings 17:12; also s.w. Ps. 37:16; Prov. 15:16). This widow woman was being invited to see the similarities, and to act likewise so that her oil would also be enough for her and her family.

I have discussed earlier how the use of the Spirit by Elijah was not always exactly as God wished, but power was delegated to him to use. Thus he brought fire down twice to destroy groups of 50 men, but the Lord implicitly criticizes this. And Elijah was stopped from scribbling the third group of 50. And so we wonder whether Elisha's miracle here was thought up by himself, although it used God's power. There are clear similarities with the widow woman and her son having her flour and cooking oil miraculously multiplied by Elijah in time of famine and want. And one suspects Elijah was seeking to emulate and replicate Elijah's work, rather than accepting Elijah had been fired from the ministry for arrogance and judgmentalism, and God intended Elisha to be a new man for Him. He was so but partially, because he was held back by his hero worship of Elijah and constant endeavour to be like Elijah, rather than being a totally new creation. And we see a lot of this in church life.

2Ki 4:4 You shall go in, and shut the door on yourself and on your sons-

There is a connection between shutting the door and praying (:33; Mt. 6:6). The idea was that her situation was going to be read as a prayer. And practically, Elisha didn't want others seeing the miracle. The actions of God in our lives are intimate, between Him and ourselves; and not to be disturbed by the observations and perceptions of others. Elisha wasn't present when the miracle happened; he wanted her to experience God alone, directly in her poverty stricken kitchen, without any religious representative present. Prayers and miracles behind shut doors are a feature of the narrative here; and the Lord alludes here by saying we should pray likewise. The idea is that relationship with God and His action in our lives is by its

nature, totally personal. The Shunammite woman likewise closes the door on her dead son (:21).

Shutting the door was also to remind her later that nobody could have brought oil in to her. We all have a tendency to later rationalize away God's wonderful works. And that is made intellectually respectable by higher critics.

And pour out into all those containers; and you shall set aside that which is full-

The idea was that the pouring out had to be continuous (:6). This was an exhortation to use to the maximum the potential given. The oil would continue to be there to be poured out, as long as she had containers for it to go into. If she were to take a break and run out for more containers, the oil would cease to flow. The extent of the miracle was directly related to how much faith and effort she had shown in borrowing the containers. The miracle repeats the essence of the situation in 2 Kings 3:16, where the Israelites had to dig ditches, and then water was abundantly poured into them by God, thus giving them the victory. The same word for "full" is used about the filling of the ditches and the filling of the pots. The scale of Elisha's work in 2 Kings 3 was national, saving the lives of thousands of soldiers and giving victory to God's people. Now the scale is different- one obscure widow woman. The same saving Divine hand at work amongst the nations is at work in one obscure life.

In the same way as they had to obediently dig the ditches, doing what was totally counter intuitive, so the woman had to borrow the vessels before the miracle happened. As with the woman told to borrow empty pots to have oil multiplied in them (2 Kings 4:3), the extent of this miracle was controlled by the degree to which the people were obedient. The more ditches [LXX "pits"] were dug, the greater the amount of water would be provided, and the greater the effect of the illusion upon the Moabites..

2Ki 4:5 So she went from him, and shut the door on herself and on her sons; they brought the containers to her, and she poured out-

The Divine cameraman is as it were zoomed in upon the scene, as the boys brought the containers to her, with her pouring continually into them. For the pouring was continuous (see on :4). The words for 'pouring out' and "oil" in :2 are those used of pouring out oil in anointing (Gen. 28:18; 35:14; Lev. 8:12; 1 Sam. 10:1 etc.) and preparing the offerings (Lev. 2:1,6). She was being bidden see this act of faith as a religious act, preparing for a life of further sacrifice and dedication to Divine service, rather than simply a means of getting out from her immediate problems. The word for 'pouring out' is used later in this chapter (:40,41). The same spirit of faith in pouring out was being asked for, and the widow was the parade example to those men.

The nature of the miracle required that the woman had her sons assisting her, gathering the vessels and holding them whilst she poured out into them; :6 implies she asked her son to bring another container whilst she held the pouring pot. They were the ones saved, and so they were the ones brought in to the work and used. Just as we are. Seeing Elisha wasn't present with them, the experience was intended to bind mother and sons closer together. Which is what participating in redemption should do to all experiencing it. This miracle behind closed doors would however have soon been shared by the woman- because she was seen in the village market selling oil from her neighbour's vessels and then returning those vessels to them. Questions would have been asked- 'Where did the oil come from?', 'What did you use my vessel for?'. And so the very private personal relationship and activity between God and the woman, behind closed doors, would have become the basis of her witness to her world.

2Ki 4:6 It happened, when the containers were full, that she said to her son, Bring me another container. He said to her, There isn't another container. The oil stopped flowing-

As discussed on :4, the oil flowed continually, and the extent of the miracle was therefore only limited by the number of containers which they had borrowed in faith and works of faith. The filling of the containers with the oil of the Spirit may look forward to how Israel had become as empty containers at the hands of the Babylonians, but were to be filled with the Spirit as far as they believed the promise (s.w. Jer. 51:34). The idea is that the oil / spirit keeps flowing whilst there is a vessel able to receive it. A profound principle. We wonder why the detail of :6 is included. Possibly we are to infer that sons and mother looked at each other with the unspoken thought that if they had only borrowed more vessels, they would have had even more oil to sell.

2Ki 4:7 Then she came and told the man of God. He said, Go, sell the oil, and pay your debt-
We are left to imagine the surprise and awkwardness of the creditor. This was a far more powerful way of leading him to a more Godly attitude than a head on confrontation with him about his breaking the letter and spirit of the Mosaic law. See on :1.

And you and your sons shall live on the rest-

I suggested on :3 that the wealth received from borrowing pots from her neighbours was analogous to that received by the Israelites when they borrowed from their neighbours when they left Egypt. And they used it to build God's dwelling place. But she was to do that through spending the wealth on raising her sons in the faith. That for her was building the tabernacle.

2Ki 4:8 It fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where there was a prominent woman; and she persuaded him to eat bread. So it was, that as often as he passed by, he turned in there to eat bread-

Shunem would have been a logical stopping point on journeys from mount Carmel, where it seems there was a school of the prophets, to the towns of Galilee where apparently Elisha ministered on the kind of circuit which Samuel operated. Maybe her persuasion of Elijah to eat food with her was because he felt awkward in the presence of a wealthy person. We can conclude that Elisha lived on Carmel, still following in the personality cult of Elijah rather than being a new creation for God's use after Elijah was found inadequate for the ministry.

2Ki 4:9 She said to her husband, See now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God that passes by us continually-

It seems that Elisha didn't specifically tell her of his prophetic work. Perhaps he as a poor man was shy to witness to the wealthy, as we can be. If even the lead prophet of Israel felt like this, it's unsurprising that we also do. Or perhaps she was a Gentile and he considered her unworthy of the Gospel.

2Ki 4:10 Please let us make a little room on the wall-

The fact she "went up" to the room (:21) suggests it was a room on the wall in the sense of built above and upon the structural wall of the ground floor.

Let us set for him there a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp stand. It shall be, when he comes to us, that he shall turn in there-

The furniture might suggest that Elisha was literate and was involved in the study of the scrolls as well as writing.

2Ki 4:11 One day he came there, and he turned into the room and lay there-

We are invited to imagine him meditating as he lay down, counting his blessings, amongst which was the kindness of this wealthy woman. And he wanted to respond to her grace.

2Ki 4:12 He said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. When he had called her, she stood before him-

Although she was a great woman, and I discussed on :8,9 how Elisha may have been keenly aware of this, she stands before him as a subordinate to his spirituality. Or it could be that she stood before Gehazi (:13), on the basis that the representative of a person is spoken of as them. This is why the Lord Jesus as God's supreme representative can be spoken of functionally as "God", although He was not God in any Trinitarian sense.

2Ki 4:13 He said to him, Say now to her-

As discussed on :12, it is possible that Gehazi spoke with her on Elisha's behalf. But it could be that [as so often with the Biblical text] this is not in chronological order. We are being given the background as to what had gone on when finally the woman "stood before" Elisha himself in :12. It would seem inappropriate for Elisha to ask Gehazi to call the woman to him if in fact Gehazi was to speak with her (:12). Rather would Elisha have told Gehazi to go to her and speak directly with her.

'Behold, you have cared for us with all this care. What is to be done for you?'

The Hebrew word for "care" also means "reverence". She 'reverenced' him (RVmg.). To reverence someone is to care for them. Care therefore comes out of a respect / reverence for the person. If we respect persons for who they are, we will care. Care in that sense can't in any sense be properly done or shown if it's simply from a sense of duty, because we're paid to do it, because we might get some benefit from doing so, etc.

Would you like to be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the army?'

Elisha lived in Samaria, or at least had a house there, and was well known it seems to the Israelite leadership- despite his insistence upon Yahweh worship. The leadership likely tolerated him in that they considered that they were worshipping Yahweh, but did it through their Baal worship. This was and is now the essential temptation to all God's people.

She answered, I dwell among my own people-

This would imply she was a Gentile, and didn't want to be spoken of to the king of Israel. This continues the similarities with Elijah, who was also cared for by a Gentile woman. The woman may well have been a Philistine, as the events of 2 Kings 8:2 appear to have happened at this time.

2Ki 4:14 He said, What then is to be done for her? Gehazi answered, Most certainly she has no son, and her husband is old-

The scene is so imaginable. Two men in the guest room discussing what they know about their host and how best to help her. Gehazi observes the age difference between the man and his wife, and seems to sense she had never had her own children. We are left to imagine the wide range of possible scenarios which may have resulted in this situation. The narrative seems purposefully open ended at points like this, so that we can enter into the situation.

This is what Elisha had been asked by Elijah. On one hand, we see here grace experienced being reflected to others. But we might also speculate that Elisha was dominated by a desire to replicate his master Elijah; when it was God's intention from Horeb onwards that Elisha replace Elijah and have a better spirit. Instead his spirituality was all about imitating a mentor. We see the same feature in so much small time Protestant sect mentality. Elisha, like Elijah, had some latitude of usage in using God's power to do miracles. We wonder whether at times he used that power to consciously imitate Elijah. Elisha lived on Carmel, :25, where Elijah liked to be after his triumph there in 1 Kings 18. This suggests a slavish following of Elijah rather than being a new man for God's service, who had learned

from Elijah's errors. Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit, but the Lord clearly viewed Elijah's spirit as wrong and not of His spirit.

2Ki 4:15 He said, Call her. When he had called her, she stood in the door-

The Shunamite woman stood "in the door", i.e. on the threshold, when Elisha gave her the message that she would have a child. This was surely to help her see the similarities with Abraham and Sarah in the tent door, who were given the same message; and they like the Shunamite woman almost lost and then 'received back' the promised son.

2Ki 4:16 He said, At this season, when the time comes around, you will embrace a son. She said, No, my lord, you man of God, do not lie to your handmaid-

As noted on :15, this continues the connection with Abraham, for these are similar words to those spoken to him by the Angel (Gen. 18:14). And she responds as Sarah does. Seeing that God's word does not lie (Num. 23:19; Hab. 2:3), her words are tantamount to disbelief in the prophetic word. See on :17.

2Ki 4:17 The woman conceived, and bore a son at that season, when the time came around, as Elisha had said to her-

Again the language is so similar to the record of Abraham and Sarah having Isaac. But we note that the woman didn't apparently have faith in God's word to her. And as noted on :37, at the end of the story we are left wondering whether she did really personally believe. For unlike the widow woman whose son Elijah resurrected, there is no gratitude from her to God. Remember that she was a Gentile (:13). The point is, great things were done for a woman who was at best an agnostic, because of the faith of third parties. We see the same in Mk. 2:5. And this opens up a huge range of pastoral responsibility for us in the lives of others.

2Ki 4:18 When the child was grown, it happened one day that he went out to his father to the reapers-

There are intentional connections with Boaz, who also married a much younger woman and had a child by her. But as discussed on :37, the question is left open in the narrative here as to how much they really believed. The boy goes out to the field and finds death; later in this chapter we will read of a man going out into a field and finding death, in the wild gourds. Elisha saves from death in both cases. The idea surely is that God through him intervened in the daily crises of the lives of obscure, nameless individuals. And this is His style to this day. This is what it means to have God in your life.

2Ki 4:19 He said to his father, My head! My head! He said to his servant, Carry him to his mother-

He assumed it was just sunstroke. We note the man's wealth, having servants. We wonder why in the bigger picture, God allowed this to happen. Both Elisha and Gehazi wanted to do something wonderful for the woman as a reward for her merit. But that is contrary to the spirit of grace. And so all concerned had to be taught that life is given, taken and restored all by grace, and not according to merit.

2Ki 4:20 When he had taken him, and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees until noon, and then died-

Sitting on her knees implies he was still young.

2Ki 4:21 She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door on him, and went out-

I discussed on :4 how there is a connection between shutting the door and praying (:33; Mt. 6:6). But the record doesn't say that she prayed. She simply thinks in a superstitious way that the dead child may be somehow blessed if he lays on the bed of the man of God. The narrative leaves us guessing as to whether she ever came to true faith in the God of Israel, seeing she was a Gentile (:13) with her own belief systems.

2Ki 4:22 She called to her husband and said, Please send me one of the servants, and one of the donkeys, that I may run to the man of God, and come again-

A full believer would surely have prayed directly to God. But she passionately believes that the physical presence of the man of God might possibly lead to the child's resurrection. Again the narrative teases us with the question of how far she really believed herself in Israel's God.

2Ki 4:23 He said, Why would you want to go to him today? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath. She said, It's alright-

We conclude that she had not told her husband that the child had died, leaving him caught up in all the concerns of harvest time, his busiest time of the year, thinking that the child had just suffered sunstroke (see on :19). His response could suggest that she was used to travelling by donkey to keep the Sabbath and new moon feasts. Or his faith and spirituality may have been so weak that he thought that the man of God could not be bothered by anyone apart from on such occasions. This was the thinking of mere religion rather than spirituality. And he may be saying that a Jewish prophet could only be approached on such festivals, so it was a pointless journey. Again the record is intentionally vague, eliciting constantly in us the question as to whether or how far the woman personally believed in Israel's God. We note that the ten tribe kingdom considered Sabbath keeping and new moon observance as quite normal. The problem was that they thought they could worship Baal as part of Yahweh worship, and so festivals of Yahweh were mixed with Baal worship- just as effectively happened in the church at Corinth. "It is well...." here and in :26 likewise teases us, as to whether she was just fobbing him off because she didn't want to tell him their son was dead; or whether she said this in trust that Elisha would indeed make all things "well" through God's power.

2Ki 4:24 Then she saddled a donkey, and said to her servant, Drive, and go forward! Don't slow down for me, unless I ask you to-

It was normal for the head of a household to have their donkey saddled by servants or inferiors (1 Kings 13:13,27). But this "great woman" was so urgent that she saddled her own donkey.

2Ki 4:25 So she went, and came to the man of God to Mount Carmel. It happened, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, there is the Shunammite-

Although Elisha had a house in Samaria, he was clearly associated with a school of prophets on Mount Carmel. Elisha would have seen her coming up the mountain.

2Ki 4:26 Please run now to meet her, and ask her, 'Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?' She answered, It is well-

As noted throughout this account, we are left to ponder whether "It is well" was a statement of her faith that Elisha would make things "well" in the end; or a vague answer because she wanted to talk with Elisha and not Gehazi. There are so many of these kinds of open ended statements in the narrative that we assume they are intended.

2Ki 4:27 When she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught hold of his feet. Gehazi

came near to thrust her away; but the man of God said, Leave her alone; for her soul is troubled within her; and Yahweh has hidden it from me, and has not told me-

Although she was angry with Elisha (:28), her passionate clinging to his feet reflects genuine respect and devotion. These two conflicting strands of feeling are quite often found in people as they come to God, or His representatives, in times of grief and loss. On one hand there is anger with God, and yet also devotion towards Him and a clinging on in faith. God hiding things from people is typically a sign of His displeasure; and He reveals that which is hidden from the world to His true servants (Is. 48:6; Lk. 10:21; 2 Cor. 4:3; Col. 1:26). So we can appreciate Elisha feeling at this point that he is somehow out of step with God.

2Ki 4:28 Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? Didn't I say, Do not deceive me?-

Her view is that God had come into her life through Elisha, on His initiative, and she had been given the child on Elisha's initiative. She recalls years later how she had suspected Elisha was somehow deceiving her. And so she pins the guilt for the child's death directly on Elisha, even though this was unreasonable. But it is absolutely psychologically credible. For the death of a child creates an almost overwhelming desire to pin the guilt upon somebody. And Elisha was a convenient person.

There is a psychological credibility in the way she doesn't say he has died. Truly, "Great grief shrinks from putting itself into words". She cannot bring herself to say "My son is dead;" but by reproaching the prophet with having "deceived" her, she sufficiently indicates her loss.

2Ki 4:29 Then he said to Gehazi, Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand, and go your way. If you meet any man, don't greet him; and if anyone greets you, don't answer him again. Then lay my staff on the face of the child-

Perhaps Gehazi was sent ahead at the fastest possible speed, not even wasting a moment on greeting people (which was often a lengthy business), because Elisha thought that time was of the essence in saving the child. And Gehazi could run or travel far faster than Elisha could as an older man.

But a snapshot of Gehazi's earnest, speedy journey is taken in the New Testament, and applied to the preachers of the Gospel, who likewise have limited time in which to share the vital power of resurrection with those who are about to die, or already spiritually dead. Therefore the disciples were to go on their preaching mission without pausing to greet others, such was their haste (Lk. 10:4 cp. 2 Kings 4:29). The Greek word translated 'greet' also carries the idea of joining together with others. People rarely travelled alone unless they were in great haste, but rather moved in caravans. But for the Lord's messengers, there was to be no loss of time. Every minute was to be precious. In a world full of time wasting distractions, information we don't need to know... this is all so necessary. No wonder that when those men finally came to themselves, realized their calling, and hurled themselves in joy at this world after the Lord's ascension... they preached repentance, immediate conversion and quick baptism, right up front.

2Ki 4:30 The mother of the child said, As Yahweh lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you. He arose, and followed her-

The woman apparently had no faith in Gehazi, and was insistent that Elisha personally was her only hope for the restoration of her child. "I will not leave you" were the very words spoken by Elisha to Elijah (2 Kings 2:2,4,6). Elisha then had in view not simply a literal determination to follow Elijah, but a commitment to spiritually follow him. "Leave" is the usual word for "forsake", used in the many appeals not to forsake Yahweh for other gods.

Again we are left with intentional unclarity, as to whether the woman was vowing to follow Elisha spiritually despite the loss of her child.

2Ki 4:31 Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff on the face of the child; but there was neither voice nor hearing. Therefore he returned to meet him, and told him, saying, The child has not awakened-

Elisha was perhaps elderly or weak, and the urgency of the situation meant that Gehazi was sent to run ahead of them. But the lesson was that the external symbols of religion, such as the staff of a prophet, would not bring the power and presence of God. "Neither voice nor hearing / response" is the very phrase used of how there was no such response or hearing from Baal when the prophets of Baal cried to him on Carmel (1 Kings 18:26,29). So we get the hint that Gehazi may possibly have invoked Baal as well as Yahweh, and we will see in 2 Kings 5 that his spirituality was at best questionable. Or it may be that the woman also entertained some aspects of Baal belief, for she was a Gentile (:13) and as noted throughout, we are left never completely sure that she was a fully believer in Yahweh.

2Ki 4:32 When Elisha had come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid on his bed-

The record implies that Elisha only now realizes that the child is dead; for he has commented that the Lord has hidden from him what has happened. This was surely to exercise his own faith. This is why crises come upon us unexpectedly; not because God is cruel, but to pique the intensity of our faith.

This was precisely the situation with the child whom Elijah resurrected; the same words for "laid on his bed" are used in 1 Kings 17:19. Elisha was inspired to faith by perceiving the similarities between this situation and that faced by Elijah. We too will be inspired by perceiving that no situation in essence is unique, but all were somehow met before in the range of histories we have in the Biblical record.

2Ki 4:33 He went in therefore, and shut the door on them both, and prayed to Yahweh-

The "therefore" may allude to how he perceived the situation as so similar to that Elijah had faced in 1 Kings 17:19. He knew what to do because he perceived the similarities with the precedent set for him by Elijah. It's hard to discern how much of this kind of behaviour was explicitly commanded by God, and how much was purely on Elisha's initiative. He had not laid the child on his own bed, the woman had, and so he was nudged by that towards perceiving the similarities with the Elijah precedent. And therefore he entered the room, knowing he was set up to resurrect the child. Mt. 6:6 alludes here, inviting each of us to see ourselves as in Elisha's position, every day- closing the door on our room and praying in secret.

2Ki 4:34 He went up, and cast himself on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth, and his eyes on his eyes, and his hands on his hands. He lay upon him; and the flesh of the child grew warm-

Elijah cast himself down in prayer (1 Kings 18:42). The word occurs only in 2 Kings 4:34,35, as if it was Elijah's example which inspired Elisha likewise to cast himself down [AV "stretch"] upon the child. See on :32,33. The implication is that Elisha did so in prayer; and in passing, we wonder whether this implies that Elijah's stretching himself upon another child, although a different Hebrew word, was also in prayer. Again we see that Elijah's prayerful example inspired another. Our attitude to prayer is so easily influential upon others, and we ourselves are likewise easily influenced. It should be no shame nor embarrassment to us to

instantly break into prayer, nor to kneel down to further our intensity in prayer, regardless of the social embarrassment this may involve in some cultures.

It has been suggested that this involves three separate procedures from Elisha on eyes, hands and mouth. Because the proportion of an adult body to a child's wouldn't have allowed all this to be done simultaneously. In this case we again see how there was a process of apparently futile efforts and apparently unanswered prayers... before the miracle happened.

2Ki 4:35 Then he returned, and walked in the house once back and forth; and went up, and cast himself on him. Then the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes-

The resurrection wasn't immediate. Elisha had to cast himself down in prayer again, just as Elijah (whose example he was imitating, 1 Kings 18:42) had to do so several times before the rain came. The reason is multi factorial, but as with Divine responses to our prayers, part of the picture may be that immediate answers to prayers would turn God into some kind of magic man who comes up with the goods at the click of our fingers. Whereas His response to man is part of the ongoing, mutual relationship with man which He so seeks. And the need to keep on praying, receiving partial answers before we get the complete answer, is part of developing that relationship.

The miracle didn't happen automatically. Elisha has to twice lay himself on the child, walking back and forth in prayer in between the two sessions. We note that prayer can be made whilst walking back and forth. Gehazi failed to revive the boy with the staff. Elisha had to more than once try to revive him. Heb. 11:35 says that by faith, women receives their dead to life. Both Elijah and Elisha experienced the need to keep on trying in faith and prayer before the miracle happened. We think of Elijah having to pray seven times for the rain to come, and stretching three times upon a dead child to revive it. Or Elisha initially failing to part the Jordan. Prayer is rarely immediately answered in order to pique our faith and intensity.

2Ki 4:36 He called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite! So he called her. When she had come in to him, he said, Take up your son-

Again we note that Elisha tends to operate with the woman through Gehazi. Perhaps this was to recall how he had asked Gehazi to call the woman, and she had likewise come to him, when he first told her she was to have a child. Elisha wanted her to perceive the similarities, and to realize that the power of God's word which had made her pregnant was no less active at this time also. We too find we are treated in such a way as to restimulate past experiences with the Lord.

2Ki 4:37 Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground; and she took up her son, and went out-

There are strong similarities with Elijah's curing of the child of the woman who had cared for him in 1 Kings 17:24. That woman's response was "Now I know that the word of Yahweh in your mouth is truth". The situation is so similar that we are invited to wonder whether this Shunamite said or felt the same. But we aren't told. And again, the narrative is left hanging, to encourage us to enter into it.

2Ki 4:38 Elisha came again to Gilgal. There was a famine in the land; and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him-

We have in this chapter a collection of cameos from Elisha's ministry. They may not be chronological, as this famine was surely that of 2 Kings 8:1.

He said to his servant, Set on the great pot, and boil stew for the sons of the prophets-
We have the picture here of the communal life amongst the "sons of the prophets", using a

large cauldron in which to cook their collective food; although we know from :1 that some of them were married with homes and children. We get the impression that instead of the sons of the prophets giving a meal to their respected visitor, as was normal custom, he cooked for them. This could be a reflection of their total lack of food, but I noted throughout 2 Kings 2 that the sons of the prophets can be detected as not being hugely respectful towards Elijah and Elisha. Elijah went too far in considering they were all apostate, and he was the only true prophet of Yahweh; but clearly he considered they were majorly spiritually compromised, and their attitude to Elisha and Elijah gives reason to think that indeed all was not spiritually well amongst them.

2Ki 4:39 One went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered of it a lapful of wild gourds, and came and shred them into the pot of stew; for they didn't recognize them-

The plant in view is hard to define, but "wild gourd" appears to refer to some kind of wild cucumber; or LXX "wild pumpkin". These plants were not necessarily poisonous, but would have given the stew a bitter and suspicious taste, leading them to fear that they were being poisoned.

2Ki 4:40 So they poured out for the men to eat. It happened, as they were eating of the stew, that they cried out, and said, Man of God, there is death in the pot! They could not eat of it- Given the tense relationship between the sons of the prophets and Elisha (see on :38), they maybe interpreted the unusual and bitter taste of the stew which Elisha had cooked as being because he and Gehazi wanted to poison them to death.

2Ki 4:41 But he said, Bring meal, then. He cast it into the pot; and he said, Pour out for the people, that they may eat. There was now no harm in the pot-

The word for 'pouring out' is used earlier in this chapter (:5), again in connection with a pot or container. The same spirit of faith in pouring out was being asked for, and the widow was the parade example to those men. Using a handful of meal / flour in a miraculous way recalled what Elijah had done likewise (s.w. 1 Kings 17:12). And again we wonder whether Elisha chose to use flour in this way in order to consciously imitate Elijah, within the parameters of usage of God's power which he knew he had been given. And again we enquire as to whether Elisha [good man as he was] remained too much in the personality cult of Elijah, rather than becoming God's new man as needed and intended.

2Ki 4:42 A man from Baal Shalishah came, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits-

The first fruits were to be given to the priests, and there is no evidence that Elisha was a Levite. The faithful Levites had generally fled from the ten tribe kingdom to Judah. The "sons of the prophets" had effectively taken their place as the teachers of God's word to Israel.

Twenty loaves of barley, and fresh ears of grain in his sack. He said, Give to the people, that they may eat-

The Lord told the disciples to feed the crowd, when they had nothing to give them (Mk. 6:37). He was actually quoting from 2 Kings 4:42, where the man of God told his servant to do the same. He gave what bread he had to the people, and miraculously it fed them. The disciples don't seem to have seen the point; otherwise, they would have realized that if they went ahead in faith, another such miracle would likely be wrought. But it seems that God almost over-ruled them to make the response of the faithless servant of 2 Kings 4:43: "Shall we... give them to eat?" (Mk. 6:37). They were almost 'made' to do this to make them later

see the similarity with the 2 Kings 4 incident. If they had been more spiritually aware at the time, the Lord's quotation would have been a fillip for their faith.

The firstfruits were brought to the Levites (Num. 18:13; Dt. 18:4,5). The miracle shares these things with the sons of the prophets, and so it effectively made the sons of the prophets the equivalent of the Levites in the ten tribe kingdom. Just as Elisha's laying on a dead body didn't make him unclean, nor did Elijah's contact with unclean ravens, so again we see these men being taught a way of spirituality according to the spirit rather than the letter of the law. The creditor could have taken the sons of the widowed woman according to the law; but Elisha was taught that there was a higher way, and that the legalistic example and position of his idol Elijah wasn't the right way.

2Ki 4:43 His servant said-

The reference may be to Elisha's servant, Gehazi, who lacked the faith to raise the widow's son; and we will again see in 2 Kings 5 had some serious spiritual problems. The word for "servant" used here specifically means 'minister' (s.w. Ex. 24:13; 33:11).

What, should I set this before a hundred men? But he said, Give the people, that they may eat; for thus says Yahweh, 'They will eat, and will have some left over'-

See on :42. "A hundred men" may be a general number, but we recall the various mentions of "sons of the prophets" in groups of 50, and how Obadiah had hidden 100 of them by groups of 50 in a cave. It seems there are no more than four schools of the prophets mentioned at this time (Carmel, Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho), and possibly there were remnants of those at Ramah and Kirjath Jearim from the time of Samuel (1 Sam. 10:5). If there were 50-100 prophets in each, then along with their families this would have meant that there were likely several thousand people who were faithful to Yahweh in the ten tribe kingdom. It makes sense of God's comment that there were 7000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Although all of them were considered by Elijah as somehow astray on one point or another, as he felt he was the only true prophet of Yahweh who had not fallen away.

2Ki 4:44 So he set it before them, and they ate, and left some of it, according to the word of Yahweh-

This again was repeated by the Lord in His replication of this miracle in a far larger scale. There is always a generosity in God's dealings, an abundance of provision, which should be reflected in our attitudes too. We note how in Lk. 9:8, Herod enquires whether the Lord is in fact Elijah, and then in Lk. 9:19 we learn that many people thought that He was Elijah. In between those two questions about whether the Lord was Elijah, we have the feeding of the five thousand- a miracle framed in terms of how Elisha, not Elijah, fed 100 men in a similar way (2 Kings 4:43.44). It could be that the Lord is replying that He is not Elijah, but He is more in the spirit of Elisha, the prophet intended to replace Elijah. This all again hints that the Lord is pointing out that He was not of Elijah's spirit.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 5

2Ki 5:1 Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him Yahweh had given victory to Syria-

The reference may be to the Syrian victory of 1 Kings 22. It is unclear whether he was honourable to God because like Jehu, he as an unspiritual man had still done God's will against Israel. Or whether he was honourable to the Syrians because they realized God was working through Naaman. He was clearly a man whom Israel's God had an interest in, and this was recognized. The high value of the present taken to secure Naaman's healing from

Yahweh would indicate that the Syrians had a real sense that Yahweh was very powerful, moreso than their own deities.

We note that Naaman was "with" / before his master; and the Israelite maiden likewise was with or before her mistress (:2). "Waited on" in :2 is the s.w. translated "with" in :1. She too had suffered, as Naaman was. The two are therefore presented as in parallel; the mighty and the obscure. But equal before God, and in fact the obscure, anonymous slave girl becomes the saviour of the mighty and famous. His skin is healed to become as a child (:14), the same word in the feminine form used in :2 of how the servant girl had been brought out of Israel as a child. He finally describes himself in :17 as Elisha's "servant". He found humility, and became as his servants.

We note the intended contrasts between Naaman and the Hebrew slave girl. He was a great man, she was a little or small girl. The small saved the great, in the inversion of principles which there is in the spiritual economy.

He was also a mighty man of valour-

Meaning he had slain many Israelites. Naaman had to submit himself on several occasions- before his wife, his wife's maid, the anonymous servant of :4, Elisha, his own accompanying servants... God's work with us is largely about eliciting in us humility, and bringing us ever down towards it. Naaman's mightiness was humbled. And yet he was angry with Elisha's command to dip in the Jordan... anger is so often a result of hurt pride. Anger management is really all about finding humility before God and man. So many angry people are really just cases of hurt pride.

But he was a leper-

We note that lepers were openly present in society in Syria, even at senior levels, whereas in Israel the law of Moses required they were excluded from society.

2Ki 5:2 The Syrians had gone out in companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maiden; and she waited on Naaman's wife-

It was the law of the jungle then (as it is now in primitive societies) that the men were killed, and the women raped. And the prettier ones carried off for further abuse. This girl would have witnessed all that, perhaps being a victim of it, and had probably experienced the murder of her parents and family. She was a great example of faith, spirituality and forgiveness that she was minded to try to help her master, who was the ultimate leader of the Syrian armed forces. See on 2 Kings 6:8.

Many of the Elisha and Elijah incidents concern obscure characters. The widow woman with whom Elijah lived for three years was so obscure that Ahab's search for Elijah never led anyone there. And so it is with the widow of one of the sons of the prophets, Naaman's wife's servant girl, a guy who borrows an axe and the axe head goes plop in the river etc. Perhaps the obscurity of these people was a foil for the high profile life of Elijah and Elisha. They were being shown that humble spirituality in obscurity and personal suffering and difficulty is the essence, and not public work for its own sake. We observed this difference between Obadiah's more private spirituality, and Elijah's.

The girl had been taken captive as a small child or young person, from an Israel where the majority were Baal worshippers. We wonder how much she actually knew or remembered about Yahweh worship, beyond a sense that this was right, and that Elisha as Yahweh's prophet could do miracles. And yet this slender knowledge of God led her to the grace whereby she wished blessing upon the figurehead of her abusers. For likely Naaman's men had slain her family and maybe sexually abused her. For that was what happened to female captives of whatever age. We likewise wonder how much Naaman "knew" beyond that intuitive sense that Yahweh through His prophet was possibly capable of healing him. But he is presented as the model Gentile convert to the Hope of Israel. His subsequent conviction of

Yahweh is presented as very strong. But hardly on the basis of doctrinal instruction. We might prefer to read 'And Elisha instructed him in the things of Yahweh and he eagerly accepted them'. But that is absent. We conclude that there is a hole within every human heart that only the true God can fill. When a man responds to that inbuilt conscience, then he is progressively convicted and accepted by God. And of course as in Naaman's case, is therefore providentially brought into contact with God's true people. And yet Elisha's enigmatic "Go in peace", or "Goodbye", avoiding a yes / no answer to his question about continuing an appearance of Rimmon worship, leaves us enquiring about the depth of his conversion. But the validity of his conversion is certainly strongly implied by the record.

2Ki 5:3 She said to her mistress, I wish that my lord would visit the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would heal him of his leprosy-

Lk. 4:27 states: "There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them were cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian". So when Naaman's maid asserted that Elisha could cure him of his leprosy, this was not therefore based on experience. She had not even heard of Elisha curing any lepers in Israel. But she believed it was the kind of thing he could do. The word "heal" means 'to assemble' or 'gather together', and we can be sure this was just what the girl said. For in Israel (see on :1), lepers were separated from the people, and the healing of a leper was the gathering back in of the person to society (Num. 11:14,15).

There is quite a theme of servants bringing blessings or good news (1 Sam. 9:6; 16:16; 25:4 cp. Gen. 41:10; 2 Kings 5:3). This may be to reflect God's interest in the significance of the lowly.

2Ki 5:4 Someone went in, and told his lord, saying, The maiden who is from the land of Israel said this-

LXX "She went in and told her lord", suggesting the "someone" in view was Naaman's wife. She had to treat him with respect as he was one of the leaders of Syria, perhaps second only to the king. But see on :1 as to why the servant is just a "someone".

2Ki 5:5 The king of Syria said, Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel-
Probably Jehoram, Ahab's son. Possibly Jehu.

He departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of clothing-

The high value of the present taken to secure Naaman's healing from Yahweh would indicate that the Syrians had a real sense that Yahweh was very powerful, moreso than their own deities. See on :1. Perhaps they had learned this from their historical defeats at the hands of Israel. And yet they seem to have believed more strongly in Yahweh than did the Israelites themselves.

Two talents of silver was enough to buy the hill of Samaria (1 Kings 16:24). He brought enough silver to buy it five times over, along with all the gold. He believed that human might and wealth could purchase God's gift... and when he learnt otherwise, he contrasts badly with Gehazi who so desperately wanted some of that vast wealth for himself.

2Ki 5:6 He brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter has come to you, behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may heal him of his leprosy-

We wonder why the request was made of the king of Israel, rather than any mention being made of Elisha. Perhaps there had been a loss of information during transmission. For the Israelite girl had just passed a comment to her mistress, and then from her the message was passed to Naaman and thence to the king of Syria. Or maybe it was assumed that any prophet

must be subject to the king of his country. The idea of personal faith was foreign to them, whereby a man like Elisha could have direct relationship with God regardless of his king.

2Ki 5:7 When the king of Israel had read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends to me to heal a man of his leprosy? Surely he is seeking a quarrel against me-

The King fails to make the connection with Elisha; he doesn't think to ask Elisha to cure Naaman. He reasons on a totally human level. He purposefully contrasts with the anonymous slave girl who knew that there is a prophet in Samaria who can cure leprosy. Just as she is a foil for Naaman, so she is for the king of Israel. Again we see how the humble and obscure are greater than the humanly great. We know from Lk. 4:27 that nobody had been cured of leprosy in Israel at that time. The king of Israel lacked faith, but the Gentile Syrians believed Yahweh could do this. All because the still small voice of an abused Israelite girl had been believed. Indeed the king of Israel considered healing from leprosy to be so impossible, that he concluded this was just a provocation. For Syria and Israel had often been in conflict with each other. And it was a rather bizarre thing, for a neighbouring enemy who only recently had raided Israel and carried people off into captivity... to then come to them offering lots of money so that their army general could be cured by them. The king of Israel saw it all in secular terms, he clearly had no real spiritual dimension in his thinking.

We enquire why there is this part to the story. I suggest we are invited to imagine how Naaman felt. He had come to Israel's king to ask to be cured of his leprosy through Elisha. But the King of Israel is angry and refuses to respond. The initial rebuff was to humble Naaman and deepen his faith; just as he had to dip six times in Jordan without healing before he was healed on the seventh dip.

2Ki 5:8 It was so, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent to the king saying, Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel-

Elisha muscles in, as it were, because he sees that this situation is going to result in war unless he does. Elisha's motive for the healing was so that Naaman "shall know" that God's word was really spoken forth in Israel. And in the end, his desire was fulfilled in Naaman's conversion.

Elisha's retort to the king, "Why have you rent your clothes? Let him come to me, and he will learn that there is a prophet in Israel" contrasts with the king's despairing as to why ever anyone should come "to me" to be healed (:7). It is possible to detect some level of prideful over assurance in Elisha at this point. His refusal to go and talk personally with Naaman could be read the same way, although through this, Naaman learns humility and obedience to God's word.

It could be argued that Elisha's motivation in healing Naaman was so that he would know there was a prophet in Israel- Elisha. We would rather read him saying that he cured him so that Naaman would know the God of Israel. But Elisha's possibly narcissistic attitude still resulted in Naaman coming to the God of Israel.

2Ki 5:9 So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariots, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha-

Elisha sat in his house and messengers from a powerful man, Naaman the leper, came to him; and Elisha displayed an amazing calm before them. This situation repeated in 2 Kings 6:32, where Elisha again sits in his house and the messengers of an aggressive King came to him. The theme of lepers recurs in this latter context also (2 Kings 7:3). And in 2 Kings 5:18 we

read of Naaman as a man upon whose arm a King (of Syria) leaned; and we find one of those sent to Elisha the second time was likewise "a lord upon whose hand the King (of Israel) leaned (2 Kings 7:2). The connections show that God was working out His program in similar ways in widely differing situations.

In 2 Kings 6:17, Elisha prays that God will open the eyes of his frightened servant to behold the Angelic horses and chariots around him. And this may have happened before this present incident (2 Kings 6:8 note). Elisha was *so* confident they were there, that he didn't ask to see them himself. He *knew* they were there; he simply asked that his servant be enabled to see the unseen reality which he calmly knew was there. He of course had had first hand experience of the Angelic horses and chariots (a kind of cherubim) when he had been parted from Elijah in 2 Kings 2:11. This must have left an abiding impression upon him- he knew that those Angelic horses and chariots were in fact permanently encamped around him (cp. Ps. 34:7). And so we are surely to see significance in the way that Naaman came to Elisha's house with *his* horses and chariot- for this is surely a development of a theme of connection between Elisha, horses and chariots (2 Kings 5:9). Most other Israelites would've been petrified to have the horses and chariots of Naaman and a company of Syrians pull up at their door. But Elisha was quite unfazed. He didn't even bother coming out to meet Naaman, knowing this was an insult to Naaman's pride, and was humanly certain to result in Naaman simply killing him and burning his house. Surely the horses-chariot-Elisha connection taught Elisha that in fact there were Angelic horses and chariots around him- he need not fear any human horse and chariot. There is no hint that Angelic activity is any less, or operates in any different way, for us today.

2Ki 5:10 Elisha sent a messenger to him saying-

Elisha doesn't come out of his house and talk to him. He wanted the man to focus his faith in God's word, not in personalities. For his end aim was to help Naaman toward faith that there was a prophet in Israel (:8). But so often, faith is clouded by issues of personality. People join or leave churches because they like / dislike pastors or individuals. And Elisha didn't want that to happen. Elisha also may be insisting that Naaman was to be treated as an Israelite leper would be treated; which meant Elisha could not have contact with him, and therefore he didn't invite the leper into his home. This was because he wanted Naaman to realize that his cure was on account of having been treated as an Israelite; in the hope that he would become a proselyte.

Elisha's healing from a distance recalls his approach with the widow and her two sons in 2 Kings 4. He tells her to shut the door upon herself and her sons, and experience the predicted miracle. Here too, he is careful not to be present at the miracle. He simply predicts it and asks for some obedience before it happens. This again was to help Naaman away from his religious idea that some "man of God" must dramatically interact with him and be present with him. He is being driven to personal experience of God; and the Father works likewise with us all today.

Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored-

Although this was not Christian baptism, it is perhaps analogous. Because humility was elicited by this request to dip in Jordan, as it is by the ritual of baptism. Elisha was aiming to convert Naaman, not simply heal him, so that he could continue as general of the forces who were marauding Israel. The fact there were plenty of lepers in Israel (Lk. 4:27) was evidence enough that the waters of Jordan contained no healing powers of themselves; Naaman was being taught faith in God's word, rather than supposed healing waters. The seven dippings recall the way Jericho was to be circled for six days before victory on the seventh (Josh. 6:3-5), the child sneezed seven times before resurrection (2 Kings 4:35) and the way Elijah was only answered at his seventh prayer (1 Kings 18:43). The intention was that through the six

times performing something which had no immediate answer, faith, hope and humility were elicited. Lev. 14:8; 15:13 speak of the healed leper washing *after* the cure, in order to be then also ritually clean. And there were various sprinkling / cleansing rituals which had to be performed seven times upon the leper (Lev. 14:7,16,27). So Naaman was potentially cured of his leprosy, but what was necessary was that he become ritually clean, and therefore he had to take the step of faith in washing. Had he not done that, the potential cure would have remained an unrealized potential. He was bidden grasp that he had been cured by Elisha; but now he had to wash in order to become spiritually clean and acceptable within Israelite, and not Syrian, society (see on 2 Kings 5:1). It could even be that the washing with water was to invite Naaman to see himself as a Jewish priest being prepared for service (Ex. 29:4 s.w.). We marvel at how God chooses people who may appear the most unlikely. The general of the Syrian army, the enemy of Israel, whose men had just destroyed the family of his wife's servant girl... was the one chosen. And not just to be healed, but to be thereby prepared to work in essence as a priest for God, in the darkness of the high command of Gentile Syria. We learn at the very least never to consider anyone beyond the scope of God's purpose.

And you shall be clean-

This was in addition to having his flesh restored and being healed. As noted on :1, there was no sense amongst the Syrians of ritual uncleanness because of leprosy. Naaman was being bidden see his healing as also something spiritual, which would enable him to serve Yahweh. The language of becoming clean recalls that of the rituals regarding leprosy in Lev. 14. This cleansing in water was to be done *after* the leper was healed. It's as if Naaman had already been cleansed of his leprosy but now had to do the ritual associated with the cleansing of the leper *after* the disease had been healed. From the Divine perspective, Naaman had been healed. But he had to be obedient to the cleansing ritual for this to become apparent.

2Ki 5:11 But Naaman was angry, and went away, and said, I thought, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of Yahweh his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy' -

Clearly Naaman was not a personal believer in Yahweh at this stage. And yet contrary to Pentecostal teaching, true miracles don't always require the faith of the sick person. We also learn again that God is prepared to work powerfully in the life of a person for the sake of the prayers and faith of third parties (as in Mk. 2:5). Naaman like many people had his preexisting religious ideas, and he expected the true God to conform to them. He was to be taught that man is made in God's image, and we are not to make God into our image and make Him act according to our expectations of religion, wherever we picked them up from. Elisha's refusal to come out and meet him clearly stuck in his gut. But the purpose for that, as explained above, was so that he realized that leprosy made a man unclean before the true people of God; and once he was cleansed, he would then be able to be part of God's people. Likewise he was placing his faith in religious ritual, rather than in the word of Yahweh. And he needed to be corrected in that perspective.

2Ki 5:12 Aren't Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage- "Jordan" means literally 'the descender', 'that which brings down'. The intention of the command was to humble him, and initially he baulked at this. His rage was likewise related to the fact he had made so much effort to come deep into enemy territory, with a huge financial reward. And all that was being spurned. Because it was his faith in Yahweh's word which was required, and not external, human strength. The idea was that the Jordan at that time of year was a muddy stream. But that was the paradox of faith- that what appears muddy

and small can make clean. It's the same issue as "And what good can baptism do me?". Baptism is really likewise a test of humility.

Naaman's dislike of the Jordan may also have been because he was aware that Joshua had cursed Jericho, and the water of the Jordan there was known to cause miscarriages- but it had been cured by Elisha in 2 Kings 2. Being asked to enter those waters was therefore a hint that he had to believe in Elisha's healing power of the waters.

2Ki 5:13 His servants came near and spoke to him and said, My father, if the prophet had asked you do some great thing, wouldn't you have done it? How much rather then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean?' -

We wonder if these servants were themselves Israelites, just as Naaman's wife had an Israelite servant. Perhaps he had thought it prudent to take them with him, seeing he was going into Israel, with many tensions between Syria and Israel at the time. Again Naaman, the mighty man of valour who had done many great things (:1), was being taught that the God of Israel is unimpressed by human works, and rather seeks humility and faithful obedience to His word. These were the 'great things' he was being asked to do, far more difficult and demanding more true bravery than all the mighty acts he had performed in his life. The fact he responds to his servants' suggestion shows that he did have some latent humility.

The salvation of Naaman was through the humble and obscure- the Israelite slave girl, and his servants. Rather like in 2 Kings 6, the salvation of Israel will be due to the desperate lepers who go outside the camp of Israel to die.

"My father, a great word the prophet has spoken..." (see ESV, NIBC). The idea is that true greatness is in humility. What he was asked to do was a great thing for a proud man like him.

2Ki 5:14 Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean-

"Then went he down" continues the idea of his progressive humiliation. This is the path of every spiritual life. At the end, we come to the point of humility required for us to rise again in glory at the resurrection. It's a race to the bottom. It's why the ageing process is a humbling process- to those who perceive it. The same words for dipping in the Jordan are only used in describing the priests crossing Jordan to take possession of God's kingdom in Israel (Josh. 3:15). Naaman was being invited to imagine himself now entering into the spirit of Israel and having their kingdom as his; and again being invited to see himself consecrated as a priest with a mission. We may note that he "dipped" in Jordan, when he was intended to "wash" in Jordan (:10). But despite this less than complete obedience, he was accepted. He was not only healed, but "was clean" in a religious, spiritual sense. His flesh being restored like a child looks ahead to being born again of water and spirit (Jn. 3:3-5).

We may enquire whether the command to "wash" was properly obeyed by "dipping". But at least Naaman responded on some level- and this was accepted.

Naaman was a Gentile leper who sought to be healed by the God of Israel. As such he represents sin-stricken man, effectively going through a living death due to sin. His cure was by dipping in the River Jordan. Initially he found this simple act hard to accept, thinking that God would want him to do some dramatic act, or to dip himself in a large and well-known river, e.g. the Abana. Similarly, we may find it hard to believe that such a simple act as baptism can ultimately bring about our salvation. It is more attractive to think that our own works and public association with a large, well-known denomination (cf. the river Abana) can save us, rather than this simple act of association with the true hope of Israel.

We may be able to discern parallels with how the axe head is lost in the next chapter, but is restored after being immersed in the Jordan and obedience to Elisha's word from God. Naaman was his master's axe head, a title for the leader of the army. But he was only restored through immersion in Jordan. The idea may be that God was equally at work in the lives of impoverished "sons of the prophets" in 2 Kings 6, as he was in the life of Naaman the high profile Gentile. The comfort is that the same God who worked in the apparently high profile lives of Biblical characters is as much at work in our obscure lives.

Syria were Israel's enemy, and so to heal Naaman the commander of their army would have seemed strange and counter intuitive. But it is in line with how in 2 Kings 6, the captured, blinded Syrian forces are given food and drink and released home unharmed. When had they been killed, the Syrian war machine would have been significantly degraded. All this was a hint of the spirit of the Lord Jesus- loving enemies, and winning by grace rather than force. And yet in the short term, it didn't work. After Naaman's healing, the Syrians still again invade Israel in 2 Kings 6. After the release of the blinded Syrian soldiers in 2 Kings 6, the Syrians come and besiege Samaria in 2 Kings 6. Indeed, grace is counter intuitive and doesn't always have any immediate effect. That is surely why the king of Israel wants Elisha dead and blames him for the siege and suffering that arose from it (2 Kings 6:31).

2Ki 5:15 He returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and stood before him- Elisha was accustomed to thinking of himself in terms of a man who stood before Yahweh, in His presence, before His face (Heb.- 2 Kings 3:14). Naaman and his "company" 'stood before' Elisha (2 Kings 5:15,16). Remember that this was the Syrian army General, standing with a "company" in Israelite territory, at Elisha's house- at a time when 'companies' of Syrian soldiers carried out raids upon Israel (2 Kings 5:2). Any Israelite would've been terrified. But Elisha responds that he 'stands before' Yahweh. Elisha was so aware of how we live in God's presence, before His very face, that he wasn't the least phased by this. If only we can share this sense, of standing in God's presence... the most frightening of human situations will have little effective 'presence' because we know we are ultimately in God's presence, 24/7. See on 2 Kings 6:17.

And he said, See now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel. Now therefore, please take a gift from your servant-

We would rather read that he said there is no God but the God of Israel. Naaman still held the primitive idea that Yahweh as the God of Israel was only present in Israel, and this was why he wanted to take some Israelite soil home with him. But reflection upon the logic of his position would have led him to see wider than that. For if Yahweh was the only God, and His greatness made all other gods effectively non-existent... then surely it made sense that the God who was "in Israel" was in fact the God of the whole planet. For otherwise, there was no God anywhere in the cosmos or on planet earth, only "in Israel". And sanctified common sense surely indicates that there is a God and creator. And yet God leaves Naaman to work this through without specifically correcting him, just as the Lord Jesus worked likewise with the wrong ideas about demons.

Naaman is presented in contrast with the king of Israel in 2 Kings 1 who didn't believe there was a God in Israel: "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?" .

There are clear connections with the healing of the centurion's servant in Lk. 7. Naaman is servant to the king of Syria. The Lord's comment "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith" (Lk. 7:9) is clearly allusive to Naaman's words. Naaman is told about Elisha just as the Centurion hears about the Lord (Lk. 7:3). A message was sent to the king of Israel asking him to "heal my servant", just as the message is sent to the Lord to do likewise. And again there is a distance healing. The centurion is also a Gentile military man, like Naaman. The connections again suggest that Naaman is seen by the Lord as a model

Gentile convert, just like the Centurion. And yet as discussed elsewhere, Naaman's knowledge was very limited. But his conversion to Israel's God is seen as valid.

2Ki 5:16 But he said, As Yahweh lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none. He urged him to take it; but he refused-

We see here the natural reaction of man to Divine grace- to want to give something material to Him or His representative. But it is refused, because the response intended from Naaman was that he would trust in Yahweh and share this with others in his homeland- which as a high ranking commander in the Syrian leadership, was a very large ask.

2Ki 5:17 Naaman said, If not, then please let two mules' burden of earth be given to your servant; for your servant will from now on offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice to other gods, but to Yahweh-

Naaman the Syrian accepted the faith of the God of Israel, knowing full well how difficult this was going to be back in his home environment. He matures from thinking about Yahweh as 'Elisha's God' in :11. Now Yahweh is to be his God. He has clearly made a conscious allegiance to Yahweh although he feels unable to totally walk the talk. And that is accepted by God. This is why I urge spiritually immature people to still be baptized. After his 'conversion' he asked for some Israelite soil to be given to him to take back to Syria (see on :15). This shows that Naaman was influenced by the surrounding superstition that one could only worship a god of another nation whilst on their soil. But this is not explicitly corrected by Elisha; he simply but powerfully comments: "Go in peace". In other words, Elisha was saying that the peace experienced by Naaman in his daily life was so wondrous that it obviated the need for worshipping on Israeli soil. Syria's army continued to attack Israel, as we learn from the next chapter. We therefore find Naaman in a similar position to Obadiah managing Ahab's palace and yet believing in Yahweh, despite his master persecuting Yahweh's prophets. And so many others- Joseph and Daniel come to mind immediately. But this is the essence of the spiritual life for so many. And yet we note from 2 Kings 6:23 that after the awesome revelation of Yahweh's cherubim at Dothan, the Syrian military stopped operations against Israel. This was not for the sake of Israel's obedience, but surely for the sake of one man, Naaman, so that he could live at peace with God.

The command to make an altar of earth was in order to inculcate humility, teaching that God doesn't want the art and external religion of man, but our sacrifice offered upon our own raw dust, which is all we are. Naaman had previously held a 'religious' view of God, expecting to pay the equivalent of millions of wealth in order for a holy man to wave some wand over his leprosy and cure him. Now he realized this was not at all what the one true God was all about. Again, he does humble himself.

But we note that offering sacrifice at a place other than the sanctuary was not according to the law of Moses. His understanding that there was only a God "in Israel" is likewise deficient. But still he is presented as a convert.

There is repeated evidence in inscriptions that the earth of a country was transported to another country in order to commemorate a victory. The following is from Nadav Na'aman, An altar for YHWH in the Land of Aram (2 Kings 5:17), Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions 18 (2018), 133–144:

"- Shalmaneser I, the King of Assyria described how after conquering the city of Arinu, "I gathered [some of] its earth and made a heap of it at the gate of my city, Ashur, for posterity". - In one of his inscriptions, Sennacherib described in detail the systematic destruction of Babylon and how he transported earth from Babylon to his capital city of Ashur: "In order to pacify the god Ashur, my lord, for people to sing the praises of his might, (and) for the admiration of future people, I removed earth from Babylon and piled (it) up in heaps (and)

mounds in the akitu-house [in Ashur].”

- The transportation of earth from one place to another is also mentioned in a Babylonian source called the Chronicle of Early Kings. It relates that Sargon, King of Akkad, “dug up the earth of the clay pit of Babylon and

built near Akkad a replica of Babylon.” The author of the chronicle considered the transportation of its earth to Akkad an act of memorialization of its destruction.

- In his campaign against Ummanhaldash, King of Elam, Ashurbanipal took piles of earth from the ruined Elamite cult centres, and deposited them in Assyria. “The earth of Susa, Madaktu, Haltemash and the rest of their sacred cities I gathered together and took (it) to Assyria.”

- Diodorus Siculus’ account of the fall of Nineveh claims that after the fall of Nineveh, Nabopolassar the Babylonian leader, requested as part of his share in the booty to transport the ashes of the ruined palace to Babylon. He planned to deposit the debris near the sacred precinct of the gods, thereby constructing a mound as an eternal monument for the downfall of Assyria”.

Naaman was surely aware of this practice. He humbly wanted to take the soil of Israel in order to build an altar, according to Yahweh's wish for an altar to be built of simple earth. But this was the symbol of victory and glory. He was celebrating a victory, a conquest, a surrender- but of himself. Here we have the inversion of values which is typical in the spiritual life. The symbols of humility become the symbols of glory, the cross being the classic example.

2Ki 5:18 In this thing may Yahweh pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon. When I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, may Yahweh pardon your servant in this thing-

See on 2 Kings 5:9. Clearly there was no belief in any guilt by association, or this concession wouldn't have been given. The whole nature of being human means that we must live in this world, although we are not of it. Consider how Daniel's friends wore turbans (Dan. 3:21 NIV), how Moses appeared externally to be an Egyptian (Ex. 2:19), and how the Lord Himself had strongly Jewish characteristics (Jn. 4:9). Imagine all the difficult situations Joseph must have been in, as Prime Minister of Egypt, married to the daughter of the pagan High Priest. Or John the Baptist's soldier converts, told to do their jobs without using violence (Lk. 3:14); or Cornelius returning to his post as Centurion. It seems almost certain that these men would all have tried to engineer their way out of their positions. Think of Daniel.

Naaman was allowed to bow himself before Rimmon for the sake of losing his position. Yet the higher level would surely have been, as Daniel's friends, not to bow down to an idol. And when we ask what the rest of the Jews in Babylon did on that occasion, it seems hard to avoid the conclusion that they took the lower level which Naaman did- and bowed down.

We would perhaps rather read that Naaman and the Israelite maid got together and did their devotions together to Yahweh. But instead we read of him continuing his external worship of Rimmon. And living in personal peace with God.

2Ki 5:19 He said to him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way-

The essence is to live in peace with God in covenant relationship. This is possible, even if like Naaman there are elements of misunderstanding of Him (:17), and dimensions of our lives where we are not serving God on the highest level we could (:18). It is my answer to people wanting to be baptized whilst still in the grip of addictions. They can go in peace.

However there is some ambiguity about "Go in peace". It is not simply "Yes it's OK". For this is also the standard way for an oriental to say goodbye. Elisha avoids answering yes or no. Surely the highest level was for Naaman not to do this. Paul seems to have this incident in mind when he warns us to be highly sensitive about going into an idol's temple, lest we cause others to stumble: "But take heed, lest by any means this freedom of yours becomes a stumblingblock to the weak. For if a man sees you who have knowledge dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be encouraged to eat things sacrificed to idols?" (1 Cor. 8:9,10). We are familiar with stories of Christians who died for refusing to offer a pinch of incense to Caesar, but the question is: 'And what about those who did do so?'. Those who refused to serve in Hitler's military and died for their conviction are rightly seen as heroes. But what about those believers who did? The enigmatic ending to Naaman's brief dialogue with Elisha leaves us thinking about these things and concluding that there these many "others", perhaps the majority of believers, are all the same with the Lord.

Elisha's enigmatic "Go in peace", or "Goodbye", avoiding a yes / no answer to his question about continuing an appearance of Rimmon worship, leaves us enquiring about the depth of his conversion. But the validity of his conversion is certainly strongly implied by the record.

2Ki 5:20 But Gehazi the servant of Elisha the man of God said, My master has spared this Naaman the Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought. As Yahweh lives, I will run after him, and take something from him-

'Said in his heart' is a common Biblical phrase (e.g. Gen. 17:17; 1 Sam. 27:1; 1 Kings 12:26; Esther 6:6). There is a huge importance attached to self talk and spiritual mindedness. Further, there are many instances where we read that a person 'said' something; but it's apparent that they said it to themselves, in their heart. Take Gehazi here. For sure, Gehazi said this to nobody but himself. Or Moses – he's recorded as saying "People have found out what I have done!" – surely he said this within himself (Ex. 2:14 GNB). We note that in his heart, Gehazi swears to himself by Yahweh. He is not an unbeliever. But we have here an insight into the functioning of the heart within a believer in a moment of weakness. "This Naaman..." reflects how he failed to perceive the spiritual wonder of what had happened; that the general of a Gentile army had been converted to Israel's God. All he still saw was a wealthy Gentile whom he thought that he as an Israelite had the right to deceive. See on :23.

We enquire why Gehazi failed in this way. He had seen so much evidence first hand of God's activity through Elisha. So why do this? We can conclude that like Israel in the wilderness, he became over familiar with the holy (something the law of Moses often tried to save man from), and failed to any longer be impressed personally by the reality of God. In this we have a great warning to ourselves.

2Ki 5:21 So Gehazi followed after Naaman. When Naaman saw one running after him, he came down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well?-

The Divine cameraman zooms in fairly close on this scene. We see Gehazi running after the cavalcade, running faster than they were moving, and catching up with Naaman. The way Naaman himself got down from his chariot to personally greet Gehazi is a reflection of the humility he had now learned. Again we see Naaman 'coming down', part of his progressive humiliation. We see his humility in how he himself came down to meet Gehazi, despite being surrounded by a large retinue.

2Ki 5:22 He said, All is well. My master has sent me, saying, 'Behold, even now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of clothing'-

Gehazi was enough of an amateur psychologist to know that if this is what he asked for, Naaman was likely to multiply it several times. And as noted on :23, his mind was full of the things he could buy with that money.

2Ki 5:23 Naaman said, Please take two talents. He urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of clothing, and laid them on two of his servants; and they carried them before him-

According to :26, Naaman pressed Gehazi to also take far more than this. Although the things he mentions there, olive yards and vineyards, could hardly have been given by Naaman. Elisha correctly and piercingly perceives that these were the things in Gehazi's mind which we coveted buying with the things he believed Naaman would give him. Again (see on :20), the Bible places such great value on the heart, the thoughts, the spirit of a person. Two talents means 68 kg. or 150 pounds. Too much to carry alone. Two talents of silver was enough to buy the hill of Samaria (1 Kings 16:24). And we note that Gehazi and Elisha lived near a hill (:24); possibly the same hill? Gehazi the servant is contrasted unfavourably with the anonymous Hebrew servant girl. He wanted huge amounts of wealth, far more than would possibly be needed to entertain a few visitors. His dreams were of materialism, not spirituality.

2Ki 5:24 When he came to the hill, he took them from their hand, and stored them in the house. Then he let the men go, and they departed-

Naaman had returned to Samaria from the Jordan river, at least 20 miles (:15) especially to thank Elisha. It was the opposite direction. And now he was going back eastwards to Syria. Elisha lived in Samaria, presumably not far from the palace of the king. So "the hill" would be "the hill of Samaria" which was bought for two talents of silver (1 Kings 16:24). Exactly the amount of money given to Gehazi (:23). We may be able to deduce from this that it was Gehazi's intention to buy the hill for himself along with the olive groves and vineyards upon it (:26).

2Ki 5:25 But he went in, and stood before his master. Elisha said to him, Where did you come from, Gehazi? He said, Your servant went nowhere-

It's possible Elisha was now blind or of limited faculties. But even without the direct revelation of the Spirit, he likely guessed what Gehazi had been up to. By saying he had gone nowhere, he clearly lies to the Holy Spirit, as it were, as Ananias and Sapphira did. They were slain, again in a context of covetousness, whereas Gehazi was made a leper and allowed to apparently continue serving Elisha, even though (see on :1) he was supposed to be quarantined away from society. His ministry was allowed to continue, but every moment of his subsequent life he would have been aware that he was only allowed to continue in the ministry by God's grace. Which should always be our view anyway.

2Ki 5:26 He said to him, Didn't my heart go with you, when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Is it a time to receive money, to receive garments and olive groves and vineyards, sheep and cattle, and male servants and female servants?-

The way the Lord Jesus 'knew' things because of His extreme sensitivity, rather than necessarily by some flash of Holy Spirit insight, isn't unparalleled amongst other men. Elisha knew what Gehazi had done when Gehazi went back to ask Naaman for a reward- Elisha's heart or thoughts went with Gehazi. Elisha imagined Naaman dismounting from his chariot, etc. And he could guess that the request had involved "money... garments" etc. That the Lord's knowledge wasn't necessarily automatic is reflected in the way we read things like "When He saw their faith... when Jesus heard it..." (Mk. 2:5,17). But the Spirit confirmed this

spiritual sensitivity, as it can do today; for [the blind?] Elisha 'saw' Naaman turning from his chariot to meet Gehazi, and Elisha read the motives of Naaman in imagining the servants and vineyards on the hill of Samaria which he could buy with his two talents. However it is possible that Elisha wasn't given any specific revelation from the Spirit, and correctly perceived all this himself, due to his own great sensitivity as a person.

These things weren't given to Gehazi. He was given money, but Elisha perceives that all these things were in his mind because he imagined buying them with the silver. This is so psychologically credible. This is exactly how the covetous, materialistic mind works.

2Ki 5:27 Therefore the leprosy of Naaman will cling to you and to your seed forever. He went out from his presence a leper, as white as snow-

This is not medically what actually happened. The idea of transference of disease from one to another was a common Semitic perception, and it's an idea used by God. And thus God went along with the peoples' idea of disease transference, and the result is recorded in terms of demons [which was how they understood illness] going from one person to another. Likewise the leprosy of Naaman clave to Gehazi. God threatened to make the diseases of the inhabitants of Canaan and Egypt to cleave to Israel if they were disobedient (Dt. 28:21,60). Here too, as with Legion, there is Divine accommodation to the ideas of disease transference which people had at the time.

We enquire whether Elisha had to curse Gehazi so severely, just as we wonder whether he had to call down the curse upon the youngsters who mocked his baldness. Likewise we wonder whether he had to bring death upon the officer who doubted whether Elisha could really restore food supply in the besieged city (2 Kings 7:2,17-20). These curses all betray the spirit of Elijah, which the Lord Jesus condemned, in bringing down fire upon two groups of 50 men. In each case, it could be argued that Elisha felt mocked and so he used the power at his disposal in a very severe and judgmental way, justifying himself as having the spirit of Elijah. Yet it was for that spirit that Elijah had been removed from his office.

In 2 Kings 8, we find Gehazi standing before the king. Presumably, his leprosy had been cleansed and the curse had been lifted by his unrecorded repentance. Curses, even Divine ones, can be changed, as God is open to dialogue with repentant sinners. Just as Elijah and Jonah repented but it is not recorded, we are left to deduce this. Another alternative is that 2 Kings 8 is out of chronological sequence.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 6

2Ki 6:1 The sons of the prophets said to Elisha, See now, the place where we dwell before you is too small for us-

This continues the impression that the sons of the prophets lived poorly. The Mosaic idea was that Israel paid tithes to the Levites, out of whom the priests were to be the teachers of the people (2 Chron. 15:3; Mal. 2:7). But this wasn't functioning, and so men of all tribes had come with their families to form these schools of the prophets, where God's word was studied and taught.

2Ki 6:2 Please let us go to the Jordan, and every man take a beam from there, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. He answered, Go!-

This school of the prophets was near the Jordan, so it must have been that at Jericho. And I noted on 2 Kings 2:5 that by no means all of them there had been supportive of Elisha. But they felt they needed Elisha's blessing to remove their camp from one place to another. They presumably had grown in size as there was more response to

Elisha's ministry and disillusion with the apostasy in the nation. The idea of "every man" taking a beam was that all were to share in the work. The priests were served by the Levites, and if this had been a priestly group, then we would have expected the Levites to do this work. See on :1.

2Ki 6:3 One said, Please go with your servants. He answered, I will go-
The idea was that Elisha himself would be involved with the work. True leadership will always involve this kind of manual work together with those being led.

2Ki 6:4 So he went with them. When they came to the Jordan, they cut down wood-
Josephus records the presence of good timber growing alongside the Jordan river.

2Ki 6:5 But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water. Then he cried and said, Alas, my master! For it was borrowed-

We have a window here onto the poverty of these communities of prophets. He had needed to borrow [Heb. 'begged'] an axe head, and also had no means of buying another one to replace it. It was a major tragedy that blew up suddenly out of left field. And his cry from the heart implies he was asking Elisha to try to find the means to replace it with. Another rendering is "It has been sought. It has fallen in, and I have sought it in vain".

We may be able to discern parallels with the previous chapter. Here, the axe head is lost, but is restored after being immersed in the Jordan and obedience to Elisha's word from God. Naaman was his master's axe head, a title for the leader of the army. But he was only restored through immersion in Jordan. The idea may be that God was equally at work in the lives of impoverished "sons of the prophets" in 2 Kings 6, as he was in the life of Naaman the high profile Gentile. The comfort is that the same God who worked in the apparently high profile lives of Biblical characters is as much at work in our obscure lives.

Many of the Elisha and Elijah incidents concern obscure characters. The widow woman with whom Elijah lived for three years was so obscure that Ahab's search for Elijah never led anyone there. And so it is with the widow of one of the sons of the prophets, Naaman's wife's servant girl, a guy who borrows an axe and the axe head goes plop in the river etc. Perhaps the obscurity of these people was a foil for the high profile life of Elijah and Elisha. They were being shown that humble spirituality in obscurity and personal suffering and difficulty is the essence, and not public work for its own sake. We observed this difference between Obadiah's more private spirituality, and Elijah's.

2Ki 6:6 The man of God asked, Where did it fall? He showed him the place. He cut down a stick, threw it in there, and made the iron float-

Elisha was surely not wealthy, and yet had been asked to effectively buy a new axe head. The method for the miracle was significant. Elisha himself cut down some wood; it was more than a stick because he had to cut it down. He showed his solidarity with the man, in that he himself cut down wood from a tree. The question "Where did it fall?" was to make the man relive the tragic moment, for his eyes would have seen the axe head go "splash" at a certain point in the river, and it was engrained in his memory. Elisha wanted the man to relive what had happened, and to realize that through his identity with him, as a fellow cutter of wood, God would do a miracle. This in essence was the spirit of the Lord Jesus in so many miracles. Thus He asked the blind man what he wanted; He was, like Elisha, making the man realize his

desperation, and to focus upon what he so wanted. And it is how He works today too, piquing our desperation and realization of our need. Our understanding of Him as having had our nature, our representative and fellow, greatly enhances our appreciation of this. And it is on the basis of our shared humanity that we likewise are to work with people.

2Ki 6:7 He said, Take it. So he put out his hand and took it-

Elisha seeks the maximum involvement of the man in the miracle. The axe head 'swum' (AV) toward him, so that from the bank he could take it. It was clearly a miracle, and yet it involved the man's full engagement and openness to it. The spirit of the miracle was repeated by the Lord (Mt. 17:27).

2Ki 6:8 Now the king of Syria was warring against Israel; and he took counsel with his servants, saying, My camp will be in such and such a place-

Presumably the Benhadad of :24. Perhaps the following larger scale and more public miracle is intentionally juxtaposed against that of making the axe head swim. The idea therefore would be that God works in small private matters and also on the scale of the nations. We wonder where Naaman was in all this. He was commander of the Syrian military, and yet an avowed proselyte to Israel's God. Like Daniel, he was in a situation where loyalty to Yahweh was very difficult, and so he may well have resigned or purposefully slipped out of the limelight of senior leadership. However, the record is not all chronological. We have here a list of Elisha's various miracles, beginning with private ones and now more public ones. The Syrians were invading Israel with bands of marauders (:23), and it could have been from these raids that Naaman's wife got her Israelite maid. For she was taken captive by these "bands" of marauders (2 Kings 5:2). The record is really giving us cameos from the ministry of Elisha arranged according to theme and not chronology. See on 2 Kings 8:1 for another example of where the cameos are definitely not chronological.

2Ki 6:9 The man of God sent to the king of Israel saying, Beware that you not pass such a place; for the Syrians are coming that way-

The king of Israel would then have been Joram. If as noted on :8 this incident took place before that of 2 Kings 5, then we recall how in 2 Kings 5, Elisha was living in a house in Samaria very near to the palace. I suggested on :8 that this incident may have been before the events of 2 Kings 5. Elisha's knowledge was clearly by direct revelation from God. And yet Yahweh had also blessed the Syrian bands with success (2 Kings 5:1). But He also gives warnings to the Israelites to help them avoid the Syrians defeating them. The fact "Yahweh had given victory to Syria" at this time means therefore that Elisha's warnings were not always accepted and obeyed. We have a similar situation here to that on Passover night. Yahweh's destroyer Angel went out to slay all the firstborn in Egypt, including the Israelites. But for those obedient to God's word, another Angel hovered over the homes of the obedient Israelites and preserved them from the destroying Angel. God's workings are so complex, and they likewise go on all around us, even if mostly unperceived by us. To accuse Him of injustice is to fail to humbly appreciate this. For all these actions were orchestrated by Him, articulating His ultimate justice and desire to save. This we must take on faith, but this kind of incident shows that there is every reason to believe that His actions are to this day likewise carefully balanced and just.

2Ki 6:10 The king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and

warned him of; and he saved himself there, not once nor twice-

I suggested on :9 that the Israelites didn't always obey Elisha's warnings and suffered because of it. But it seems the king did, and saved himself personally from capture several times. Yet he was a murderer (:32) and God's summary of his life is that he did evil. But he was preserved, because God sought his repentance. Even if that never happened ultimately.

2Ki 6:11 The heart of the king of Syria was very troubled about this. He called his servants, and said to them, Won't you show me which of us is for the king of Israel?-

Naaman wanted to be a secret believer, even bowing down to Rimmon to keep his boss happy. God seems to have allowed this, but He worked in Naaman's life, I suggest, so that his faith was no longer secret. For soon after his conversion, his master got the hunch that one of his courtiers was "for the king of Israel" (2 Kings 6:11). And Naaman would have been the obvious suspect, as he had gone to Israel and been cured of his leprosy by an Israeli prophet. We then read that the army of Syria came against Elisha the prophet and sought to surround him in order to capture him. They were then judged by God. Could it really be so that Naaman would have led that army? Surely the situation arose so as to force Naaman to resign the job. Thus God worked to stop him being a secret believer, and to remove him from a position where he could not live with a free conscience before the Father. And so God will do in our lives- if we respond.

But another reading is possible, if we accept the suggestion on :8 that this happened before the events of 2 Kings 5. Naaman as commander of the army would have been aware of this strange action of Israel's God, whilst being also aware that Yahweh was giving him victory against Israel on the occasions when they did engage with and defeat them (2 Kings 5:1). It was all setting him up for faith in Yahweh, even though His first introduction to Him was through beholding His apparently contradictory behaviour. And there are many former atheists, agnostics and skeptics who have a similar testimony.

2Ki 6:12 One of his servants said, No, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom-

If as suggested on :8, this happened before the events of 2 Kings 5... then we see a theme being set up, of senior leadership humbling themselves to listen to their servants. The king of Syria listened to his servant and sent horses and chariots to Dothan (:13) because he believed the servant. And because Naaman believed his wife's servant girl, he also came to Samaria to Elisha with horses and chariots. And because he finally listened to his servants, he dipped in Jordan and was cured. And he also believed Elisha's servant Gehazi, with his story about needing clothes. God works like this, giving us examples in observed experience of others (in this case, the king believing his servant) in order to prepare us personally for similar challenges. We wonder too whether this servant of Benhadad was also an Israelite, just as Naaman's wife's servant was.

2Ki 6:13 He said, Go and see where he is, that I may send and get him. It was told him saying, Behold, he is in Dothan-

Dothan was near Shechem, and yet it seems from 2 Kings 5 that Elisha also had a home in Samaria near to the king's palace. This knowledge that he was at that point in Dothan would suggest that the Syrian's servant of :12 was an Israelite with

connections in Israel. And so the theme continues, of listening to and believing Israelite servants.

2Ki 6:14 Therefore he sent horses, chariots and a great army there. They came by night, and surrounded the city-

This was tacit reflection of the belief in the words of the Israelite servant, and was to be repeated when again Naaman came with horses and chariots to the home of Elisha in Samaria (assuming as suggested on :8 that these events happened before those of 2 Kings 5). Step by step, God was setting Naaman up to believe in Him. He responded, although his pride nearly got in the way. But God works likewise in so many lives, in such detail, and yet their pride stops them being led to the intended outcome, of faith and conversion.

2Ki 6:15 When the servant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was around the city. His servant said to him, Alas, my master! What shall we do?-

This servant was presumably Gehazi. If this is chronological [and the records often aren't], then this would have been at a point after Gehazi had been made a leper (2 Kings 5:27). By saying he had gone nowhere (2 Kings 5:25), he clearly lied to the Holy Spirit, as it were, as Ananias and Sapphira did. They were slain, again in a context of covetousness, whereas Gehazi was made a leper but was allowed to apparently continue serving Elisha, even though (see on 2 Kings 5:1) he was supposed to be quarantined away from society. His ministry was allowed to continue, but every moment of his subsequent life he would have been aware that he was only allowed to continue in the ministry by God's grace. Which should always be our view anyway. But this issue evaporates if as suggested on :8 these events happened before those of 2 Kings 5

2Ki 6:16 He answered, Don't be afraid; for those who are with us are more than those who are with them-

The surrounding of Elisha's home in Samaria with the same horses and chariots in 2 Kings 5 would have been a scary experience. But Elisha doesn't even come out (remember as suggested on :8 that these events happened before those of 2 Kings 5). For he had learned from this experience that they were of no ultimate power. He was surrounded by the heavenly armies and chariots of Angels.

2Ki 6:17 Elisha prayed and said, Yahweh, please open his eyes, that he may see. Yahweh opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw that the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire around Elisha-

Elisha was so confident they were there, that he didn't ask to see them himself. He *knew* they were there; he simply asked that his servant be enabled to see the unseen reality which he calmly knew was there. He of course had had first hand experience of the Angelic horses and chariots (a kind of cherubim) when he had been parted from Elijah in 2 Kings 2:11. This must have left an abiding impression upon him- he knew that those Angelic horses and chariots were in fact permanently encamped around him (cp. Ps. 34:7). And so we are surely to see significance in the way that Naaman came to Elisha's house with *his* horses and chariot- for this is surely a development of a theme of connection between Elisha, horses and chariots (2 Kings 5:9). Most other Israelites would've been petrified to have the horses and chariots of Naaman and a company of Syrians pull up at their door. But Elisha was quite unfazed. He didn't

even bother coming out to meet Naaman, knowing this was an insult to Naaman's pride, and was humanly certain to result in Naaman simply killing him and burning his house. Surely the horses-chariot-Elisha connection taught Elisha that in fact there were Angelic horses and chariots around him- he need not fear any human horse and chariot. There is no hint that Angelic activity is any less, or operates in any different way, for us today.

2Ki 6:18 When they came down to him, Elisha prayed to Yahweh, and said, Please strike this people with blindness. He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha-

Elisha's game plan was that the Syrians be converted to Yahweh. Presumably (if as suggested on :8 these events happened before those of 2 Kings 5) Naaman was present at this time, and was also struck with blindness and then healed of it. This would have been another step along the way of being set up for faith that he could be healed of leprosy. "They", the Syrian troops including Naaman, came down to Elisha, who had presumably gone out of the city gate to meet them. It would have been Naaman's first meeting with Elisha. And no sooner had he seen him, he and his men were smitten with blindness. Naaman may have perceived the similarity with the smiting of the Sodomites with blindness as they stood before the door of God's prophet Lot (Gen. 19:11). He would then have realized that he was being treated as a sinner.

2Ki 6:19 Elisha said to them, This is not the way, neither is this the city-

The idea was 'I am Elisha, but I usually live in Samaria, not here in Dothan. If you want to go to Elisha's house, I'll lead you there'.

Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek. He led them to Samaria-

This was to set up Naaman for again coming to Elisha's house in Samaria with his horses and chariots, to see Elisha (if as suggested on :8 these events happened before those of 2 Kings 5). Clearly this was all intended to create patterns in life which Naaman was to perceive by as it were joining the dots and seeing the picture.

2Ki 6:20 It happened, when they had come into Samaria, that Elisha said, Yahweh, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. Yahweh opened their eyes, and they perceived that they were in the midst of Samaria-

They "perceived" this because many of them would never have been there before. The opening of eyes by Yahweh is often associated with spiritual vision, and this was the hope of Elisha. And it eventually worked for Naaman at least.

2Ki 6:21 The king of Israel said to Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I strike them? Shall I strike them?-

Naaman would have realized that he was now without his horses and chariots of human strength, surrounded by Israelite soldiers eager to kill him. His only hope was salvation by the grace of Israel's God, and His prophet Elisha. And he was not disappointed. Slaying captives was permitted under the law (Dt. 20:13), but Elisha is showing that the spirit of the law was actually far above and in contradiction to the letter of it in many places.

2Ki 6:22 He answered, You shall not strike them. Would you strike those whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before

them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master-

"Bow" and "sword" often occur together as almost an idiom for human strength (Gen.48:22; Josh. 24:12; 2 Kings 6:22; 1 Chron. 5:18; Hos. 1:7). The giving of food to captives and sending them back is exactly what was commanded later in 2 Chron. 28:15. The Israelites were intended to learn from the grace which had been shown to the Syrian captives. This is a great theme of the historical books; that situations in essence repeated, because God's people are expected to learn from Biblical history. And that is the relevance of these records for us today. The Syrians, Naaman especially, were likewise to learn about the grace of Israel's God and His prophet Elisha. For not only were their lives spared but they were given every courtesy, and a feast which was counter instinctive to all their culture understood- whereby you killed your enemies and invaders. And this was all to climax in Naaman's cure of leprosy and conversion to Yahweh (if as suggested on :8 these events happened before those of 2 Kings 5).

2Ki 6:23 He prepared a great feast for them. When they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. The bands of Syria stopped raiding the land of Israel-

The way the King of Syria found his servants returning to him their master with stories of the amazing grace of the God of their enemy Israel was surely to try to bring him to conversion too (2 Kings 6:23; 5:1). Israel were to be the light to the Gentile world around them, the righteous servant who showed light to the Gentiles. But they sadly failed. This is all a great example of grace turning away aggression. But although the bands stopped marauding Israel, the Syrians were to return "after this" (:24) not with marauding bands but with a great army. If as suggested on :8 the events of 2 Kings. 6:1-22 happened before those of 2 Kings 5, then perhaps we are to insert 2 Kings 5 at this point. But Israel didn't remain committed to Yahweh's grace, and the Syrians refused to live under the impression of it.

2Ki 6:24 It happened after this, that Ben Hadad king of Syria gathered all his army, and went up and besieged Samaria-

For the chronology, see on :23. We have to assume that Naaman either died, lost his faith or resigned his position. The Biblical record leaves many such questions intentionally hanging open (such as did Jephthah kill his daughter), so that we might reflect and enter more fully into the narrative and explore the possibilities. This is now the third time we read of the Syrians coming into Israel with their armies; to Dothan, then to Samaria for Naaman to meet Elisha, and now they come to invade and take Samaria. They ought to have learned from their previous two experiences, as the king of Israel likewise should have learned faith in Yahweh.

2Ki 6:25 There was a great famine in Samaria. Behold they besieged it, until a donkey's head was sold for eighty pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a kab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver-

Famine was typically a punishment for apostasy. If Joram had gone out in faith and fought with Benhadad, then this situation need not have arisen. For there had been ample evidence in the besieging of Dothan that there were armies of Angelic help available. History repeated itself, in the hope that Israel would learn faith. And it does likewise in our lives. It was perhaps this same Benhadad who had been subjected by Ahab in 1 Kings 20. He was trying to get even with Israel, rather than humbly accept how he was being led like Naaman toward acceptance of Israel's God. Dove's dung

was tiny, so this may have been a name for a very cheap kind of pulse, similar to how such food is called in German 'devil's dung', *teufelsdreck*.

2Ki 6:26 As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried to him saying, Help, my lord, O king!-

Presumably houses were joined to the wall of the city, and therefore this woman was in close range of the king.

2Ki 6:27 He said, If Yahweh doesn't help you, how could I help you? From the threshing floor, or from the winepress?-

The king states that he has no personal stocks of food for himself even, and so she needs to address herself to God and not himself. He was driven to faith in Yahweh in his extremity, and yet the summary of Joram's life is that he did evil before Yahweh. The faith of a moment is not the same as living by faith all life long.

2Ki 6:28 The king said to her, What ails you? She answered, This woman said to me, 'Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow'-

This kind of argument about dead children, between two women apparently living in one house, recalls the case which was put to Solomon by the two prostitutes. But this king has no good answer, for he has no wisdom. His response is simply to kill Elisha, whom he blames for the overall situation.

2Ki 6:29 So we boiled my son, and ate him. I said to her on the next day, 'Give your son, that we may eat him;' and she has hidden her son-

This was in direct fulfilment of the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 28:56,57). The answer to it was repentance and reaffirmation of the covenant. But instead the king seeks to kill Elisha. Had he repented and not been so proud as to prolong the siege, then this tragic situation would not have arisen. He personally was solely responsible for it, but he seeks to put the blame solely upon another individual, Elisha, who was totally innocent. It is a classic case of psychological transference of guilt. And it confirms the absolute psychological credibility of the Biblical records, in contrast to the uninspired histories of other nations, full as they are of exaggeration, lack of credibility and bias.

2Ki 6:30 It happened, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he tore his clothes (now he was passing by on the wall); and the people looked, and behold, he had sackcloth underneath on his flesh-

Such sackcloth was a symbol of both mourning and repentance. If he had repented, then the curses of the covenant would not have come upon the people (see on :29). But his sackcloth was not visible openly. Perhaps he did in a way privately want to repent, but not far enough. A vague personal whim that we need to repent is not enough.

2Ki 6:31 Then he said, God do so to me, and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stay on him this day-

Blaming Elisha, transferring his personal guilt onto him (see on :28) was exactly what the king of Syria had done, and had made his ill fated attack upon Dothan because of it. The king ought to have learned from this. But the whole account here is a parade example of men refusing to learn from Biblical history.

Syria were Israel's enemy, and so to heal Naaman the commander of their army would have seemed strange and counter intuitive. But it is in line with how in 2 Kings 6, the captured, blinded Syrian forces are given food and drink and released home unharmed. When had they been killed, the Syrian war machine would have been significantly degraded. All this was a hint of the spirit of the Lord Jesus- loving enemies, and winning by grace rather than force. And yet in the short term, it didn't work. After Naaman's healing, the Syrians still again invade Israel in 2 Kings 6. After the release of the blinded Syrian soldiers in 2 Kings 6, the Syrians come and besiege Samaria in 2 Kings 6. Indeed, grace is counter intuitive and doesn't always have any immediate effect. That is surely why the king of Israel wants Elisha dead and blames him for the siege and suffering that arose from it (2 Kings 6:31).

2Ki 6:32 But Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. Then the king sent a man from before him; but before the messenger came to him, he said to the elders-

Elisha's house had been visited before, both in Dothan and twice in Samaria, by the armies of Syria. The king ought to have perceived this parallel. In 2 Kings 5:9, Elisha sat in his house and messengers from a powerful man, Naaman the leper, came to him; and displayed an amazing calm before them. This situation repeated in 2 Kings 6:32, where Elisha again sits in his house and the messengers of an aggressive King came to him. The theme of lepers recurs in this latter context also (2 Kings 7:3). And in 2 Kings 5:18 we read of Naaman as a man upon whose arm a King (of Syria) leaned; and we find one of those sent to Elisha the second time was likewise "a lord upon whose hand the King (of Israel) leaned (2 Kings 7:2).

Do you see how this son of a murderer has sent to take away my head? When the messenger comes, shut the door, and hold it shut against him. Isn't the sound of his master's feet behind him?-

The statement that the king and his father were murderers shows how sinful he was, and what grace God had shown him by saving his life (:10). This shows His long term patience and desire this man would come to repentance, even though he ultimately didn't. And He works likewise with men today.

2Ki 6:33 While he was still talking with them, the messenger came down to him. Then he said, This evil is from Yahweh. Why should I wait for Yahweh any longer?-

Elisha has an apparent roughness with the Almighty that could only surely come from his knowing that God fully viewed and knew his inner feelings. "Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" (2 Kings 6:33 RV) expresses his exasperation, in words which are quite shocking to read- until we realize that our own hearts have probably harboured such basic feelings, even though never verbalized. The intimacy of other prophets with God is reflected in the roughness and familiarity which they sometimes use- take Ps. 44:23,24: "Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, Lord? Awake! Do not cast us off for ever! Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?"

Or we could assume that the king followed the messenger, running after him and only shortly behind him (:32) and therefore these words are the king's. 2 Kings 7:17 makes it clear that the king himself came to Elisha at this time. He recognizes that evil is from Yahweh (not any cosmic satan figure, Is. 45:5-7). But that he is tired of following Elisha's constant message to "wait for Yahweh", in the spirit of many such statements in the Psalms.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 7

2Ki 7:1 Elisha said, Hear the word of Yahweh. Thus says Yahweh, 'Tomorrow about this time a measure of fine flour will be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria' -

This follows straight on from the enigmatic 2 Kings 6:33, where either the king of Elisha have expressed frustration with waiting for Yahweh any longer. We would have expected God to consider that such an effective throwing off of patient waiting for Him meant that He would in turn give up with them. But instead, He gives His word of promise that six times as much food would be soon sold for a fifth of the price. This is typical of His grace, meeting human faithlessness with His response. Just as He had commanded Israel to not slay the Syrian captives but instead to give them a feast and let them return home. There is something senseless about grace, to the secular mind. And it is with that awareness that we are to live in this present world. Grace therefore makes us radically out of step with the world.

2Ki 7:2 Then the captain on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God and said, Behold, if Yahweh made windows in heaven, could this thing be? He said, You shall see it with your eyes, but shall not eat of it-

Clearly the king relied upon a faithless man as his second in command, and not upon Elisha. We note that the same term is used of faithful Naaman, a Syrian (2 Kings 5:18). See on 2 Kings 5:9. It can be that we accept God's existence without really believing that He is, therefore, all powerful, and that all His attributes which the Bible reveals are actually functional and real for us today. The unfaithful captain forgot that there *are* windows in Heaven (Gen. 7:11; Mal. 3:10) through which blessing can be given. He believed in God's existence. But he didn't think this God could do much, and he doubted whether He would ever practically intervene in human affairs. We must be aware of this same tendency. The man is punished as Moses was, able to see the promised land with his eyes but not experience it. And this will be the same kind of judgment given to all the condemned at the last day. They will see the Kingdom of God established, but be unable to enter it. This will be the reason for their gnashing of teeth.

We enquire whether Elisha had to curse Gehazi so severely, just as we wonder whether he had to call down the curse upon the youngsters who mocked his baldness. Likewise we wonder whether he had to bring death upon the officer who doubted whether Elisha could really restore food supply in the besieged city (2 Kings 7:2,17-20). These curses all betray the spirit of Elijah, which the Lord Jesus condemned, in bringing down fire upon two groups of 50 men. In each case, it could be argued that Elisha felt mocked and so he used the power at his disposal in a very severe and judgmental way, justifying himself as having the spirit of Elijah. Yet it was for that spirit that Elijah had been removed from his office.

2Ki 7:3 Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate. They said one to another, Why do we sit here until we die?-

In 2 Kings 5:9, Elisha sat in his house and messengers from a powerful man, Naaman the leper, came to him; and displayed an amazing calm before them. This situation repeated in 2 Kings 6:32, where Elisha again sits in his house and the messengers of an aggressive King came to him. The theme of lepers recurs in this latter context also (2 Kings 7:3). And in 2 Kings 5:18 we read of Naaman as a man upon whose arm a

King (of Syria) leaned; and we find one of those sent to Elisha the second time was likewise "a lord upon whose hand the King (of Israel) leaned (2 Kings 7:2).

2Ki 7:4 If we say, 'We will enter into the city', then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there. If we sit still here, we also die. Now therefore come, and let us surrender to the army of the Syrians. If they save us alive, we will live; and if they kill us, we will only die-

I suggested on 2 Kings 6:8 that the events of 2 Kings 6:1-23 may have happened before those of 2 Kings 5, which concludes with Gehazi becoming a leper. We are tempted to imagine that one of these lepers was Gehazi. And yet God was not done with him, despite his conscienceless behaviour with Naaman. He was still able to have a ministry of sorts, to be used by God significantly. But he had to be brought to this point of desperation and death in order for that to happen.

2Ki 7:5 They rose up in the twilight, to go to the camp of the Syrians. When they had come to the outermost part of the camp of the Syrians, behold, there was no man there-

As lepers, they had to dwell outside the gates (Lev. 13:46; Num. 5:2,3). They must have longed for the Mosaic restrictions upon them to be lifted, recalling how Naaman the leper was allowed a prominent place in Syrian society despite being a leper. But it was thanks to obedience to those regulations that they actually saved Israel. For nobody else ventured outside the city gates to apparent certain death at the hands of the Syrians.

2Ki 7:6 For the Lord had made the army of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great army. They said one to another, Behold, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come on us-

Elisha had been full of faith in the presence of the Angelic horses and chariots when the Syrians surrounded Dothan. And he was not lacking in such faith now, although one could read 2 Kings 6:33 as meaning that in fact his faith was at a very low ebb indeed. Yet despite that low level of faith, God still came through for him. The same horses and chariots of Angels which he had seen in the removal of Elijah, and which he had believed in during the siege of Dothan... were still present. The ears of the Syrians were opened to hear their noise, as Gehazi's eyes had been opened to see them.

2Ki 7:7 Therefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their donkeys, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life-

This irrational flight of armies, or fighting amongst themselves because of some irrational fear, is typical of how God destroys His enemies. He prefers to work by His Spirit acting directly upon the minds of men, rather than by the swords of His people. For it seems therefore not His preferred will that His people should take the sword themselves, even though He does work through that sometimes. The Syrians had been made to believe such haste was required that they hadn't even fled upon horses, but had left the animals still tethered. See on :15.

2Ki 7:8 When these lepers came to the outermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and ate and drank, and carried from there silver, and gold, and clothing, and went and hid it. Then they came back and entered into another tent, and carried from

there also, and went and hid it-

The desperate, starving lepers found great treasure and went and hid it. The Lord used this as the basis for His parable about the man who finds the Gospel, as the treasure in a field, and hides it. But surely He intended us to think of what those men did afterwards. "They said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace". They even felt that woe would be unto them if they did not share the good news of what they had found. The same joyful urgency must be ours.

2Ki 7:9 Then they said one to another, We aren't doing the right thing. This day is a day of good news, and we keep silent. If we wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come, let us go and tell the king's household-

We see here the sin of failing to share the Gospel. For those men were types of us (Mt. 13:44). Their position is so imaginable, and the Divine cameraman is focused in close up upon them. Their recorded conversation is absolutely credible and imaginable.

2Ki 7:10 So they came and called to the porter of the city and said, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there, neither voice of man, but the horses tied, and the donkeys tied, and the tents as they were-

The animals being still tied indicates the absolute sense of urgency which fell upon them, fleeing on foot because they had no time to untether their horses. This was the extent of the Divine hand upon their minds.

2Ki 7:11 He called the porters; and they told it to the king's household within-

As lepers they were not allowed inside the city gates. The Israelites were forced to believe good news, the Gospel, from the mouths of the most wretched and desperate people on planet earth at that time. This clearly looks forward to our witness, for the Lord's parable of treasure hid in a field (Mt. 13:44) makes those men types of us.

2Ki 7:12 The king arose in the night and said to his servants, I'll tell you what the Syrians are doing to us. They know that we are hungry. Therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field saying, 'When they come out of the city, we shall take them alive, and get into the city'-

Despite Elisha's prophetic word to him about a dramatic change in situation (:1), the king was not open to the possibility of it having any fulfilment. He wasn't looking for a fulfilment, and was skeptical of any hint that it might be forthcoming. And yet the word still came true, and the blessing of God's grace was given to the undeserving. Perhaps the whole incident was for the sake of the salvation of Elisha, Gehazi and the other three lepers. For God can involve huge numbers of people in situations which finally work out in the salvation of a minority.

2Ki 7:13 One of his servants answered, Please let some men take five of the horses that remain in the city. Behold, they are like all the multitude of Israel who are left in it. They would perish anyway, like all the many Israelites who have already died. Let us send and see-

This servant has the same mentality as the lepers- that death is now near, and so there is no harm in risking further loss or death, because it will come anyway. The lepers are thereby connected with those whom they were separated from. They had the same mentality.

2Ki 7:14 They took therefore two chariots with horses; and the king sent after the army of the Syrians saying, Go and see-

We recall that the king of Israel was not to have chariots and horses (Dt. 17:17,18), and here we see how in any case, such human strength could not save them.

2Ki 7:15 They went after them to the Jordan; and behold, all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste. The messengers returned and told the king-

They had been so affected by the Spirit of God working directly upon their hearts that they had fled on foot, and not even untied their horses to flee upon them (:7). It seems the panic got even stronger, for they threw away even their own clothes and armour in order to run faster.

2Ki 7:16 The people went out, and plundered the camp of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of Yahweh-

The besieging army had their own supplies, which were now pillaged. In their desperation they would have not minded mixing with the four lepers who had saved them.

2Ki 7:17 The king appointed the captain on whose hand he leaned to be in charge of the gate; and the people trod on him in the gate, and he died as the man of God had said when the king came down to him-

This means that in 2 Kings 6:33, the king himself and not just his messenger went down to Elisha's house, perhaps intending himself to have Elisha slain before his eyes.

2Ki 7:18 (It happened, as the man of God had spoken to the king saying, Two measures of barley for a shekel, and a measure of fine flour for a shekel, shall be tomorrow about this time in the gate of Samaria-

Perhaps this was the same open space where the false prophets had gathered and mocked Yahweh's words (1 Kings 22:10).

2Ki 7:19 and that captain answered the man of God and said, Now, behold, if Yahweh should make windows in heaven, might such a thing be? And he said, Behold, you shall see it with your eyes, but shall not eat of it-

The fulfilment of the prophecy over the mocking of the captain is laboriously stressed. The implication is that there was such an urgent stampede that the man literally didn't have time to eat of the food. Although he was apparently the second in command (:2), he had not himself gone out to the camp of the Syrians. He remained inside the city until the food and spoil had been brought into it. He just didn't want to see God's word come true, even though it meant blessing for starving people. This was all due to pride, and the related fear of being proven wrong before God.

2Ki 7:20 It happened like that to him; for the people trod on him in the gate, and he died-

Death by trampling underfoot was seen as a death of shame. Perhaps the people intentionally did this to him because he was trying to limit their access to the food, desperate by all means to stop the fulfilment of the prophecies which he had mocked. He may well have been the same officer as in 2 Kings 8:6 (see note there and

on 2 Kings 8:1), who had previously witnessed the accounts of the power of Elisha. He was therefore the more reprehensible and accountable for his mockery of Elisha's words.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 8

2Ki 8:1 Now Elisha had spoken to the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, Arise and go, you and your household, and stay for a while wherever you can; for Yahweh has called for a famine. It shall also come on the land seven years-

The famine of 2 Kings 6:25 was because of the siege by the Syrians, but it seems the people didn't learn from the events of 2 Kings 7. The king and his captain had been in denial of the fulfilment of God's word right to the end. They were not reformed by the famine caused by siege, and so now a major famine is called for. We notice the contrast with how Elijah himself called for a famine (1 Kings 17:1), "according to my word". Elisha seems to have reflected upon Elijah's arrogance which had led to his dismissal as the lead prophet. And he expresses the call for a famine in far more humble, God-centred words.

However, the record in Kings isn't chronological. We are given cameos from the ministry of Elisha arranged according to theme and not chronology. These seven years famine may be the famine of 2 Kings 4:38, which was at the very time that Elisha had restored this woman's son to life. This would explain why Gehazi was not yet a leper, and could freely talk with the king.

2Ki 8:2 The woman arose, and did according to the word of the man of God. She went with her household, and lived in the land of the Philistines seven years-

This was a major act of obedience, especially as it resulted in living amongst the Philistines. Although she herself was likely Gentile, perhaps a Philistine. It is typical of God's grace that He would work with a Philistine, and a female- despised generally within Israelite society. The intention of the famine was to elicit repentance, and perhaps she was one of the few who had already repented and so didn't need the famine experience. "Seven years" may be an idiom or symbolic period and not literal.

2Ki 8:3 It happened after the seven years, that the woman returned out of the land of the Philistines. Then she went forth to plead to the king for her house and for her land-

It appears someone else had taken her land and house whilst she was away, and as a Philistine and a female head of house, apparently with no man around to plead for her, she was in a very weak position. It must have been through the good offices of Elisha that she even got a hearing with the king.

2Ki 8:4 Now the king was talking with Gehazi the servant of the man of God saying, Please tell me all the great things that Elisha has done-

I noted on :1 that the events in the record of Elisha's life aren't in chronological order. So if this happened at the time of 2 Kings 4:38, Gehazi was not yet a leper. However it could be that he repented and was healed of his leprosy, or that laws about lepers were not strictly enforced; we recall that Naaman as a leper had free access to his king and a place in Syrian society. And Gehazi would now be conducting his ministry with an appropriate sense of humility. King Jehoram is summarized overall as a wicked

king, but perhaps he had some sense of conscience, and just as Herod was desirous to hear from John the Baptist, so he wished to learn more about Elisha's ministry.

2Ki 8:5 It happened, as he was telling the king how he had restored to life him who was dead, that the woman whose son he had restored to life, cried to the king for her house and for her land. Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life-

It was perhaps orchestrated by Elisha that the woman approached the king whilst Gehazi was before him. Otherwise we can see this as a typical outcome of the hand of providence. The restoration of dead man to life was clearly the most gripping of all the Elisha stories, and then the mother of the man appears on the scene. God was really trying to persuade the king of the power of His word. And yet ultimately he refused to accept it in his own life.

2Ki 8:6 When the king asked the woman, she told him. So the king appointed to her a certain officer saying, Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now-

This latter provision was effectively a punishment for the person who had taken her land. Or it could be that the king himself had taken possession of the land, and now repents. This would explain the ease with which he rectifies the situation and can give the woman all the harvest she would otherwise have had in those seven years, which an ordinary farmer would not have been able to do. We wonder if this was the same officer of 2 Kings 7, seeing that the events are not arranged chronologically. In this case he was the more reprehensible for his mockery of Elisha's prophecy that food would be made instantly available during the siege of Samaria.

2Ki 8:7 Elisha came to Damascus; and Ben Hadad the king of Syria was sick. It was told him saying, The man of God has come here-

Ben Hadad is a generic term for the Syrian kings, like Pharaoh for the Egyptian rulers. As noted on :1, it is hard to work out exactly where this fits in to the chronological sequence. It could well have been after the events of Naaman in 2 Kings 5, seeing that the seven years famine began it seems at the time of 2 Kings 4:38. Elisha may well have also intended making a pastoral visit to his convert Naaman.

2Ki 8:8 The king said to Hazael, Take a present in your hand, and go, meet the man of God, and inquire of Yahweh by him, saying, 'Will I recover from this sickness?' - Hazael appears to have been the army commander. Depending upon the chronology (see on :1), he may have replaced Naaman, who as a convert to Yahweh wished to resign from his position or just fade out of the limelight of senior leadership. If this was after the events of 2 Kings 5, then he would have recalled how Naaman had been healed by Elisha. He lacks the faith to ask Elisha to heal him, although that may be implicit in his request. He took a present for Elisha as Naaman had done; and thanks to the deception of Gehazi, he would have been under the impression that Elisha had accepted a present for healing Naaman.

2Ki 8:9 So Hazael went to meet him, and took a present with him, even of every good thing of Damascus, forty camels' burden, and came and stood before him and said, Your son Ben Hadad king of Syria has sent me to you, saying, 'Will I recover from this sickness?' -

The language of good things, presents, camels and coming and standing before Elisha

recalls how Naaman came with similar things and stood before Elisha's house, seeking healing. It seems almost certain that these things happened after the time of 2 Kings 5.

2Ki 8:10 Elisha said to him, Go, tell him, 'You shall surely recover;' however Yahweh has shown me that he shall surely die-

The word / Gospel will inevitably have a result, and yet it is also limited by the attitudes of men. The widow woman was told to borrow pots in which to place the oil which would be miraculously provided. The extent of the miracle was limited by the number and size of the pots she borrowed in faith. Or take 2 Kings 8:10 AV: "Thou mayest certainly recover: howbeit the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die". Ben-Hadad *could* recover, it was possible in prospect, but God knew he would not fulfil certain preconditions, and therefore he would not. Or the idea may be that Hazael is told to tell the dying king that he would recover, as a courtier was supposed to bring only good news; although in fact, he was going to die.

2Ki 8:11 He settled his gaze steadfastly on him, until he was ashamed. Then the man of God wept-

It is interesting to compare Elijah's attitude with how Elisha weeps tears over Hazael, knowing how much damage he is going to do to Israel in response to Elijah's prayer (2 Kings 8:12). Yet significantly, Elijah doesn't actually do what he is told; he doesn't anoint Jehu nor Hazael to destroy Israel (2 Kings 9:3). It's hard to decide whether this was disobedience or rather an awkward realization that he had been praying with too harsh a spirit for something that would have been best left to God. Elisha was effectively doing what Elijah ought to have done- anointing Hazael as king over Syria.

2Ki 8:12 Hazael said, Why do you weep, my lord? He answered, Because I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel. You will set their strongholds on fire, kill their young men with the sword, dash in pieces their little ones and rip up their women with child-

The command to Elijah to anoint Hazael king over Syria (1 Kings 19:15) was therefore part of God's intended judgments upon Israel for their sins. There is no specific record of Hazael doing this, but in the records of his attacks upon Israel we are therefore to assume that he did so at those times (2 Kings 10:32; 13:3,22).

2Ki 8:13 Hazael said, But what is your servant, is he a dog, that he should do this awful thing? Elisha answered, Yahweh has shown me that you will be king over Syria- This may have been mere politeness to Elisha. He was indeed what Israel would call a "dog", a Gentile. His denial of this may mean that he wanted to give the impression that like Naaman whom he had replaced, he was a proselyte.

2Ki 8:14 Then he departed from Elisha, and came to his master, who said to him, What did Elisha say to you? He answered, He told me that you would surely recover- This may have been a polite lie sanctioned by Elisha, or perhaps a literal repeat of Elisha's message, but only part of it. See on :10.

2Ki 8:15 It happened on the next day, that he took a thick cloth, dipped it in water, and spread it on his face, so that he died. Then Hazael reigned in his place-

If he had had true faith in the prophetic word, he would have surely waited for Hazael

to die and then taken over from him. But on the other hand, he did believe what Elisha had said, and was impatient to get on and be the king Elisha said he would be. And so he forced the fulfilment of the prophecy by murdering Benhadad. LXX "coverlet" may mean he did it in such a way that it was not perceived as murder. For the body would have shown no signs of violence. We see here how a man can have both faith and unbelief within him at the same time. We are all the same, like the man who said he believed but asked for help with his unbelief (Mk. 9:24).

2Ki 8:16 In the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Jehoshaphat being king of Judah then, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah began to reign- 2 Kings 1:17 says Joram son of Ahab began reigning in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat of Judah. It seems that Jehoram reigned alongside his father Jehoshaphat. Putting together 1 Kings 22:42; 2 Kings 1:17; 3:1; 8:16, Jehoram began reigning as regent in around the 17th year of Jehoshaphat, and yet he was reaffirmed as king two years before Jehoshaphat died (:17).

2Ki 8:17 He was thirty-two years old when he began to reign. He reigned eight years in Jerusalem-

Putting together 2 Kings 1:17; 3:1; 8:3,16; 2 Chron. 21:5,20, it seems Jehoram became king as regent about two years before Jehoshaphat died.

2Ki 8:18 He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab; for he had the daughter of Ahab as wife. He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh- His wife was Athaliah the granddaughter of Omri (2 Chron. 22:2; 2 Kings 8:26). "Athaliah", 'Yah has constrained', may mean that she was bitter that Yahweh had as it were limited her; the same groundless complaint as in 2 Cor. 6:12.

Ahab's marriage to a Gentile was far worse than *all* the sins of Jeroboam; the idolatry, the perversion, the making of Israel sin; these were "a light thing" compared to the evil of marriage out of the faith (1 Kings 16:31). That perspective on marriage out of the faith needs to be appreciated. And further, those who married the daughters of Ahab were led astray by them (2 Kings 8:18,27).

2Ki 8:19 However, Yahweh would not destroy Judah, for David His servant's sake, as He promised him to give to him a lamp for his children always-

That promise was understood by God at this stage as meaning that a descendant of David would continue to reign on David's throne "always", and therefore He did not destroy Judah. However, He did eventually. He reinterpreted and reapplied His words of promise. And He does this often with the various possible futures prophesied. His word is not proven false but He reapplies it, as He continues His purpose with respect for the freewill decisions of man.

2Ki 8:20 In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves-

A sad decline from the situation in his father's time (2 Chron. 17:10).

2Ki 8:21 Then Joram passed over to Zair, and all his chariots with him. He rose up by night, and struck the Edomites who surrounded him, and the captains of the chariots; and the people fled to their tents-

We note that horses and chariots were forbidden to Israel's king (Dt. 17:17,18). Yet it seems that his chariots and captains prevailed against those of Edom, even when he

was surrounded and about to be defeated. Perhaps this was a repeat of the situations of 2 Chron. 13:15; 18:31, where weak believers in their time of need called to God when surrounded by enemies, and were heard. This reflects God's deep sensitivity to faith in Him, even in time of desperation. And yet His final judgment is of the state of a person's heart.

2Ki 8:22 So Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah to this day. Then Libnah revolted at the same time-

Libnah was a priestly city (1 Chron. 6:47), but the tribes seem to have given the Levites towns which were not particularly valuable to them, or which were exposed to attack. Contrary to the spirit of David, they offered to God that which cost them nothing. And we must take a lesson from that. Some manuscripts read "Then did the Edomites who dwelt in Libnah revolt". So Libnah had been taken over by Edomites and was formerly only technically under Israelite control.

2Ki 8:23 The rest of the acts of Joram, and all that he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-

This may not necessarily be the same books we have in our Bibles known as 1 and 2 Chronicles.

2Ki 8:24 Joram slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David; and Ahaziah his son reigned in his place-

The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2Ki 8:25 In the twelfth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah began to reign-

2 Chron. 22:1 adds: "The inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his place; for the band of men who came with the Arabians to the camp had slain all the older ones". It could be that this band of men had preserved Ahaziah and were seeking for him to be a puppet king for them. And the fact his mother immediately took the throne after his death hints again at this.

2Ki 8:26 Twenty-two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign; and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah the daughter of Omri king of Israel-

In fact the granddaughter of Omri. "Athaliah", 'Yah has constrained', may mean that she was bitter that Yahweh had as it were limited her; the same groundless complaint as in 2 Cor. 6:12. Ahaziah was 22 years old when he began to reign (2 Kings 8:26), but 42 in 2 Chron. 22:2. LXX has 20. But in Biblical Hebrew, numbers were expressed by single letters, and *mem*, forty, is very similar in orthography to *caph*, twenty. And that difference is even more probable in ancient Hebrew or 'Samaritan'. So this appears to be a case of where there were indeed slight errors in copying the Divinely inspired text.

2Ki 8:27 He walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, as did the house of Ahab; for he was the son-in-law of the house

of Ahab-

2 Chron. 22:3 adds: "He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab; for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly".

His father had done the same (2 Chron. 21:6). So much sin and spiritual failure is due to a refusal to individuate from parental influence and be an independent person before God. "Counsellor" suggests she specifically instructed him in the ways of idolatry; and it was by listening to the wrong counsel that Rehoboam went wrong when the kingdom of Judah first began (s.w. 2 Chron. 10:8,9).

2Ki 8:28 He went with Joram the son of Ahab to war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth Gilead; and the Syrians wounded Joram-

Ahaziah was clearly intended to have learned from the experience of Jehoshaphat, who also went to war with Syria at Ramoth Gilead and was nearly slain there. He was only saved by grace, and afterwards experienced God's wrath for going there (2 Chron. 16:2). Circumstances and similarities repeat within our lives, and between our lives and those of people in the Biblical histories, in order that we might learn. Jehoram is called "Joram" within this same verse, perhaps because the name of God was no longer part of his name in practice.

2Ki 8:29 King Joram returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick-

As noted on :28, Ahaziah failed to perceive the similarities with the situation of Jehoshaphat. And this was to lead to his death (2 Kings 9:27).

2 KINGS CHAPTER 9

2Ki 9:1 Elisha the prophet called one of the sons of the prophets and said to him, Put your belt on your waist, take this vial of oil in your hand, and go to Ramoth Gilead-

King Joram had gone away from the fighting to Jezreel, having been lightly wounded (so :15,21 imply- he was able to ride his chariot quite fine). This would not have sat well with the soldiers under Jehu who remained defending Ramoth Gilead, and so Jehu as the army commander was going to be a popular choice as next leader. Elijah had been told to anoint Jehu and Hazael, but it seems he did neither of those things, and Elisha is now doing it.

2Ki 9:2 When you come there, find Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brothers, and carry him to an inner room-

Jehu was exalted from amongst his brethren as was the Lord Jesus Christ (Dt. 18:18; Ps. 45:7) and taken up into a chamber within a chamber (AVmg), cp. the most holy place / Heaven itself. There Jehu was anointed, made Lord and Christ, and then the people placed their garments underneath him (:13) and proclaimed him to the world as King of Israel. This symbolic incident teaches a clear lesson- the exaltation of Jesus should lead us to be witnesses for Him. The wonder and joy of it alone, that one of us, one of our boys, a man like us... should be so exalted.

2Ki 9:3 Then take the vial of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, 'Thus says Yahweh,

I have anointed you king over Israel'. Then open the door, flee, and don't wait- Elijah doesn't actually do what he was told; he didn't personally anoint Jehu nor Hazael to destroy Israel (1 Kings 19:15). It's hard to decide whether this was disobedience or rather an awkward realization that he had been praying with too harsh a spirit for judgment to come upon Israel, and didn't want it to come. The prophet was maybe told to leave immediately because Jehu was to be left to use his own initiative in how to take things forward now.

2Ki 9:4 So the young man, even the young man the prophet, went to Ramoth Gilead- His being a "prophet" is stressed, because it was through the prophetic word that Jehu was to become king.

2Ki 9:5 When he came, behold, the captains of the army were sitting. Then he said, I have a message for you, captain. Jehu said, To which of us all here? He said, To you, O captain-

Jehu takes the initiative in asking the messenger to whom he is sent. This suggests he was already the de facto leader of the army captains now that the king had left the front and returned to Jezreel under the pretext of having had a slight wound. They were apparently sitting in a courtyard, perhaps having been discussing battle plans; for the prophet and Jehu now go "into the house" (:6).

2Ki 9:6 He arose, and went into the house. Then he poured the oil on his head and said to him, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, 'I have anointed you king over the people of Yahweh, even over Israel-

There is the reminder that God didn't really want human kings, and He was their real king. We also note that God considered Himself the king of the apostate ten tribes, just as much as over Judah through the Davidic line. All such divisions within God's people are not visible from God's perspective.

2Ki 9:7 You shall strike 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 Yahweh, at the hand of Jezebel-

Ahab had apparently repented in humility and had been accepted. But this didn't mean that his family were not going to be punished for his sins; there were still consequences for his sins, not least because it seems they continued in his sins.

2Ki 9:8 For the whole house of Ahab shall perish. I will cut off from Ahab every male, both him who is shut up and him who is left at large in Israel-

"He who is shut up and he who is left free" is apparently an idiom referring to children still shut up at home, and those who are free to move about independently. The meaning would then be "young and old".

2Ki 9:9 I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah-

The extreme judgment pronounced was because of the great potentials God had enabled for Jeroboam (see 1 Kings 11:38; 14:10). But he refused to realize them. We live in an age of great potentials. We are generally literate, mobile, with easy access to God's word; and many members of the body of Christ live in relative ease and luxury, free from persecution. The potentials for service are far higher for the average believer today than they were centuries ago. So this issue of judgment according to

wasted potentials is so relevant to our age. Baasha had failed to learn the lessons of Jeroboam and so he was judged in the same way (1 Kings 16:3,4). And the house of Ahab had likewise not learned these lessons.

2Ki 9:10 The dogs will eat Jezebel on the plot of ground of Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her'. He opened the door, and fled-

The "rampart" of Jezreel where Jezebel was to be eaten (1 Kings 21:23) is s.w. "trench" in 2 Sam. 20:15. It would refer to the trench immediately below the city wall. Jezebel was in a house on the city wall when she was thrown out of it (2 Kings 9:36,37), and her body would have landed in the drainage ditch which was probably dry. Dogs wandered there looking for scraps of food thrown out of the windows of the houses on the city wall.

2Ki 9:11 Then Jehu came forth to the servants of his lord; and one said to him, Is all well? Why did this mad fellow come to you? He said to them, You know the man and what his talk was-

"You know the man", because he was dressed in the distinctive clothing of the prophets. Jehu tries to initially pass him off as a typical mad prophet, reflecting his disrespect of the prophetic word. See on :22,26,35,37. The prophets were often perceived as mad. And indeed the pressure upon them was great indeed. The psychological strengthening of the prophets (see on Ez. 2:4-6) was absolutely necessary- for no human being can live in a constant state of inspiration without breaking. The composer Tchaikovsky commented: "If that condition of mind and soul, which we call inspiration, lasted long without intermission, no artist could survive it. The strings would break and the instruments be shattered into fragments" (Rosa Newmarch, *The Life And Letters Of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky* (New York: Vienna House, 1973 ed.) pp. 274,275). The whole tremendous experience of having God's mind in them, sharing His perspective, seeing the world through His eyes, made the prophets appear crazy to others. There's a marked emphasis upon the fact that they were perceived as madmen (e.g. Jer. 29:24,26; Hos. 9:7; 2 Kings 9:11). For us to walk down a street for even ten minutes, feeling and perceiving and knowing the sin of every person in those rooms and houses and yards, feeling the weeping of God over each of them... would send us crazy. And yet God strengthened the prophets, and there's no reason to think that He will not as it were strengthen us in our sensitivity too.

2Ki 9:12 They said, That is a lie. Tell us now. He said, He told me, 'Thus says Yahweh, I have anointed you king over Israel'-

Although he appeared mad, they correctly perceived that he was not and that likely he was a prophet with a message. People have a way of perceiving Divine truth when they encounter it. What they later do with it, or whether they then deny it, is another question. We get the impression Jehu rather blurts out the absolute truth. The record has every ring of psychological credibility.

2Ki 9:13 Then they hurried, and took every man his garment, and put it under him on the top of the stairs and blew the trumpet, saying, Jehu is king-

As noted on :1, they were army captains who were disillusioned with Joram and were psychologically open to this prophetic message at this time- although not from spiritual motives.

2Ki 9:14 So Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi conspired against Joram. (Now Joram was keeping Ramoth Gilead, he and all Israel, because of Hazael king of Syria-

As noted on :1, Joram as king was commander in chief of the army, and was defending Ramoth Gilead against the Syrians under Hazael, whom God had anointed to judge Israel. Yet He was also working through Jehu to judge Joram and the house of Ahab.

2Ki 9:15 but king Joram had returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Syrians had given him, when he fought with Hazael king of Syria). Jehu said, If this is your thinking, then let no one escape and go out of the city to go to tell it in Jezreel- See on :1. Jehu clearly intended to kill Joram and so he didn't want him to have advanced warning. For he was in Jezreel. LXX "If your mind be with me" begins the theme we will see developed in :18, that Jehu was on an ego trip, and demanded people follow him personally (:18 etc.).

2Ki 9:16 So Jehu rode in a chariot, and went to Jezreel; for Joram lay there. Ahaziah king of Judah had come down to see Joram-

2 Chron. 22:7 comments: "Now the destruction of Ahaziah was of God, in that he went to Joram". This is not guilt by association, but rather a case of bad company resulting in sharing in the judgments of those we prefer to company with.

There are a number of other passages which mention how "it was of the Lord" that certain attitudes were adopted by men, resulting in the sequence of events which He desired (Dt. 2:39; Josh. 11:20; 1 Sam. 2:25; 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Chron. 10:15; 22:7; 25:20). It is tempting to read Jud. 14:4 in this context, meaning that God somehow made Samson desire that woman in order to bring about His purpose of freeing Israel from Philistine domination. God through His Spirit works to confirm men in the path they wish to go. And this is the huge significance of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives today.

2Ki 9:17 Now the watchman was standing on the tower in Jezreel, and he spied the company of Jehu as he came, and said, I see a company. Joram said, Take a horseman, and send to meet them, and let him say, 'Is it peace?'-

The zoom of the Divine cameraman is close in on the scene. Jehu was clearly not alone and had taken some of the army with him from Ramoth Gilead. The one horseman is seen by us from the tower on the wall, drawing closer to the larger group racing toward him. We feel the atmosphere of foreboding and imminent tragedy.

2Ki 9:18 So there went one on horseback to meet him and said, Thus says the king, 'Is it peace?' Jehu said, What do you have to do with peace? Fall in behind me! The watchman said, The messenger came to them, but he isn't coming back-

As noted on :15, there is a theme here of Jehu wanting people to follow him personally. He comes over as being on an ego trip, using the apparent service of God and judgment of apostasy as an opportunity to flaunt his own ego. And that is not unheard of today.

2Ki 9:19 Then he sent out a second on horseback, who came to them, and said, Thus says the king, 'Is it peace?' Jehu answered, What do you have to do with peace? Fall in behind me!-

Again "fall in behind me" suggests a man on an ego trip. See on :18; 2 Kings 10:15.

Jehu was using the old argument 'We cannot have peace until we judge apostacy'. But like many who use that argument, they despise the concept of peace, when this is one of the fruits of the Spirit.

2Ki 9:20 The watchman said, He came to them, and isn't coming back. The driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi; for he drives angrily-

We sense the native anger of Jehu reflected in the style of driving and lack of care for his horses which was well known; but it was now apparently channeled into serving God by judging others. Again, this ancient character speaks to so many of our age, who use the judgment of apostacy as a mere vehicle for their own anger, rather than genuinely serving God to His glory.

2Ki 9:21 Joram said, Get ready! They got his chariot ready. Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah went out, each in his chariot, and they went out to meet Jehu, and found him in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite-

2 Chron. 22:7 says that Ahaziah "went out with Jehoram against Jehu"; perhaps not merely to meet him; although "against" can simply mean that they faced off against each other. See on :23. They met with Jehu almost as soon as leaving the palace, for they met at the vineyard of Naboth, which was next to Ahab's palace (1 Kings 21:1). It was Divinely overruled that the meeting was at the vineyard of Naboth which Ahab had wrongfully stolen from him, as Joram had apparently not returned the land to Naboth's family. He was not penitent for the sins of his father but continued in them.

2Ki 9:22 It happened, when Joram saw Jehu, that he said, Is it peace, Jehu? He answered, What peace, so long as the prostitution of your mother Jezebel and her witchcraft abound?-

The last time Joram had seen Jehu was at Ramoth Gilead, when they had been fighting against the Syrians together. Jehu realized that his Divine remit was to judge the family of Ahab and Jezebel for her Baal worship, and especially her encouragement of others to do it [her "prostitution"]. And yet Jehu as a typical member of the ten tribe kingdom was likely also an idolater, and had spoken most disparagingly of Yahweh's prophet in :22.

2Ki 9:23 Joram turned around to flee-

Just as Ahab his father did before being slain (1 Kings 22:34).

And said to Ahaziah, There is treason, Ahaziah!-

This was the first Joram had sensed, it seems, of the putsch. He had presumably assumed that Jehu was racing towards Jezreel with news of events from the conflict with the Syrians at Ramoth Gilead. He may have been giving Ahaziah a chance to get away, as Ahaziah did manage to flee (:27) and managed to hide in Samaria before being found (2 Chron. 22:9).

2Ki 9:24 Jehu drew his bow with his full strength, and struck Joram between his arms; and the arrow went out at his heart, and he sunk down in his chariot-

LXX "Sunk down upon his knees". He was finally humbled, all too late. We sense Jehu's great physical strength, and his dependence upon that rather than God's strength. He comes over as strong, angry (see on :20), judgmental and on a massive ego trip (see on :18,19).

2Ki 9:25 Then Jehu said to Bidkar his captain, Pick him up, and throw him in the plot of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite; for remember how, when you and I rode together after Ahab his father, Yahweh laid this burden on him-

Jehu and Bidkar had been with Ahab when he went to take possession of Naboth's vineyard, and would have heard Elijah's words to Ahab.

2Ki 9:26 'Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons', says Yahweh; 'and I will repay you in this plot of ground', says Yahweh. Now therefore take and cast him onto the plot of ground, according to the word of Yahweh-

This reported speech is not actually a quotation but rather an interpretation of 1 Kings 21:19. Again we see Jehu not really respecting the word of Yahweh which he claimed to be so obedient to. See on :11,22. The taking possession of the vineyard by Ahab was apparently in the sense of permanently having the vineyard registered in his name. For he could have leased it from Naboth until the next Jubilee year. And possibly renewed the lease after that. But Ahab was so obsessive about what he wanted. He wanted the vineyard as his permanent possession. This was why Naboth had to be killed, along with his sons (as we learn only here) so that they would not have any argument for inheriting it later. Ahab reasoned in a very long term manner, forgetting his own mortality. He 'just loved the idea' not only of the vineyard, but of adding it to his inheritance. And so Naboth and his sons had to die, and the people and leaders of Jezreel led into major sin. And yet legally it is hard to see how he could have added it to his inheritance, unless he was some relative of Naboth. So all the drama was to obtain a piece of legal documentation that was always going to be questionable as to its validity.

2Ki 9:27 But when Ahaziah the king of Judah saw this, he fled by the way of the garden house. Jehu followed after him, and said, Strike him also in the chariot!-

It seems however that he escaped from his chariot. 2 Chron. 22:9 says that Jehu "Sought Ahaziah, and they caught him (now he was hiding in Samaria), and they brought him to Jehu, and killed him". Putting the records together, it seems that Ahaziah fled in his chariot through the garden house road (2 Kings 9:27), avoiding Jehu's call to slay him in his chariot. He got to Samaria and hid somewhere, Jehu's men searched for him and found him (2 Chron. 22:9), brought him to Jehu who was then "by Ibleam" (2 Kings 9:27), who struck him so hard that he eventually died of it, but he managed to again escape in his chariot to Megiddo, where he died of the wounds inflicted by Jehu.

They struck him at the ascent of Gur, which is by Ibleam. He fled to Megiddo, and died there-

In the list of cities given to the Levites, this is called "Bileam". "Bileam" means 'not of the people', called Ibleam, Jud. 1:27; 2 Kings 9:27, and in Josh. 21:25, Gath-rimmon. Perhaps it is called "Bileam" in 1 Chron. 6:70 because it continues the theme that the tribes of Israel may have somehow manipulated the lots so that they gave less valuable cities to the Levites, or even cities which weren't theirs, thereby breaking the foundation principle of 2 Sam. 24:24.

2Ki 9:28 His servants carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and buried him in his tomb with his fathers in the city of David-

2 Chron. 22:9 adds: "They buried him, for they said, He is the descendant of Jehoshaphat, who sought Yahweh with all his heart".

2Ki 9:29 In the eleventh year of Joram the son of Ahab began Ahaziah to reign over Judah-

Ahaziah was Ahab's grandson because of the intermarriage between the rulers of Israel and Judah. So Jehu did have a commission to kill him. But it would seem from 2 Chron. 22:7 that Ahaziah could have avoided this had he not shown unity with Joram by visiting him when he was sick. Such is the flexibility of God's purpose, with so many potentials built into it, ever respecting the possibility of human repentance.

2Ki 9:30 When Jehu had come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her eyes, and attired her head, and looked out at the window-

Presumably this means she placed the crown upon her head. It seems the royal palace was on the wall of the city by the gate (:31), with Naboth's vineyard just next to it but outside the city limits (1 Kings 21:1).

2Ki 9:31 As Jehu entered in at the gate she said, Do you come in peace, Zimri, you murderer of your master?-

Zimri had slain his master some time before and was famed for it (1 Kings 16:9-20). So she is effectively calling Jehu "You Zimri!", pointing out that servants who slay their masters never have peace. Zimri slew all the male descendants of Baasha in fulfilment of God's word, and Jezebel was surely aware that Ahab was under the same judgment. She is arrogant to the end, saying that the man who fulfilled Yahweh's word (as Jehu was about to) had no peace. For he committed suicide after reigning only seven days.

2Ki 9:32 He lifted up his face to the window and said, Who is on my side? Who? Two or three eunuchs looked out at him-

Again, Jehu expresses things in terms of people being on his side and following him personally; see on :18,19. The reference to "two or three" may allude to how two or three witnesses were required to condemn (Dt. 17:6; 19:15).

2Ki 9:33 He said, Throw her down! So they threw her down; and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses. Then he trampled her under foot-

The blood on the wall suggests she may have put up a struggle and the eunuchs had attacked her, leaving her bleeding. To trample under foot was to despise.

2Ki 9:34 When he had come in, he ate and drank; and he said, See now to this cursed woman, and bury her; for she is a king's daughter-

The eating and drinking was a sign of having taken power, and was likely a small feast to celebrate himself as king. Clearly Jezebel had no supporters amongst her retainers. She was daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon. By wanting to bury her, Jehu showed his lack of knowledge or respect of the word of Divine judgment against her, which said she would not be buried (:37). And yet he claimed to be so zealous in fulfilling it. Clearly he was grabbing hold of bits and pieces of God's word, and seeking to fulfil them as an excuse for giving his own ego and blood lust full reign. He is so similar to over zealous 'defenders of the faith' of our age.

2Ki 9:35 They went to bury her; but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of her hands-

Nobody was concerned with her corpse, showing how unpopular she was. Nobody

chased the wild dogs away from eating her. She is set up as representative of all whom God will finally reject, cast out of the city to the wild dogs in the rubbish tip in the small valley beneath the city walls (:36). And nobody will feel sorry for them. In the last day, we will see things differently, and from God's perspective. All questions about God's justice will evaporate.

2Ki 9:36 Therefore they came back, and told him. He said, This is the word of Yahweh which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite saying, 'The dogs will eat the flesh of Jezebel on the plot of Jezreel-

The "rampart" of Jezreel where Jezebel was to be eaten (1 Kings 21:23) is s.w. "trench" in 2 Sam. 20:15. It would refer to the trench immediately below the city wall. Jezebel was in a house on the city wall when she was thrown out of it (2 Kings 9:36,37), and her body would have landed in the drainage ditch which was probably dry. Dogs wandered there looking for scraps of food thrown out of the windows of the houses on the city wall.

2Ki 9:37 and the body of Jezebel shall be as dung on the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel, so that they shall not say, This is Jezebel'-

Jehu clearly intended to give her some kind of burial (see on :35), but this was not according to the very prophetic word which Jehu claimed to be so zealous to fulfil. He comes over as consistently insincere and not truly respectful of God's word. See on :11.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 10

2Ki 10:1 Now Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. Jehu wrote letters and sent to Samaria, to the rulers of Jezreel, even the elders, and to those who brought up the sons of Ahab, saying-

As noted throughout 2 Kings 9, Jehu now had blood lust, and his huge ego sought to fulfil it through the excuse that he was obeying God's word against Ahab. He was indeed fulfilling that word, but he didn't respect Yahweh's word in his heart (see on 2 Kings 9:11,35,37). "Samaria" is used for the region, as some were killed in Jezreel (:11). Although the rulers of Jezreel were apparently in Samaria at the time, unless we read with LXX "the rulers of Samaria".

2Ki 10:2 Now as soon as this letter comes to you, since your master's sons are with you, and there are with you chariots and horses, a fortified city also, and armour- This confirms that despite the unclarity of :1, the city of Samaria is in view. For at this time, Jehu was in Jezreel, and also needing to take care of the war in Ramoth Gilead.

2Ki 10:3 Select the best and fittest of your master's sons, set him on his father's throne, and fight for your master's house-

This shows again Jehu's self confidence and trust in human strength. He was challenging any who supported the house of Ahab to set a descendant of Ahab on the throne, and enter into a civil war with him and the Israelite military, who were all under his control at Ramoth Gilead. We note that he was thereby prepared to surrender control of Ramoth Gilead, to cease fighting the Syrians, in order that he might fight his own brethren in order to establish his own personal power base.

2Ki 10:4 But they were exceedingly afraid and said, Behold, the two kings didn't stand before him! How then shall we stand?-

It was known that he had recently murdered Ahaziah of Judah as well as Joram of Israel. He had done this almost singlehanded. But see on :7.

2Ki 10:5 He who was over the household, and he who was over the city, the elders also, and those who raised the children, sent to Jehu saying, We are your servants, and will do all that you ask us. We will not make any man king. You do that which is good in your eyes-

It was typical after a power grab to slay the entire family of the ousted king. These men knew well enough what was required of them, and they agree.

2Ki 10:6 Then he wrote a letter the second time to them saying, If you are on my side, and if you will listen to my voice, take the heads of the men your master's sons, and come to me to Jezreel by tomorrow this time. Now the king's sons, being seventy persons, were with the great men of the city who brought them up-

The Philistines in 1 Sam. 29:4 recalled how David had carried the head of Goliath to Saul (1 Sam. 17:57). To carry the heads of a king's enemies was a way to get the king's favour, as in Jud. 7:25; 2 Sam. 4:8; 16:9; 20:21; 2 Kings 10:6-8. Again we see the inspired, historical record has consistency. It would have required a clever editor to insert this theme of beheading to curry a leader's favour throughout the entire Biblical record. But the histories were clearly written at different times; a later hand would not have thought of all these realistic touches to sprinkle so consistently throughout it. The internal harmony of the Bible is to me the greatest indication that it is what it claims to be, the Divinely inspired word of God, evidencing His editing throughout.

2Ki 10:7 It happened, when the letter came to them, that they took the king's sons and killed them, all seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent them to him to Jezreel-

It was only a few hours journey from Samaria to Jezreel. They did this all on the basis of the fact he had killed two kings (:4). But they likely imagined that had been on the basis of a battle, when in fact Jehu had effectively assassinated unsuspecting men. The two kings had rushed out to meet him without their body guards, assuming that he as their inferior and army general was bringing news from the battle front. So all on the basis of rumour and exaggerated impressions, the elders of Samaria killed 70 children of Ahab. This is the kind of thing which goes on all the time- people taking major decisions on the basis of fake news and exaggerated impressions and fears.

2Ki 10:8 A 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-
This was to display them openly, in order to make openly clear his hold on power.

2Ki 10:9 It happened in the morning, that he went out and stood and said to all the people, You are righteous. Behold, I conspired against my master, and killed him; but who struck all these?-

Jehu consistently appears out of step with God's principles. It is for God and not men like Jehu to pronounce His people as just / righteous. The heaps of young heads would have been grotesque. Jehu's argument is that he indeed has killed his master, but who

killed these 70 young men and boys? Not him, but the elders of Samaria who had raised them and now supported him over Ahab. It was clever enough as a political statement, but is very spiritually deficient. For the grosser sin of others doesn't remove nor justify our sins. And Jehu ought to have reasoned that in humility he had fulfilled God's word about Ahab's family, rather than seeking to justify it by such mind games.

2Ki 10:10 Know now that nothing shall fall to the earth of the word of Yahweh, which Yahweh spoke concerning the house of Ahab. For Yahweh has done that which He spoke by His servant Elijah-

Time and again we are brought to realize that the same external action can be judged by God quite differently, according to our motives. Uzziah was condemned for acting as a priest; when David did the same, he was reflecting his spirituality. God commanded Jehu to perform the massacre of Ahab's family at Jezreel, and blessed him for it (2 Kings 10:10,29,30); and yet Hos. 1:4 condemns the house of Jehu for doing that. Why? Presumably because their later attitude to that act of obedience was wrong, and the act therefore became judged as God as something which brought just punishment on the house of Jehu many years later. Why? Because even an outward act of obedience, when perceived through wrong motives and feelings, becomes an act of sin and a basis even for condemnation. All our works need careful analysis once we grasp this point.

2Ki 10:11 So Jehu struck all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, with all his great men, his familiar friends, and his priests, until he left him none remaining-

The Divine commission was to destroy the male descendants of Ahab, but Jehu excuses his blood lust in the name of serving God. And right wing Christian extremists have and still do the same. Even though there is actually a lack of understanding and respect for the Divine word they claim to be fulfilling (see on 2 Kings 9:11,35,37). We note Jehu killed Ahab's personal priests, which suggests Ahab's repentance was not very thorough.

2Ki 10:12 He arose and departed, and went to Samaria. As he was at the shearing house of the shepherds on the way-

This probably referred to some inn where the brothers of Ahaziah were staying for the night. RV margin "'house of gathering'", where the sheep were gathered before slaughter, and so Jehu likes to imagine this is a providential hint that he should kill these people there. Such imagination of 'the hand of providence' is common amongst those who set themselves on a supposed path of fulfilling God's word, without really doing so from the heart and with full understanding.

2Ki 10:13 Jehu met with the brothers of Ahaziah king of Judah and said, Who are you? They answered, We are the brothers of Ahaziah. We are going down to greet the children of the king and the children of the queen-

Ahaziah was grandson of Ahab, so they were relatives of Ahab. But the Divine commission had been to destroy his male descendants. Jehu is seeking to justify his own blood lust by apparently generously interpreting that commission. These men were obviously ignorant of the putsch, and we have to remember that they were living in an age where communication was difficult. The "queen" is better 'the queen mother' (as 1 Kings 15:13), referring to Jezebel.

2Ki 10:14 He said, Take them alive! They took them alive, and killed them at the pit of

the shearing house, even forty-two men. He didn't leave any of them-

This seems to suggest Jehu originally thought of taking them captives, but then killed them in the cistern (RVmg.) where the sheep were washed before shearing or slaughter. His change of plan shows that he was far from clear in his understanding of the Divine commission.

2Ki 10:15 When he had departed from there, he met Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him. He greeted him and said to him, Is your heart right, as my heart is with your heart? Jehonadab answered, It is. If it is, give me your hand. He gave him his hand; and he took him up to him into the chariot-

The Rechabites were part of the Kenites (1 Chron. 2:55), from where Moses' wife came (Jud. 1:16). Jael was married to a Kenite (Jud. 4:17), and they were not slain along with the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:6). They were clearly a nomadic, spiritually minded family (Jer. 35:6,7). It seems there is a purposeful juxtaposition here, between the truly spiritual person and Jehu, whose zeal for Yahweh was clearly only superficial, and was a justification of his own pride and ego. Jehu asks Jehonadab to be of his own "heart", because his heart is "right". Again we see the same spirit as in 2 Kings 9:18,19. To follow God meant following Jehu personally, and we sense his desire for power and leadership everywhere in this.

2Ki 10:16 He said, Come with me, and see my zeal for Yahweh. So they made him ride in his chariot-

This so obviously smacks of pride, and exhibiting human pride and strength under the cover of 'I am doing this for Yahweh'. And this is to be seen so often in misguided religious attempts to serve self in the name of serving God. I noted on :15 the intended contrast between Jehonadab and Jehu; and Jehu makes him ride in his chariot, as if this was agreed to reluctantly by Jehonadab.

2Ki 10:17 When he came to Samaria, he struck all who remained to Ahab in Samaria, until he had destroyed him, according to the word of Yahweh, which He spoke to Elijah-

If he had been truly zealous for Yahweh, he would have removed the calves in Dan and Bethel. But instead he seemed interested in murdering people, on the mistaken basis of some kind of guilt by association ethic. It could be that we are intended to read this as meaning 'according to his interpretation of the word of Yahweh', because his massacre of anyone remotely associated with Ahab was not what the Divine command had stated. He was using God's word, as many do, to justify his own native desire for power and abuse of others.

1 Kings 21 states that the death of Joram at Jehu's hand was "in accordance with the word of the LORD". Likewise the murder of Ahab's 70 sons is stated to be an explicit fulfilment of Yahweh's word here "through His servant Elijah" (2 Kings 10:10,17 cp. 1 Kings 21:21). But the "through" begs many questions. Elijah maybe repeated these words- but failed to anoint Jehu to do the job as requested. Or maybe the idea is that God's word still finally comes true despite human failure, as we have here on Elijah's part. See on 1 Kings 19:17.

So God's word through Elijah was fulfilled, but not through the initially intended mechanism- that Elijah would anoint Jehu. Actually he didn't, Elisha took on the job but got his servant to do it- who nervously ran off after doing it. But still God's word came true- although the path to fulfilment of it varied in accordance with human

weakness and, as it were, availability to God. This explains why and how prophecies have varying fulfilments but always somehow come true in the end.

2Ki 10:18 Jehu gathered all the people together and said to them, Ahab served Baal a little; but Jehu will serve him much-

The gathering of all the Baal worshippers together was meant to imitate Elijah on Carmel, whose words Jehu claimed to be fulfilling. But Elijah was clear that he was not a Baal worshipper, and would never have used this kind of deceit which Jehu did. His claim that he personally wanted to hold a feast to Baal had credibility and people attended because of it- because he was well known himself as a Baal worshipper. His hypocrisy was awful.

2Ki 10:19 Now therefore call to me all the prophets of Baal, all of his worshippers, and all of his priests. Let none be absent; for I have a great sacrifice to Baal. Whoever is absent, he shall not live. But Jehu did it in subtlety, intending that he might destroy the worshippers of Baal-

As noted on :19, he had clearly been a Baal worshipper because his invitation had credibility and was responded to. Threatening to murder any who didn't attend again reflects the bloodlust with which Jehu appears to now be drunk with. The word "subtlety" suggests he was as the serpent in Eden and not acting as he ought to have done. LXX "Now, O ye prophets of Baal, call ye unto me all his servants" would further underline that he had absolutely solid credibility with them as a Baal worshipper, who had only slain Ahab's personal prophets because he was destroying Ahab's inner circle. We note that he proclaims he is doing this in accord with Yahweh's word to Elijah (:17). And yet he can also credibly announce that he is a Baal worshipper. This again shows how Baal worship was practiced as a form of Yahweh worship. This has been the perennial problem for God's people; to claim to serve God through serving the flesh, to mix Divine truth with pagan error. See on :20,21.

2Ki 10:20 Jehu said, Sanctify a solemn assembly for Baal! They proclaimed it- This is the very word used of proclaiming feasts and assemblies of Yahweh (Joel 1:14; Lev. 23:36; Num. 29:35; Dt. 16:8; Neh. 8:18). As noted on :19, he was mixing paganism with Yahweh worship. Feasts to Baal were seen as fulfilling the commands to hold feasts to Yahweh.

2Ki 10:21 Jehu sent through all Israel; and all the worshippers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left that didn't come. They came into the house of Baal; and the house of Baal was filled from one end to the other-

Again we note that the credibility of Jehu's appeal was only because he must have been a known worshipper of Baal. This "house of Baal" must have been huge, and was likely an imitation of the Jerusalem temple. For the nature of Baal worship was that it was understood as a form of Yahweh worship; see on :19.

2Ki 10:22 He said to him who was over the vestry, Bring out robes for all the worshippers of Baal! He brought robes out to them-

As noted on :21, this house of Baal was an imitation of the Jerusalem temple, which also had rooms where the priestly robes were kept (see on 2 Kings 22:14). See on :19.

2Ki 10:23 Jehu went with Jehonadab the son of Rechab into the house of Baal. Then

he said to the worshippers of Baal, Search, and look that there are here with you none of the servants of Yahweh, but the worshippers of Baal only-

We get the impression that the humble, spiritually minded Jehonadab would not have approved of this deceit, and just as he had been "made" to ride in Jehu's chariot, so he was being used here. The demand that any worshipper of Yahweh should leave would mean that really Jehonadab and Jehu ought to have themselves exited. The whole situation was unethical, and Jehonadab, like many good men, was railroaded into it. I have shown on :19-22 that Baal worship was seen as a form of Yahweh worship. So "the servants of Yahweh" would be a technical term here for those known to insist upon only worshipping Yahweh and who rejected Baal worship.

2Ki 10:24 They went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings. Now Jehu had appointed him eighty men outside and said, If any of the men whom I bring into your hands escape, he who lets him go, his life shall be for the life of him-

If the house of Baal was so packed, we wonder whether 80 men were really enough to kill all the hundreds or thousands of Baal worshippers inside it. But numbers in the Hebrew Bible are often not to be read literally, especially when used in connection with numbers of soldiers. This could refer to a group or division of soldiers called 'an eighty'.

2Ki 10:25 It happened, as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, that Jehu said to the guard and to the captains, Go in, and kill them! Let none escape- It seems Jehu himself offered the offering, as if he were the high priest of Baal. As noted above, he could only have done this if he were well known as a senior Baal worshipper.

They struck them with the edge of the sword; and the guard and the captains cast them out, and went into the inner room of the house of Baal-

The house of Baal appears to have been an imitation of the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem. It also had an "inner room", corresponding to the most holy place. See on :19.

2Ki 10:26 They brought out the pillars that were in the house of Baal, and burned them-

As there were "pillars" associated with the Jerusalem temple, so there were with this house of Baal. See on :19. However these pillars were burned, meaning they were made of wood, which as a fertility symbol would have been associated with the worship of the likes of Astarte and Baal.

2Ki 10:27 They broke down the pillar of Baal, and broke down the house of Baal and made it a latrine, to this day-

The house of Baal was broken down, but soon afterwards, it was rebuilt and had to be destroyed yet again (2 Kings 11:18). There are examples galore of purges and re-purges in the record of the Kings. This was an apparent obedience to Dt. 7:5,25; 12:2,3- but the real idols were the pride and ego in Jehu's heart. That is the fairly clear implication of the narrative. External obedience didn't deal with those idols.

2Ki 10:28 Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel-

The next verse shows the hollowness of this. For other idols were allowed to continue, such as the calves (:29) and Asherah (2 Kings 13:6), and it is clear that Baal was replaced with Moloch worship (2 Kings 17:17). It's rather like the addict who quits

one drug for another. Destruction of one form of idolatry is in no way any guarantee that our heart is therefore given over to Yahweh.

2Ki 10:29 However Jehu didn't depart from following the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin: the golden calves that were in Bethel, and in Dan-

See on :28. The political motive for retaining them was so that Israel would not reunite with Judah (1 Kings 12:26-30); and for Jehu, his hold on personal power was of paramount importance to him, far more than instituting worship of Yahweh and seeking His glory.

2Ki 10:30 Yahweh said to Jehu, Because you have done well in executing that which is right in My eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all that was in My heart, your sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel- Hosea's prophesied that the blood of Jezreel would be visited upon the house of Jehu (Hos. 1:4). At Jezreel, Jehu had killed Ahab's family in a quite literal bloodbath. And God had commented that because Jehu had done this and thus fulfilled His word, Jehu's family would reign for the next four generations. So why, then, does Hosea start talking about punishing the house of Jehu for what they did to the house of Ahab? Jehu became proud about the manner in which he had been the channel for God's purpose to be fulfilled, inviting others to come and behold his "zeal for the Lord" (2 Kings 10:16). Jehu and his children showed themselves to not really be spiritually minded, and yet they prided themselves in having physically done God's will. And because of this, Hosea talks in such angry terms about retribution for what they had done; the house of Jehu's act of obedience to God actually became something his family had to be punished for, because they had done it in a proud spirit. We see this all the time around us. Men and women who clearly are instruments in God's hand, like the Assyrians were, doing His will... but being proud about it and becoming exalted in their own eyes because of it. And Hosea is so sensitive to the awfulness of this, he goes ballistic about it.

2Ki 10:31 But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of Yahweh, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He didn't depart from the sins of Jeroboam, with which he made Israel to sin-

Jeroboam was apparently a believer. He had his eyes open. He was an apparent enthusiast in doing God's work, and working for the good of His people Israel in strengthening their cities, fighting their enemies etc.. He had some faith, for example that God would heal him. He knew the real date of the feast of tabernacles; he knew his Bible, he had an enthusiasm for studying the genealogies and some aspects of the Mosaic Law. He seems to have taught the truth to his son. He understood a little about the symbology of the ark and the cherubim. But he shut his eyes to the real spirit of God's word. Now we can't say we have no similarity with that man. 2 Kings 10:31 sums up his real failures. Jehu "took no heed to walk in the law with all his heart, for (because)" he followed the sins of Jeroboam. So this was his specific sin; not walking in God's law *with all his heart* . It is stressed in the records that he was "the son of Nebat". 'Nebat' means 'one who pays careful attention'; as if to emphasize that Jeroboam was not that person; he was the son of that person. Israel , Malachi says, were "partial" in God's law. Are we partial? Are we just focusing on those parts of spiritual life which we don't find difficult? Are we avoiding the real pain of spiritual growth? See on Hos. 1:4.

2Ki 10:32 In those days Yahweh began to weaken Israel; and Hazael struck them in all the borders of Israel-

This was the fulfilment of Elisha's words to Hazael in 2 Kings 8:12: "I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel. You will set their strongholds on fire, kill their young men with the sword, dash in pieces their little ones and rip up their women with child". The command to Elisha to anoint Hazael king over Syria (1 Kings 19:15), which Elisha fulfilled, was therefore part of God's intended judgments upon Israel for their sins. There is no specific record of Hazael doing this, but in the records of his attacks upon Israel we are therefore to assume that he did so at those times (2 Kings 10:32; 13:3,22).

2Ki 10:33 from the Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, and the Reubenites, and the Manassites, from Aroer, which is by the valley of the Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan-

This meant that about 25% of Israelite territory was taken from them, and these areas were famed as good pasture land. Bashan was famed for the "fat bulls of Bashan" and for "the oaks of Bashan".

2Ki 10:34 Now the rest of the acts of Jehu, and all that he did, and all his might, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-

This is the common rubric found in the histories of the kings (1 Kings 15:23; 16:5,27; 22:45; 2 Kings 10:34; 13:8,12; 14:15,28; 20:20). "His might that he showed" uses a word for "might" which has the sense of victory / achievement. But the contrast is marked with the way that David so often uses this word for "might / victory / achievement" in the context of *God's* "might"; notably in 1 Chron. 29:11, which the Lord Jesus places in our mouths as part of His model prayer: "Yours is the power [s.w. "might"], and the glory and the majesty". The kings about whom the phrase is used were those who trusted in their own works. It therefore reads as a rather pathetic memorial; that this man's might / achievement was noted down. But the unspoken further comment is elicited in our own minds, if we are in tune with the spirit of David: "But the only real achievement is the Lord's and not man's". All human victory and achievement must be seen in this context. The same word is used in Jer. 9:23,24: "Don't let the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might [s.w.]... but let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth". The glorification of human "might" is often condemned. "Their might [s.w.] is not right" (Jer. 23:10; also s.w. Jer. 51:30; Ez. 32:29; Mic. 7:16 and often).

2Ki 10:35 Jehu slept with his fathers; and they buried him in Samaria. Jehoahaz his son reigned in his place-

The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2Ki 10:36 The time that Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria was twenty-eight years-

This was the second longest reign of an Israelite king. The kings of Israel lived and reigned far shorter than those of Judah. And yet in the final analysis, Ezekiel says that

Judah sinned more than Israel. But their kings had greater signs of external blessing, and perhaps overall they were generally more righteous than their people. Whereas the kings of Israel were as wicked as their people.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 11

2Ki 11:1 Now when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal-

So obsessed was she with personal power that she killed her own relatives, perhaps her own children, in order to establish herself as the only living heir to David's throne. The royal family had already been depleted because of the murders of 2 Kings 10:14; 2 Chron. 21:4,17. She saw the significance of the promises to David, but twisted them into mere religion. For she was an idolater, Jezebel's daughter.

2Ki 11:2 But Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king's sons who were slain, even him and his nurse, and put them in the bedroom. They hid him from Athaliah, so that he was not slain-

In a sense, God's entire purpose through the line and seed of David depended upon the quick thinking of a young woman, and was concentrated in this small baby. For "all the royal seed" had been slain (:1). Her name means 'sworn to Jehovah', and this likely represents her later character rather than her birth name. She came from a bad background, but was married to the high priest (although we note Jehoiada is not listed in the list of high priests in 1 Chron. 6). "The bedroom" is better "the chamber of the beds", perhaps a room in the temple (:1) used for the storage of old beds and furniture. Or maybe this was where he was temporarily hidden, before being moved to somewhere in the temple (:2). We marvel at how Jehoiada kept his own faith in Yahweh strong (2 Chron. 23:1), although surely he must have been somewhat of an underground believer at this time.

2Ki 11:3 he was with her hidden in the house of Yahweh six years. Athaliah reigned over the land-

The temple was likely relatively disused, as Athaliah was such a strong worshipper of Baal. Therefore Joash later had to majorly repair it. However in 2 Chron. 23:1-8 we do read of its usage, but perhaps not as it was before. It could be inferred from 2 Chron. 23:18 that the burnt offerings were not offered during Athaliah's dictatorship. And 2 Chron. 24:7 is clear: "For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up God's house". See on 2 Chron. 24:13 for the extent of the damage done. So they hid the child in one of the disused chambers for the priests of Yahweh, who likely were not regularly officiating any more at that time. We note how Jehoshabeath and her husband Jehoiada the priest (2 Chron. 22:11) would have had access to both the palace and the temple because of their positions. And although they must have been underground believers to some extent, they used their connections well, to keep alive the line of David. Joash became king at seven, so he was a one year old baby when saved from Athaliah.

2Ki 11:4 In the seventh year Jehoiada sent and fetched the captains over hundreds of the Carites and of the guard, and brought them to him into the house of Yahweh. He made a covenant with them, and took an oath of them in the house of Yahweh, and

showed them the king's son-

The Carites were the Cherethites of 2 Sam. 20:23. More information is given in 2 Chron. 23:1: "In the seventh year Jehoiada strengthened himself, and took the captains of hundreds, Azariah the son of Jeroham, Ishmael the son of Jehohanan, Azariah the son of Obed, Maaseiah the son of Adaiah and Elishaphat the son of Zichri, into covenant with him". The five men and their followers of 2 Chron. 23:1 match the description of three "third parts" and another "two parts" in 2 Kings 11:5-7. The corroboration between the records, clearly written by different hands, reflects the Divine inspiration of the record. The names of all these men include the name of God. To overthrow Athaliah was a risky undertaking and their faith and commitment to the Davidic line was very strong.

2Ki 11:5 He commanded them saying, This is the thing that you shall do: a third part of you, who come in on the Sabbath, shall be keepers of the watch of the king's house- This is fleshed out by 2 Chron. 23:4: "This is the thing that you shall do. A third part of you, who come in on the Sabbath, of the priests and of the Levites, shall be porters at the thresholds". Chronicles stresses the role of the Levites (2 Chron. 23:2,4) whereas Kings hardly mentions them in the record. Clearly Chronicles is largely a history of the priesthood and Levites, written up in captivity to encourage the Levites to return to Judah and revive Yahweh worship there. Comparing with 2 Chron. 23:8, the idea is that the Levites had a changeover of shifts that Sabbath. Those who were going off shift were to remain, so that there would be a larger number of them present. It seems that the Kings records speaks of three battalions of royal guards, one of which was on duty, and the others later brought into the temple by Jehoiada (2 Chron. 23:7). Whereas Chronicles has three battalions of Levitical temple guards / doorkeepers. They could be the same groups, but it seems easier to read them as separate. This would mean that somehow Jehoiada had persuaded even Athaliah's own bodyguards to betray her.

2Ki 11:6 a third part shall be at the gate Sur; and a third part at the gate behind the guard. So you shall keep the watch of the house, and be a barrier-

We must compare this with 2 Chron. 23:5 "A third part shall be at the king's house; and a third part at the gate of the foundation. All the people shall be in the courts of Yahweh's house". "The king's house" isn't the royal palace; for in any case, Athaliah was a queen and not a king. It refers to the place where the king Joash was hiding. The Gate of the Foundation was apparently near the valley separating Moriah from the hill opposite it, literally "the gate of Sur", mentioned in 2 Kings 11:6. But "Svr" may be "Svs", the horse gate, which is that of 2 Chron. 23:15; 2 Kings 11:16.

2Ki 11:7 The two companies of you, even all who go out on the Sabbath, shall keep the watch of the house of Yahweh around the king-

Those whose period of service ended that Sabbath were to remain present. We again note how even under Athaliah's idolatrous rule, the temple services continued. Baal worship was thought to be a form of Yahweh worship. See on 2 Kings 10:19.

2Ki 11:8 You shall surround the king, every man with his weapons in his hand; and he who comes within the ranks, let him be slain. Be with the king when he goes out, and when he comes in-

The reference is specifically to the Levites: "The Levites shall surround the king, every man with his weapons in his hand. Whoever comes into the house, let him be

slain. Be with the king when he comes in, and when he goes out" (2 Chron. 23:7). The whole putsch was a risky undertaking, and Jehoiada was aware of the possibility of armed opposition from Athaliah's loyalists. The Levites were armed, presumably with weapons like knives or whatever they could get hold of. Perhaps this command foresaw how Athaliah would come running into the temple (:13) and should therefore be slain.

2Ki 11:9 The captains over hundreds did according to all that Jehoiada the priest commanded; and they took every man his men, those who were to come in on the Sabbath, with those who were to go out on the Sabbath, and came to Jehoiada the priest-

The idea is that the Levites had a changeover of shifts that Sabbath. Those who were going off shift were to remain, so that there would be a larger number of them present. "All Judah" being present in 2 Chron. 23:8 refers to the representatives of all Judah who were present. "All" in the Bible often refers not to literally everybody but to representatives of the "all". The taking of the Gospel to "all the world" must surely be understood in that way. "The Levites and all Judah" is therefore matched here by "the captains over the hundreds".

2Ki 11:10 The priest delivered to the captains over hundreds the spears and shields that had been king David's, which were in the house of Yahweh-

Possibly the shields of gold David had taken and dedicated at the time of 2 Sam. 8:7,11. Gold represents faith, and they were probably not very functional for combat. But this whole putsch was on the basis of faith and not secular strength and wisdom.

2Ki 11:11 The guard stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, from the right side of the house to the left side of the house, along by the altar and the house, around the king-

2 Chron. 23:10 "He set all the people...". The altar would be the altar of burnt offering in the outer court. "All the people" refers to those other than the priests and Levites who had agreed to help in the putsch.

2Ki 11:12 Then he brought out the king's son and put the crown on him, and gave him the testimony. They made him king and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, Long live the king!-

"The testimony" was a copy of the law the king was supposed to write out when he became king, but it had presumably been written out for him (Dt. 17:18-20).

2Ki 11:13 When Athaliah heard the noise of the guard and of the people, she came to the people into the house of Yahweh-

See on :8. Any who came into the temple were to be slain, and it seems Jehoiada set her up to do just what she did. That this was all pulled off right under her nose was quite an achievement.

2Ki 11:14 She looked, and behold, the king stood by the pillar, as the tradition was- Heb. 'pedestal', a kind of podium, considering he was only seven years old and small.

And the captains and the trumpets near the king; and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew trumpets. Then Athaliah tore her clothes and cried, Treason! Treason!-

"Treason" is literally "conspiracy". She realized all too late that a huge conspiracy had been going on under her nose.

2Ki 11:15 Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of hundreds who were set over the army, and said to them, Bring her out between the ranks. Kill him who follows her with the sword. For the priest said, Don't let her be slain in the house of Yahweh-

This confirms the suggestion that the command in :8 to slay whoever entered Yahweh's house was planned with Athaliah in view. "The ranks" would likely refer to the ranks of soldiers; or possibly to the temple precincts.

2Ki 11:16 So they made way for her; and she went by the way of the horses' entry to the king's house. She was slain there-

Making way for her suggests they all restrained themselves from touching her, the unclean, until she was outside the temple. It would have been an awful last walk to her death. I suggested on 2 Chron. 23:5 that "the horse gate" is the same as the "gate of the foundation".

2Ki 11:17 Jehoiada made a covenant between Yahweh and the king and the people, that they should be Yahweh's people; also between the king and the people-

"Between himself and the people" (2 Chron. 23:16) suggests Jehoiada was absolutely representing Yahweh; 2 Kings says the covenant was between Yahweh and the people. The Bible is full of examples of where men function as God and functionally represent Him to man. But this didn't make them God Himself in person. And it is within this context that we must read the passages which likewise speak of the Lord Jesus as functioning as God- without being God Himself.

2Ki 11:18 All the people of the land went to the house of Baal, and broke it down. They broke his altars and his images in pieces thoroughly, and killed Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars. The priest appointed officers over the house of Yahweh-

The allusion is to how "all the people" were to put to death those who incited others to idolatry (Dt. 13:9). It seems that the temple of Baal had been built near the temple, just as Solomon had built such idol temples near to the temple. The house of Baal was broken down in 2 Kings 10:27. But now, soon afterwards, it was rebuilt and had to be destroyed yet again. There are examples galore of purges and re-purges in the record of the Kings.

2Ki 11:19 He took the captains over hundreds, and the Carites, and the guard, and all the people of the land; and they brought down the king from the house of Yahweh, and came by the way of the gate of the guard to the king's house. He sat on the throne of the kings-

"The upper gate" of 2 Chron. 23:20 is here "the gate of the guard".

2Ki 11:20 So all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet. Athaliah they had slain with the sword at the king's house-

Quietness or peace is often associated with obedience. We read of this at least twice during Jehoshaphat's reign. Going God's way is the only way to true peace; although that peace is juxtaposed against the violent slaying of Athaliah which had been necessary to bring it about.

2Ki 11:21 Jehoash was seven years old when he began to reign-

He had been hidden six years in the temple (2 Chron. 22:12), and so it follows that he was grabbed to safety when he was a one year old baby. That was how frail was the line of descent from David, for the rest of the male line had been slain by Athaliah (2 Chron. 22:10). The royal family had already been depleted because of the murders of 2 Kings 10:14; 2 Chron. 21:4,17.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 12

2Ki 12:1 In the seventh year of Jehu began Jehoash to reign; and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba-

Beersheba was famed for idolatry at this time (Am. 5:5; 8:14), and the mother's name, meaning 'gazelle', has no mention of God's Name in it.

2Ki 12:2 Jehoash did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh all the days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him-

Joash did right before God whilst the priest Jehoiada was alive, and then apostatized; Uzziah did likewise, with Zechariah the priest (2 Chron. 24:2; 26:5). He didn't reflect upon the personal implications of Divine history. And we too must appreciate that there are Bible characters whose experiences are framed in terms directly relevant to us- for our learning. Interestingly, straight after Jehoiada died, the princes of the land came to Joash with a request, which he wrongly listened to. This has great similarities with the tragic mistake made by Rehoboam after Solomon died (2 Chron. 10:3,4 cp. 24:17). So Joash was given chance after chance to be directed back to previous examples and be instructed by them- but he went on in his own way.

But when Jehoiada died, Joash listened to, and was influenced by, the wicked princes of Judah (2 Chron. 23:17). It is clear that for all his apparent strength of character and zeal for God, Joash was simply a product of those he was with. And so it can be that our generation especially, can tend to be people with no real character, their very personalities influenced by others rather than being real, credible people. Insofar as we can break free from all these moulding influences, we will be real, credible persons. And our independence, our realness, is what will attract others to the message of Divine influence which we preach. Those raised in Christian homes need to pay especial attention to the possibility that they are where they are spiritually because of the good influence of others upon them. There is no harm in this; but we need to strive to have a faith that is not merely the faith of our fathers, but a real and personal response to the love of God which we have for ourselves perceived in the man Christ.

2Ki 12:3 However the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places-

From this we get the hint that despite all this initial zeal, things were not spiritually solid with Joash even from the start. Likewise from 2 Chron. 24:3 we learn that Joash was a polygamist from the start, for "Jehoiada took for him two wives".

2Ki 12:4 Jehoash said to the priests, All the money of the holy things that is brought into the house of Yahweh, in current money, the money of the persons at which each man is rated, and all the money that it comes into any man's heart to bring into the

house of Yahweh-

This presumably meant that the half shekel temple tax had not been paid for some time. So Joash urged that it be paid, although unsurprisingly there was reluctance. Plague was threatened for not paying it, but there is no record that this happened.

2Ki 12:5 let the priests take it to them, every man from his acquaintance; and they shall repair the breaches of the house, wherever any breach shall be found-

These breaches in the temple had presumably been caused not only by assault, but more likely by the various apostate kings taking the valuable building materials (timber, cut stone etc.) in order to build pagan temples. He had a personal emotional attachment to the temple, seeing that he had grown up hiding in one of its disused side rooms (2 Chron. 22:12). The temple was in a serious state of disrepair at Athaliah's time; she was an idolater, and the daily sacrifices weren't offered (2 Chron. 23:18). The way Joash later desecrates the temple with idolatry is therefore a tragic example of turning away from the faith. No amount of devotion to the things of God's house, or emotional, sentimental feelings towards them, is a guarantee that true faith will be retained in the long term. This restoration of the temple would have been programmatic for the exiles, for whose benefits these historical records were originally written.

2Ki 12:6 But, in the twenty third year of king Jehoash the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house-

We have the abiding impression that the priesthood was never completely dedicated solely to Yahweh. Although it was through the temple being in such a state of disrepair, that Joash could be hidden in it for six years, living as if the child of some homeless woman squatting in one of the disused side rooms (see on 2 Chron. 22:11).

2Ki 12:7 Then king Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest, and for the other priests, and said to them, Why don't you repair the breaches of the house? Now therefore take no more money from your treasurers, but deliver it for the breaches of the house-

The collection ordered in:5 was abandoned. Instead of going around Judah trying to get donations, those who came to offer were to be encouraged to donate. Trying to force money out of God's people is never a good idea; it must be offered freely by those who already understand the concept of sacrifice.

2Ki 12:8 The priests agreed that they should take no more money from the people, neither repair the breaches of the house themselves-

The priests had not done these repairs, and so the responsibility for them was removed from the priests. And they accepted that (:11).

2Ki 12:9 Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in its lid, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one comes into the house of Yahweh. The priests who kept the threshold put therein all the money that was brought into the house of Yahweh-

"Chest" is the Hebrew word usually used for "ark". I suggested on 2 Chron. 24:6 that the ark may have gone missing or even been destroyed by Athaliah, resulting in the rather strange term "tent of the testimony" [the tables of stone] being used for the most holy place. Kings says it was in the court opposite the porch, by the side of the altar of burnt offering. But "outside" in 2 Chron. 24:6 may also mean outside of the most holy place. It could be that the chest was stored by the altar, but in the day time

was taken to the gate of the temple to receive contributions (see on 2 Chron. 24:11). 2 Chron. 24:9 GNB says this was for "the tax which Moses, God's servant, had first collected in the wilderness". The idea may be that that was the only time they ever really obeyed the law of giving the half shekel. Israel's collective disobedience to the law is quite stunning.

2Ki 12:10 It was so, when they saw that there was much money in the chest, that the king's scribe and the high priest came up, and they put up in bags and counted the money that was found in the house of Yahweh-

This was done "day by day" (2 Chron. 24:11), which can mean 'from time to time', suggesting it was done whenever the chest was full. We note that the counting and management of the money was done not by the priests and Levites, another hint (as in :15) that they had embezzled it before.

2Ki 12:11 They gave the money that was weighed out into the hands of those who did the work, who had the oversight of the house of Yahweh. They paid it out to the carpenters and the builders, who worked on the house of Yahweh-

Those who had the oversight of the repair work were not the priests, who had failed to do this previously (:8). We sense the priesthood were very weak at this time, and Jehoiada was almost alone in his dedication to the work. So when he died, things immediately reverted to the previous apostasy.

2Ki 12:12 and to the masons and the stone cutters, and for buying timber and cut stone to repair the breaches of the house of Yahweh, and for all that was laid out for the house to repair it-

The language is rather similar to that used of building the temple, as if this rebuilding was really major, seeing Athaliah had consciously "broken up" the temple (2 Chron. 24:7). We have the repeated impression that the overseers were the ones who "laid out" the money for workers and materials, suggesting again that the Levites and priests had not been honest with this (see on :10).

2Ki 12:13 But there were not made for the house of Yahweh cups of silver, snuffers, basins, trumpets, any vessels of gold, or vessels of silver, of the money that was brought into the house of Yahweh-

The idea seems to be, comparing with 2 Chron. 24:14, that these vessels were made only after the house was completed. The focus was to be upon repairing the house first, and the vessels were seen as of secondary importance. We wonder whether this is also a hint at spiritual weakness and wrong priorities; for surely the house was not of the essence. God had said He didn't in fact want a physical house built. Surely the vessels which enabled the rituals to be performed ought to have been made first, so that Divine worship could continue, even within a ruined building.

2Ki 12:14 for they gave that to those who did the work, and repaired therewith the house of Yahweh-

As discussed on :13, it seems that all the funds were given solely to the builders, because of a wrong perception that the building of a physical temple was more important than what went on within it.

2Ki 12:15 Moreover they didn't demand an accounting from the men into whose hand they delivered the money to give to those who did the work; for they dealt faithfully-

This may be in implied contrast to the priests and Levites who had not done the work, perhaps because of embezzlement of the funds. See on :10. The money was delivered to these overseers directly from the king (:11), and not via the priesthood.

2Ki 12:16 The money for the trespass offerings, and the money for the sin offerings, were not brought into the house of Yahweh: it was the priests '-

It seems there had begun the practice of buying sacrificial animals in Jerusalem, at the temple, and this in turn degraded to giving money to the priests in lieu of sin offerings. The Mosaic commands said nothing about this; the sinner was to bring an animal and make personal identification with it (Lev. 5:1-12; 14:13). And we see here the easy slide away from personal repentance and dedication to Yahweh, to merely giving some money.

2Ki 12:17 Then Hazael king of Syria went up and fought against Gath, and took it; and Hazael set his face to go up to Jerusalem-

2 Chron. 24 adds the account of Joash's apostasy and murder of Jehoiada's son after Jehoiada dies. 2 Chron. 24:23 adds: "It happened at the end of the year, that the army of the Syrians came up against him. They came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all their spoil to the king of Damascus".

The princes were those who had encouraged Joash to idolatry after Jehoiada died (2 Chron. 24:17). We wonder why they spared Joash. Perhaps his extra bit of life was in order to give him the chance of repentance. But he turned it down.

2Ki 12:18 Jehoash king of Judah took all the holy things that Jehoshaphat, Jehoram and Ahaziah, his fathers, kings of Judah, had dedicated, and his own holy things, and all the gold that was found in the treasures of the house of Yahweh, and of the king's house, and sent it to Hazael king of Syria; and he went away from Jerusalem-

It could be that this effectively means that he saved his life by paying them off, after they had already entered Jerusalem and slain the princes (2 Chron. 24:23).

2Ki 12:19 Now the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-

This is not necessarily the same books of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles.

2Ki 12:20 His servants arose, and made a conspiracy, and struck Joash at the house of Millo, on the way that goes down to Silla-

We wonder whether his servants were so loyal to Yahweh that they killed him for what he had done to the sons of Jehoiada. Although these servants were apparently secular Gentiles (2 Chron. 24:25), perhaps even they were disgusted at his deep ingratitude. Or it could mean that their conspiracy against Joash was meant by God as punishment for his conspiracy against Zechariah (2 Chron. 24:21). Joash was killed on his bed, probably his sick bed (2 Chron. 24:25), "at the house of Millo, on the way that goes down to Silla". This may have been the equivalent of a hospital.

2Ki 12:21 For Jozacar the son of Shimeath, and Jehozabad the son of Shomer, his servants, struck him, and he died; and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David. Amaziah his son reigned in his place-

2 Chron. 24:26 "Shimeath the Ammonitess and Jehozabad the son of Shimrith the Moabitess". We wonder whether these servants were in fact his sons by Gentile

wives. If so, then even before the death of Jehoiada he had shown his unspirituality by marrying Gentiles, for all his avowed devotion to the rebuilding of the temple. This is why there was specific commentary written about "his sons" (2 Chron. 24:27).

2 KINGS CHAPTER 13

2Ki 13:1 In the twenty-third year of Joash son of Ahaziah king of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria for seventeen years- This appears to be a slight contradiction with :10, but it is not so in the LXX- which is the version the New Testament prefers to quote over the Hebrew Masoretic text.

2Ki 13:2 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, in which he made Israel to sin. He didn't depart from it- At the end of Jehu's reign, God had removed 25% of Israel's territory (2 Kings 10:33). But Jehoahaz didn't repent, he refused to learn any lesson from his father's sins. We note that although Jehu had no real spirituality, he inserted the name of God in his son's name. The usage of the Divine Name in the names of the kings of Israel was the same mere tokenism with which the Name is used by effective unbelievers today.

2Ki 13:3 The anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel, and He delivered them into the hand of Hazael king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben Hadad the son of Hazael, continually-

He had already done this in Jehu's time (2 Kings 10:32), but as Israel had failed to learn the lesson, His anger was the more kindled. We note that Ben Hadad is a generic term for a leader of Syria, like "Pharaoh". For Hazael had murdered the Ben Hadad before him, and yet has a son who was also a Ben Hadad.

2Ki 13:4 Jehoahaz begged Yahweh, and Yahweh listened to him; for He saw the oppression of Israel, how that the king of Syria oppressed them-

This was the fulfilment of Elisha's words to Hazael in 2 Kings 8:12: "I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel. You will set their strongholds on fire, kill their young men with the sword, dash in pieces their little ones and rip up their women with child". The command to Elijah to anoint Hazael king over Syria (1 Kings 19:15), which Elisha fulfilled, was therefore part of God's intended judgments upon Israel for their sins. There is no specific record of Hazael doing this, but in the records of his attacks upon Israel we are therefore to assume that he did so at those times (2 Kings 10:32; 13:3,22).

2Ki 13:5 Yahweh gave Israel a saviour, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians; and the children of Israel lived in their tents as before-

We note the simple love and pity of God for His children, responding to their suffering which He Himself had brought upon them in anger (:3)- even though they were impenitent (:6). We see the two conflicting aspects of God's character, His justice and His grace, His anger and His pity. They were reflected in Hosea's conflicting feelings for his sexually addicted, unfaithful wife Gomer (Hos. 11:8). The saviour was Jeroboam (2 Kings 14:27), although he was a wicked man.

2Ki 13:6 Nevertheless they didn't depart from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, with which he made Israel to sin, but walked therein. There remained the Asherah also in

Samaria-

Jehu's apparent zeal to destroy Baal worship was just an excuse for the flaunting of his own power and blood lust. It was not real "zeal for Yahweh" as he proclaimed; for he destroyed Baal, but the Asherah remained. See on 2 Kings 10:28.

2Ki 13:7 For the king of Syria didn't leave to Jehoahaz of the people any more than fifty horsemen, ten chariots and ten thousand footmen; for the king of Syria destroyed them, and made them like the dust in threshing-

The king of Israel was not supposed to have horses and chariots anyway (Dt. 17:16). So this could be read as God still seeking the repentance of Jehoahaz, trying to elicit from him true trust in Him.

2Ki 13:8 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz, and all that he did, and his might, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-

This is the common rubric found in the histories of the kings (1 Kings 15:23; 16:5,27; 22:45; 2 Kings 10:34; 13:8,12; 14:15,28; 20:20). "His might that he showed" uses a word for "might" which has the sense of victory / achievement. But the contrast is marked with the way that David so often uses this word for "might / victory / achievement" in the context of *God's* "might"; notably in 1 Chron. 29:11, which the Lord Jesus places in our mouths as part of His model prayer: "Yours is the power [s.w. "might"], and the glory and the majesty". The kings about whom the phrase is used were those who trusted in their own works. It therefore reads as a rather pathetic memorial; that this man's might / achievement was noted down. But the unspoken further comment is elicited in our own minds, if we are in tune with the spirit of David: "But the only real achievement is the Lord's and not man's". All human victory and achievement must be seen in this context. The same word is used in Jer. 9:23,24: "Don't let the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might [s.w.]... but let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth". The glorification of human "might" is often condemned. "Their might [s.w.] is not right" (Jer. 23:10; also s.w. Jer. 51:30; Ez. 32:29; Mic. 7:16 and often).

2Ki 13:9 Jehoahaz slept with his fathers; and they buried him in Samaria: and Joash his son reigned in his place-

The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2Ki 13:10 In the thirty-seventh year of Joash king of Judah, Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz began to reign over Israel in Samaria for sixteen years-

This appears to be a slight contradiction with :1, but it is not so in the LXX- which is the version the New Testament prefers to quote over the Hebrew Masoretic text.

2Ki 13:11 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh; he didn't depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin; but he walked therein-

The note that he did *not* depart from those sins would reflect how the prophets had

appealed to him to depart from them; but he didn't. Israel had been commanded to "not depart" from the way of Yahweh's commandments (Dt. 28:14; Josh. 1:7), but the frequent lament of the historical records is that they did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam. The Bible, especially in Proverbs, constantly reduces human moral choice to that between two ways of life and being. We constantly wish to argue that "it's not so simple" because there are grey areas. But the 'grey area' argument is what leads us so often into sin, into following the "way" of sin.

2Ki 13:12 Now the rest of the acts of Joash, and all that he did, and his might with which he fought against Amaziah king of Judah, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-

See on :8. The account occurs in 2 Kings 14:8-14 and 2 Chron. 25, but this may not be the same books of Chronicles in view which we have in our Bibles.

2Ki 13:13 Joash slept with his fathers; and Jeroboam sat on his throne. Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel-

We note the use of "his throne" rather than "the throne of Yahweh". They had no sense of being kings on God's behalf. Samaria had only recently been built by Omri, Ahab's father, so we should not imagine that there was a long line of kings already buried there.

2Ki 13:14 Now Elisha contracted a sickness of which he would die-

Evidence enough that Pentecostalism is wrong in claiming that the righteous don't die of illness and always recover.

Joash the king of Israel came down to him and wept over him and said-

Joash was not a spiritual person, but he wept over Elisha as a prophet of Yahweh. For Israel had mixed Baal worship with that of Yahweh, and never rejected Yahweh totally.

My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!-

Elijah's example clearly influenced Elisha, both in the nature of the miracles which he performed, and in how when Elisha died, he was likewise seen as "My father, the chariot of Israel, and its horsemen", the same words used at Elijah's departure from ministry. How Elisha related to Elijah, was how people came to relate to Elisha. This is not only a neat cameo of the immense personal influence which we have upon each other; it reflects how Elisha learnt the lesson from Elijah, which we too must learn, of freely and totally absorbing ourselves in the progress of God's Angelic, cherubic work to bring about *His* glory and not our own. Elisha had related to Elijah as his spiritual father, so now others were relating to Elisha in just the same way- as *their* spiritual father. The child had become the father, in spiritual terms. He had brought forth a spiritual child in his own image and likeness.

2Ki 13:15 Elisha said to him, Take bow and arrows; and he took to him bow and arrows-

The victory was to be through bow and arrows, not horses and chariots, which were forbidden to Israel's kings (Dt. 17:16), nor through swords. See on :17.

2Ki 13:16 He said to the king of Israel, Put your hand on the bow; and he put his hand on it. Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands-

Joash was intended to understand that this was a symbolic act, and that what he now did had God's prophetic blessing upon it through the hands of Elisha. But he failed to

perceive that, and so the extent of blessing was far less than potentially it could have been. The story of wasted potentials is so frequent in the Bible, and in the lives of God's people to this day. Joash would have felt how feeble were Elisha's hands, for he was on his death bed. But those apparently feeble hands were those of God.

2Ki 13:17 He said, Open the window eastward; and he opened them. Then Elisha said, Shoot! And he shot. He said, Yahweh's arrow of victory, even the arrow of victory over Syria; for you shall strike the Syrians in Aphek-

We might think that Elisha was being rather unreasonable with Joash; how was he to know what was in Elisha's mind? But the point is, Elisha expected the king to be more spiritually perceptive, to understand that they were enacting a parable of deliverance, to have grasped that those arrows were symbolic of victory over Syria. And so the lesson comes to us: we may be expected to have a greater understanding than we think reasonable of God to expect of us. "Aphek" means 'strength', so the idea was that Divine strength was to triumph over human strength. Hence the use of bows and arrows (see on :15). This was to repeat the defeat at Aphek (1 Kings 20:26), a victory also given by faith to an unspiritual Ahab. Yahweh had earlier given victory to Syria (s.w. 2 Kings 5:1), but this was now to be reversed. Victory against Syria was to be given to Israel. Both sides were probably about equally unspiritual, but by grace God had finished trying to educate Israel through defeat at the hands of the Syrians. Now He wanted to educate them by giving the grace of undeserved victory, in the hope that would elicit their repentance. The arrow was shot eastwards toward Gilead which was then under the control of Syria, from the hands of Joash. The idea was that the victories depended upon his personal faith, and putting his hand in God's hand, represented by Elisha's hands.

Until you have consumed them-

But :19 states clearly that Joash would not consume them (s.w.). He lacked the spiritual vision to enable this potential to come true. No specific conditions are mentioned at this point, and neither are they in many prophecies. Yet that is not to say that they are not in fact only conditionally true, and may not come true unless certain unstated conditions are fulfilled.

2Ki 13:18 He said, Take the arrows; and he took them. He said to the king of Israel, Strike the ground; and he struck three times, and stopped-

"Ground" is the word for "land"; if 'earth' was solely meant, then another word would have been used. The same phrase is used five or six times in Exodus of the smiting of the land of Egypt with plagues. Perhaps that is the significance of the complaint that Joash ought to have struck the land five or six times (:19). The intention was that these victories would have led to not only the salvation of Israel, but their rebirth as a nation. Even at this late stage in their history, God was looking and hoping for their rebirth. See on :21.

2Ki 13:19 The man of God was angry with him and said, You should have struck five or six times. Then you would have struck Syria until you had consumed it, whereas now you shall strike Syria just three times-

See on :17,18. Elisha tells Joash to smite upon the ground with arrows; if Joash had perceived deeper what Elisha meant, he would have smitten many times and the Syrian threat would have been eliminated entirely. But he didn't, and therefore Elijah was frustrated with him; the great potential victory was limited by a man's lack of spiritual perception.

2Ki 13:20 Elisha died, and they buried him. Now the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year-

We assume Elisha died at his home in Samaria. In this case, the Moabite bands had crossed the Jordan from Gilead, which was in Syrian hands, and had boldly entered this far into Israel. The promised victory against enemies didn't seem to happen. Because Joash simply respected Elisha as a great person and liked the culture of Yahweh worship, and yet failed to live up to the huge potentials. See on :22.

2Ki 13:21 It happened, as they were burying a man, that behold, they spied a band; and they cast the man into the tomb of Elisha. As soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet-

The band is one of the Moabite bands of :20. We see how weak Israel were at this time, for Elisha had lived in Samaria. Even near their capital, Israel were prone to such fear at the appearance of just one band of marauders. The idea of course was that there was power and potential of new life in the word of the prophets. I noted on :18 the potential for a rebirth of the people at this time. The language is later applied to the exiles in Ez. 39, who likewise could have been revived by the Spirit to stand upon their feet as a great army. But that potential was likewise wasted.

2Ki 13:22 Hazael king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz-

See on :4 for the extent of the evil done to Israel at this time. This statement seems to exemplify how the promise of potential victory against Syria wasn't realized in practice because of Israel's lack of spiritual vision.

2Ki 13:23 But Yahweh was gracious to them and had compassion on them, and had respect to them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither did He cast them out from His presence at that time-

The implication is that a time did come when even their connection with the fathers didn't save them. The covenant which led to so much grace was broken by Israel, and God eventually accepted that. He broke the covenant with them in response to how they had themselves broken it (Zech. 11:7-14). Covenant relationship meant salvation and blessing by grace alone; for Israel were impenitent at this time. And yet they broke it and spurned it as mere history irrelevant to them, as many do today.

The presence of God may have been articulated at that time through the Angels. Angels being physically with us in our lives means that we are always in the presence of God, as they represent Him. The fact that "the Lord spoke to Moses face to face" through an Angel shows that they represent God's face, and they are also likened to the eyes of God. Even when a man is wicked in some ways, he may still have presence of the Angels in his life. Thus although Israel were wicked in the time of Jehoahaz and were therefore punished by Hazael of Syria, because of the covenant with Abraham "neither cast He them from His presence (Heb. face) as yet" (2 Kings 13:23). And therefore Jehoahaz is described as doing what was right in the sight (the eyes) of the Lord (i.e. the Angels with him), although he did not take away the high places (2 Kings 14:3-5). It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfil their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen. See on Gen. 18:10.

2Ki 13:24 Hazael king of Syria died; and Ben Hadad his son reigned in his place-

We note that Ben Hadad is a generic term for a leader of Syria, like "Pharaoh". For Hazael had murdered the Ben Hadad before him, and yet has a son who was also a Ben Hadad.

2Ki 13:25 Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again out of the hand of Ben Hadad the son of Hazael the cities which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war. Joash struck him three times, and recovered the cities of Israel-

We must compare this with the statement in :22 that there was constantly oppression from Syria. The three victories were not enough to stop this, and we conclude that the huge potential available to Israel, as demonstrated by Elisha, wasn't realized. The history of God's people is such a tragic list of wasted potentials.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 14

2Ki 14:1 In the second year of Joash son of Joahaz king of Israel began Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah to reign-

Amaziah's father Joash died at 47, so Joash would have been 22 when Amaziah was born. He would have lived under the Godly influence of Jehoiada for some time, and witnessed his father's apostasy and gross ingratitude to Jehoiada shown by murdering his sons.

2Ki 14:2 He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Jehoaddin of Jerusalem- His mother, 'pleasing to Jehovah', was one of the wives chosen for Joash by his Godly uncle Jehoiada.

2Ki 14:3 He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, yet not like David his father- Chronicles says, "not with a perfect heart", Kings says "yet not like David". David was far from perfect, but he had a heart wholly ['perfectly'] devoted to God.

He did according to all that Joash his father had done- Repeatedly, the New Testament speaks of converting others as a bringing forth of children. This means that our level and style of spirituality is likely to be replicated in those we convert. Thus Amaziah "did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord... according to all things as Joash his father had done" (2 Kings 14:3). What spirituality he had was according to that which his father had displayed.

2Ki 14:4 However the high places were not taken away. The people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places-

"Taken away" is the same word as 'depart from' in :24. The way of Jeroboam was not departed from, and so the high places were not departed from. The suggestion is that they were associated with the calf worship.

2Ki 14:5 As soon as the kingdom was established in his hand, he killed his servants who had slain the king his father-

This continues a theme, of the kings of Judah strengthening or establishing themselves, often when they first became king; but then having that human strength tested by God or removed. The same word is used repeatedly (1 Chron. 11:10; 2 Chron. 11:11,17; 12:13; 13:21; 17:1; 23:1; 25:3,11; 26:8,15; 29:3; 32:5). The lesson of course was that it is God's Angelic eyes who run to and fro in the land promised to

Abraham, "to shew Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. 16:9).

2Ki 14:6 But the children of the murderers he didn't put to death; as written in the book of the law of Moses, that Yahweh commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall die for his own sin-

Overall this man appears to have spiritually failed. But he as it were grabs hold of one commandment and religiously obeys it. We see this kind of thing all the time in 'religious' approaches to Christianity. But it is the heart which God is looking at, and it was in this that Amaziah failed, ultimately. Chronicles was written for the exiles, and perhaps they needed reminding of this principle (as in Ez. 18:20) because of their wrong idea that they were being unjustly punished for the sins of their fathers.

2Ki 14:7 He killed of Edom in the Valley of Salt ten thousand and took Sela by war, and called its name Joktheel to this day-

Far more details are given in 2 Chron. 25:5-10. This was where David had won a great victory (1 Chron. 18:12). Amaziah was being guided to follow in David's footsteps. This, as noted on 2 Chron. 25:7, was another baby step taken to try to reform him.

2Ki 14:8 Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us look one another in the face-

The soldiers he had hired were apparently mercenaries. They had apparently been paid, but not used in the battle. And so they had gotten offended and sacked cities of Judah (2 Chron. 25:13). And Amaziah was demanding compensation for this from the king of Israel. By so doing he demonstrated that his apparent willingness to lose the money paid for them was not a decision taken from the heart. He was still after compensation for his losses, rather than believing that God could give him all riches (see on 2 Chron. 25:9).

2Ki 14:9 Jehoash the king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah saying, The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon saying, 'Give your daughter to my son as wife. Then a wild animal that was in Lebanon passed by, and trampled down the thistle-

This is similar to the parable of the trees in Jud. 9:7-15, which also talks of the land of Israel as "Lebanon" (Jud. 9:15). The king of Israel presents himself and Amaziah as both living in the same land, and considered himself to be the glorious cedar and Amaziah merely a thistle. It was quite inappropriate, he felt, for Amaziah to provoke him over the fact mercenaries from his country had ransacked towns in Judah over an argument about money and payment. He is saying that it as inappropriate as a poor man asking a wealthy man to give him his daughter to marry the poor man's son. And he threatens to act not just as an elegant cedar, but to morph into a wild beast who would trample down Amaziah. Perhaps Amaziah had indeed provoked Joash by making a marriage proposal which he knew Joash would turn down.

2Ki 14:10 You have indeed struck Edom, and your heart has lifted you up. Enjoy the glory of it, and stay at home; for why should you meddle to your harm, that you should fall, even you, and Judah with you? '-

The victory against Edom was from God, but by accepting the vanquished gods of

Edom, Amaziah shows that he trusted in his own strength rather than that of Yahweh. So often the victories God gives, be it passing an exam or military victory, lead to pride and boasting.

2Ki 14:11 But Amaziah would not listen. So Jehoash king of Israel went up-
2 Chron. 25:20 says this was "of the Lord". There are a number of other passages which mention how "it was of the Lord" that certain attitudes were adopted by men, resulting in the sequence of events which He desired (Dt. 2:39; Josh. 11:20; 1 Sam. 2:25; 1 Kings 12:15; 2 Chron. 10:15; 22:7; 25:20). It is tempting to read Jud. 14:4 in this context, meaning that God somehow made Samson desire that woman in order to bring about His purpose of freeing Israel from Philistine domination. The fact a man does something "of the Lord" doesn't mean that he is guiltless. In the same context of God's deliverance of Israel from the Philistines, men who did things "of the Lord" were punished for what they did (Dt. 2:30; 1 Sam. 2:25; 2 Chron. 22:7; 25:20). God through His Spirit works to confirm men in the path they wish to go. And this is the huge significance of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives today.

And he and Amaziah king of Judah faced each other at Beth Shemesh, which belongs to Judah-

This was on the border of Judah and Dan, the frontier of Judah. The pagan name, "house of the sun", had not been changed; and reflects Judah's abiding penchant for idolatry.

2Ki 14:12 Judah was defeated by Israel; and they fled each man to his tent-

This was not because Israel were more spiritual or faithful, but because God has a special interest in judging pride. Victories of secular people must be understood in this context. The giving of victory by God (in whatever context) is multi factorial and is not simply a reflection of His pleasure with the victor.

2Ki 14:13 Jehoash king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash the son of Ahaziah, at Beth Shemesh, and came to Jerusalem, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim to the corner gate, four hundred cubits-

This is s.w. Neh. 1:3; 4:7, and would have helped remind the exiles how the walls of Jerusalem had come to be so broken down. It would seem by the implication of Jer. 31:38; Zech. 14:10 that this gate was on the north of Jerusalem. Depending how we define a cubit, this would have been between 600 and 700 feet.

2Ki 14:14 He took all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the house of Yahweh and in the treasures of the king's house, with hostages also, and returned to Samaria-

This faithful family who had cared for the ark had been entrusted with caring for the gold and silver in the temple. But Joash had given much of this to the Syrians previously.

2Ki 14:15 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash which he did, and his might, and how he fought with Amaziah king of Judah, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-

This is the common rubric found in the histories of the kings (1 Kings 15:23; 16:5,27; 22:45; 2 Kings 10:34; 13:8,12; 14:15,28; 20:20). "His might that he showed" uses a word for "might" which has the sense of victory / achievement. But the contrast is marked with the way that David so often uses this word for "might / victory /

achievement" in the context of *God's* "might"; notably in 1 Chron. 29:11, which the Lord Jesus places in our mouths as part of His model prayer: "Yours is the power [s.w. "might"], and the glory and the majesty". The kings about whom the phrase is used were those who trusted in their own works. It therefore reads as a rather pathetic memorial; that this man's might / achievement was noted down. But the unspoken further comment is elicited in our own minds, if we are in tune with the spirit of David: "But the only real achievement is the Lord's and not man's". All human victory and achievement must be seen in this context. The same word is used in Jer. 9:23,24: "Don't let the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might [s.w.]... but let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth". The glorification of human "might" is often condemned. "Their might [s.w.] is not right" (Jer. 23:10; also s.w. Jer. 51:30; Ez. 32:29; Mic. 7:16 and often).

2Ki 14:16 Jehoash slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel; and Jeroboam his son reigned in his place-

The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2Ki 14:17 Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah lived after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel fifteen years-

The implication may be that he was given ample opportunity to repent; and we have noticed that in the lives of other kings.

2Ki 14:18 Now the rest of the acts of Amaziah, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-

This may not necessarily be the same books of Chronicles which we have in our Bible.

2Ki 14:19 They made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem; and he fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish, and killed him there-

Perhaps he was trying to flee to Egypt, ever representative of human strength which fails. For Lachish was on the road there. Athaliah, Joash and Amaziah each died due to a conspiracy. Surely Amaziah was intended to learn from the deaths of his predecessors, but the great theme of Biblical history is that so few learn from it. And that is the challenge to us. The planning of the conspiracy apparently took at least 15 years (2 Chron. 25:25).

2Ki 14:20 They brought him on horses; and he was buried at Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David-

Horses were forbidden to the kings of Israel (Dt. 17:16) so this is an appropriate end for an unfaithful man who trusted in human strength.

2Ki 14:21 All the people of Judah took Azariah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in the place of his father Amaziah-

Called Uzziah in 2 Chron. 26:1. Those who conspired against Amaziah were

apparently stopped by the people from taking power. And they insisted upon the line of David continuing, through Uzziah. Despite their general unspirituality. "Uzziah", 'strength of Jehovah', has a very similar meaning to the name of his father Amaziah, 'power of Jehovah'. Yet Amaziah had not lived up to that (see on 2 Chron. 25:15. He may have named his son similarly in a hope that he would succeed where he failed.

2Ki 14:22 He built Elath, and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers-

Amaziah his father had defeated Edom, and Elath was in Edom. This explains the comment that Uzziah did this after his father died. But in doing so he was really living out the ghost of his father and fulfilling parental expectation; for he repeated the works for Yahweh which his father had done (2 Chron. 26:4). Those raised in believing families must ever probe the degree to which their faith and works are possibly just living out parental expectation.

2Ki 14:23 In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria for forty-one years-

This was the longest reign of an Israelite king. The kings of Israel lived and reigned far shorter than those of Judah. And yet in the final analysis, Ezekiel says that Judah sinned more than Israel. But their kings had greater signs of external blessing, and perhaps overall they were generally more righteous than their people. Whereas the kings of Israel were as wicked as their people.

2Ki 14:24 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh: he didn't depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin-

See on :4. Israel had been commanded to "not depart" from the way of Yahweh's commandments (Dt. 28:14; Josh. 1:7), but the frequent lament of the historical records is that they did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam. The Bible, especially in Proverbs, constantly reduces human moral choice to that between two ways of life and being. We constantly wish to argue that "it's not so simple" because there are grey areas. But the 'grey area' argument is what leads us so often into sin, into following the "way" of sin.

2Ki 14:25 He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath to the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of Yahweh, the God of Israel, which He spoke by His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was of Gath Hepher-

Jeroboam was a wicked man, but God reversed Israel's fortunes through him, by grace alone (:26). The entrance of Hamath generally means the northern border of Israel (Num. 13:21; 34:8); the sea of the Arabah is the Dead Sea. The Jonah of the book of Jonah was also the son of Amittai, so we conclude this was the same prophet. Hosea and Amos also prophesied at this time. This prophecy of restoration of territory was fulfilled by grace alone (:26), and would have been an encouragement to the exiles at the time of the restoration, who would have feared that the exiles were generally so unspiritual that the restoration could not happen. "Restored" is the usual word used for the "return" of the exiles. Gath Hepher was near Nazareth in the tribe of Zebulun. According to Jewish tradition, he was the son of the widow of Zarephath.

2Ki 14:26 For Yahweh saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter; for there was none shut up nor left at large, neither was there any helper for Israel-

As noted on :25, the restoration of :25 was therefore an example of God's fulfilment

of His prophetic word by grace alone, rather than in response to the righteousness of His people.

We must watch out for the tendency to think that because a man has dug a hole and then fallen into it, well, that's his problem. But we have all done this, hopelessly so. We only have ourselves to blame. And yet God has rushed to us in Christ. He was grieved for the affliction of Israel, even though it was purely due to their own sin and wilful rebellion. If a man has fallen into his own hole, well he is still there and needs help, however he got there.

Scripture repeatedly speaks as if God notices things and is then hurt by what He sees (Jonah 3:10; Gen. 29:31; Ex. 3:4; Dt. 32:19; 2 Kings 14:26; 2 Chron. 12:7; Ez. 23:13; Is. 59:15 cp. Lk. 7:13). If He knew in advance what they were going to do, this language is hard for me to understand. But God is therefore hurt and 'surprised' at sin- He saw Israel as the firstripe grapes, but they were worshipping Baal even then (Hos. 9:9). Thus God can allow Himself to feel an element of surprise- and this was a shock to Jeremiah, who queried: "Why are You like a man who is caught by surprise...?" (Jer. 14:9).

2Ki 14:27 Yahweh didn't say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under the sky; but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash-
And this Jeroboam was a wicked man, although the appointed saviour (2 Kings 13:5). The idea may be that He did not say at that time that He would blot out the name of Israel. Or perhaps the message is that for all their sins, God did not blot out the name of Israel, for it continued, as in a sense He never cast away His people (Rom. 11:1,2).

2Ki 14:28 Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all that he did, and his might, how he warred, and how he recovered for Israel Damascus and Hamath, which had belonged to Judah, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-

See on :15. This may not be the same books of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles. David had put garrisons in Damascus (2 Sam. 8:6) and had made Hamath's king a tributary to him (2 Sam. 8:9-11). So we are reading here of how Jeroboam restored to some extent the Davidic kingdom and situation- but by grace alone (:26), seeing he was wicked. This was all encouragement to the exiles, that God's word of restoration had come true earlier, by grace alone, despite His people's weakness.

2Ki 14:29 Jeroboam slept with his fathers, even with the kings of Israel; and Zechariah his son reigned in his place-

This was now the fourth generation from Jehu who were to reign on the throne before being cut off (2 Kings 10:30).

2 KINGS CHAPTER 15

2Ki 15:1 In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel began Azariah son of Amaziah king of Judah to reign-

Azariah is called Uzziah in 2 Chron. 26. The margin of the earlier versions of the AV states: "This is the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam's partnership in the kingdom with his father, who made him consort at his going to the Syrian wars. It is the sixteenth year of Jeroboam's monarchy". Lightfoot tries to reconcile with 2 Kings 14:16,17 by claiming that "At the death of Amaziah, his son and heir Uzziah was but

four years old, for he was about sixteen in Jeroboam's twenty-seventh year; therefore, the throne must have been empty eleven years, and the government administered by protectors while Uzziah was in his minority". These explanations rather founder when compared with 2 Chron. 26:1; 2 Kings 14:20,21. Probably the better resolution is to just accept that the numerals 15 ט and 27 כ have been confused by copying error. The difference between them is not that great, just a few tiny stems on letters.

"Uzziah", 'strength of Jehovah', has a very similar meaning to the name of his father Amaziah, 'power of Jehovah'. Yet Amaziah had not lived up to that (see on 2 Chron. 25:15. He may have named his son similarly in a hope that he would succeed where he failed.

2Ki 15:2 Sixteen years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem-

This means that he was born about the time that his father Amaziah turned away from Yahweh (2 Chron. 25:25-27). His spirituality may therefore have been due to his mother, 'Yah will enable'.

2Ki 15:3 He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, according to all that his father Amaziah had done-

God's judgment of Amaziah was that he *did* what was right, but his heart was not consistently with God. So the meaning of this may be that Uzziah likewise *did* what was right, he did something which were right, as Amaziah did. But there is no comment at this point about the all important judgment of God about his state of heart. And I suggested on 2 Chron. 26:2 that he began by simply living out parental expectation. See on 2 Chron. 26:16.

2Ki 15:4 However the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places-

"Taken away" is the same word as 'depart from' in :9. The way of Jeroboam was not departed from, and so the high places were not departed from. The suggestion is that they were associated with the calf worship.

2Ki 15:5 Yahweh struck the king, so that he was a leper to the day of his death, and lived in a separate house. Jotham the king's son was over the household, judging the people of the land-

There is far more background in the record in 2 Chron. 26. This living in a separate house indicates obedience to God's law. For Naaman was a leper and yet had an active place in Syrian society, and Uzziah and Judah might have adopted their attitude to leprosy. The fact Uzziah didn't seek to get around this could perhaps indicate that he accepted his judgment and may have repented. But see on 2 Chron. 26:23.

2Ki 15:6 Now the rest of the acts of Azariah, and all that he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-

This may not be the same book of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles.

2Ki 15:7 Azariah slept with his fathers; and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David. Jotham his son reigned in his place-

2 Chron. 26:23 is more detailed: "So Uzziah slept with his fathers; and they buried him with his fathers in the field of burial which belonged to the kings; for they said, He is a leper". They were hyper sensitive to the Mosaic legislation about leprosy (see on :5), and yet Isaiah says that Judah at that time were spiritually so leprous, and they

didn't even realize it. They focused upon external obedience to the law when it concerned others, but failed to see that they in essence were just as bad as those whom they were carefully separate from. And this again is an abiding lesson for us. We note that sleeping with fathers doesn't have to mean being buried next to them.

2Ki 15:8 In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah king of Judah, Zechariah the son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in Samaria six months-

Some wicked kings reigned just six months, others decades. We cannot immediately explain this, although it seems some showed signs of repentance whereas others didn't, and God patiently worked with them- even if in the end He didn't persuade them of repentance.

2Ki 15:9 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, as his fathers had done: he didn't depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin-

See on :4. Israel had been commanded to "not depart" from the way of Yahweh's commandments (Dt. 28:14; Josh. 1:7), but the frequent lament of the historical records is that they did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam. The Bible, especially in Proverbs, constantly reduces human moral choice to that between two ways of life and being. We constantly wish to argue that "it's not so simple" because there are grey areas. But the 'grey area' argument is what leads us so often into sin, into following the "way" of sin.

2Ki 15:10 Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and struck him before the people, and killed him, and reigned in his place-

Amos was a prophet contemporary with this situation and he had prophesied in Am. 7:9 that God "will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword". Hence the murder was committed "before the people", in some kind of public execution.

2Ki 15:11 Now the rest of the acts of Zechariah, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel-

Not necessarily the same book of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles. See on :21.

2Ki 15:12 This was the word of Yahweh which He spoke to Jehu, saying, Your sons to the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel. So it came to pass-

We must read in an ellipsis; "this was the [fulfilment of] the word of Yahweh". His word is so sure of fulfilment that His word is the fulfilment of it. We are to grasp this perspective by living as if the word of promise has been fulfilled in essence.

2Ki 15:13 Shallum the son of Jabesh began to reign in the thirty-ninth year of Azariah king of Judah; and he reigned for a month in Samaria-

Amos describes the situation at this time as being of very deep moral failure.

2Ki 15:14 Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah, and came to Samaria, and struck Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria, and killed him, and reigned in his place-

Tirzah may have been the home town of Menahem. Or it could be that he was at Tirzah on the way to a campaign in Tiphsah (:16); Menahem appears to have been the commander of the army.

2Ki 15:15 Now the rest of the acts of Shallum, and his conspiracy which he made,

behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel-
Not the same book of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles; see on :21.

2Ki 15:16 Then Menahem struck Tiphshah, and all who were therein, and its borders, from Tirzah, because they didn't open to him. Therefore he struck it; and all the women therein who were with child he ripped up-

Tiphshah was on the Euphrates (1 Kings 4:24). But this was very far away, and maybe the reference is to some other town; the name means "passage" or "ford". Perhaps Zachariah had sought to continue on his father's policy of restoring Israel's border, and had gathered an army to do this which was at the royal city of Tirzah, with Menahem as general. But before they marched "from [i.e. starting from] Tirzah", they heard that Shallum had murdered Zachariah and taken the throne. Menahem therefore marched from Tirzah to Samaria, destroyed Shallum, returning to his military base as Tirzah, and then continued the eastern campaign.

Slaying the pregnant women was surely not in accord with the spirit of the Mosaic laws of engagement. And yet he conducted his campaign under the excuse he was zealously restoring Israel's borders in accordance with the covenant.

2Ki 15:17 In the thirty-ninth year of Azariah king of Judah, Menahem the son of Gadi began to reign over Israel for ten years in Samaria-

"Gadi" means "fortune" and is a term associated with idolatry. He doesn't have even God's name in his name nor did his son Menahem, and Amos describes the spiritual situation in Israel as utterly dire at this time.

2Ki 15:18 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh. He didn't depart all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin-
For "depart", see on :9.

2Ki 15:19 There came against the land Pul the king of Assyria; and Menahem gave Pul one thousand talents of silver, that he might help him to confirm the kingdom in his hand-

Menahem clearly didn't have a strong hold on power within Israel nor amongst the surrounding nations, and sought strength from Pul rather than God. "Pul" does not appear in the Assyrian Canon, but Babylonian documents seem claim Pul (Pulu) was the Babylonian name for Tiglath-pileser, who reigned under that name in Babylon during his last two years. It was the same power which was to desolate Israel; and yet they invited them to come into their land, in their faithfulness.

The 1000 talents was maybe a punishment for taking Tiphshah.

2Ki 15:20 Menahem exacted the money of Israel, even of all the mighty men of wealth, of each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria turned back, and didn't stay there in the land.-

Fifty shekels was a heavy tax, and to get 1000 talents, it would have had to be taken from 60,000 people. This confirms the impression we get from the prophecies of Amos at this time; that there was wealth in Israel, although in the hands of the ruling elite. And it was this wealth which led to their apostacy.

2Ki 15:21 Now the rest of the acts of Menahem, and all that he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?-

Not the same book of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles, which says nothing about Menahem.

2Ki 15:22 Menahem slept with his fathers; and Pekahiah his son reigned in his place-
The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2Ki 15:23 In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah Pekahiah the son of Menahem began to reign over Israel in Samaria for two years-
We note the contrast in the general lengths of reign; the kings of Judah reigned far longer on average than those of Israel. Although Menahem was far from God, he inserted the name Yah in his son's name. Typically Israel sinned not by totally rejecting Yahweh, but as we are tempted to, mixing His religion with our own idolatry and agendas.

2Ki 15:24 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh. He didn't depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin-
For "depart", see on :9.

2Ki 15:25 Pekah the son of Remaliah, his captain, conspired against him and struck him in Samaria, in the castle of the king's house, with Argob and Arieah; and with him were fifty men of the Gileadites. He killed him, and reigned in his place-
The men of Gilead were those whom a few years ago Menahem had sought to restore to Israel through his campaign at Tiphshah on the Euphrates (see on :16). But the people were disloyal and ever seeking for petty advantage and settling old scores, so they helped to murder his son. "With Argob and Arieah" suggests they were with him at the time and not part of the conspiracy against him. Perhaps they were his deputies, but we note neither of them have the name of God in their names.

2Ki 15:26 Now the rest of the acts of Pekahiah, and all that he did, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel-
Not the same book of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles, see on :21.

2Ki 15:27 In the fifty-second year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekah the son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel in Samaria for twenty years-
Isaiah mentions Pekah as 'the son of Remaliah' only, without mention of his name, perhaps because his life was a denial of his name, 'Yah is watching'.

2Ki 15:28 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh. He didn't depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel to sin-
For "depart", see on :9.

2Ki 15:29 In the days of Pekah king of Israel came Tiglath Pileser king of Assyria, and took Ijon, Abel Beth Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, Galilee all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to Assyria-
Yet despite this loss of his northern borderlands, he planned on restoring the size of his territory by attacking Judah, as explained in Is. 7-9.

2Ki 15:30 Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and struck him, and killed him, and reigned in his place, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah-

The end of Israel is associated with conspiracies and brother murdering brother. This is why division and aggression between brethren is associated with condemnation, and by behaving like this, we herald not only the destruction of our own community of believers but are living out our own condemnation (see on Gal. 5:15).

2 Kings 15:30 says that Hoshea began to reign in the twentieth year of Jotham; but Jotham only reigned 16 years (2 Kings 15:33). But 2 Kings 17:1 says that Hoshea became king of Israel in the 12th year of Ahaz. There are various possibilities here. One is that if 2 Kings 15:30 "in the twentieth year of Jotham" means "in the twentieth year from the accession of Jotham" i.e. in the fourth year of Ahaz, as Jotham reigned sixteen years (2 Kings 15:33). There may have been some overlap in the reigns, whereby two kings rule at the same time, an "interregnum". Although we must then somehow factor in 2 Kings 15:30. Another possibility is that although Hoshea killed Pekah in the fourth year of Ahaz (2 Kings 15:30), he didn't fully become king until eight years later. Eight years of anarchy between the death of Pekah and establishment of Hoshea as king would not be unimaginable, given the terribly divided state of Israel at the time.

2Ki 15:31 Now the rest of the acts of Pekah, and all that he did, behold, they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel-

Not the same book of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles, see on :21.

2Ki 15:32 In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel began Jotham the son of Uzziah king of Judah to reign-

Verse 33 notes that "He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem".

He died at 41, which is a number which repeats at least three other times in the history of the kings (1 Kings 14:21; 15:10; 2 Kings 14:23). We can only ponder whether this is all some kind of Divinely arranged program, the exact function of which we cannot understand although we perceive it as existent.

2Ki 15:33 He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Jerusha the daughter of Zadok-

Zadok, righteousness, is a typical priestly name; so we wonder whether this was another example of the kingly and priestly lines uniting.

2Ki 15:34 He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh; he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done-

So often kings who were not very faithful or spiritual are described with a rubric like: "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord: he did according to all that his father... had done". This may not mean that he totally did what was right in God's sight. He did what was right *only insofar as his father had done*. And this is why over time, the spirituality of the kings of Judah decreased.

2Ki 15:35 However the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burned incense in the high places. He built the upper gate of the house of

Yahweh-

This was the gate which led from the king's palace to the temple. The fact the king rebuilt it would reflect his desire for access to the temple and a wish to show solidarity with the temple.

2Ki 15:36 Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all that he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-

Bearing in mind the note on :21, it is so that 2 Chron. 27 records in great detail Jotham's mighty works.

2Ki 15:37 In those days Yahweh began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah-

God had condemned and forbidden any fighting between His people. But He sent Pekah of Israel against Judah. He confirms division and conflict between brethren if that is what they wish, just as He confirms the unity of the Spirit through His Spirit.

2Ki 15:38 Jotham slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father; and Ahaz his son reigned in his place-

The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 16

2Ki 16:1 In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah Ahaz the son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign-

Ahaz means 'taker hold of', and Isaiah [who prophesied at his time] seems to make a play on his name when he uses the word about the judgment which was to come upon or 'take hold of' him (Is. 5:29; 13:8; 21:3; 33:14).

2Ki 16:2 Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign; and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. He didn't do that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh his God, like David his father-

Isaiah, Hosea and Micah all prophesied during his evil reign and provide more details about the awful nature of his sins.

2Ki 16:3 But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel-

Although Israel is often described as the source of Judah's apostasy, we must give due weight to Ezekiel's word that Judah was in fact more wicked than Israel. This could have been because Judah fell further, from greater spiritual potential. Or maybe because sinners can provoke people to sin worse than they do.

Yes, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations, whom Yahweh cast out from before the children of Israel-

Hezekiah his son somehow survived this, but may have reacted to his father's murder of his brothers by turning right against such idolatry. This means that his apparent zeal for Yahweh [remembering that he turned away from Him in the end and raised

Manasseh] was partly due to a psychological reaction against his father and traumatic childhood experiences. For he would have lived in constant fear that he would also be offered, at the whim of the gods of his father. It was common to make children pass through fire as a kind of dedication ceremony; but he actually burnt his children in the fire, such was his obsession.

The valley of Hinnom, Ge Hinnom, was to later be known as Gehenna, and became a symbol used by the Lord for complete destruction (Mt. 5:22). As they burnt their children there, to destruction, so sinners would be burnt to destruction in that same place. Joachim Jeremias explains how the literal valley of Gehenna came to be misinterpreted as a symbol of a 'hell' that is supposed to be a place of fire:

“[*Gehenna*]...since ancient times has been the name of the valley west and south of Jerusalem...from the woes pronounced by the prophets on the valley (Jer. 7:32 = 19:6; cf. Is. 31:9; 66:24) because sacrifices to Moloch took place there (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6), there developed in the second century BC the idea that the valley of Hinnom would be the place of a fiery hell (Eth. Enoch 26; 90.26)... it is distinguished from *sheol*” (*New Testament Theology*, London: SCM, 1972 p. 129).

2Ki 16:4 He sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places and on the hills, and under every green tree-

Large, flourishing green trees weren't so common in the landscape, and they therefore came to be seen as the presence of fertility gods. This is the huge significance of the old covenant promising fertility from Yahweh- for most of the pagan gods were seen as fertility gods, and this is why they were worshipped by largely agricultural people.

2Ki 16:5 Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to war; and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him-

2 Chron. 28 records their massive military victories against Ahaz. But Kings wishes to stress that despite these, they could not overcome him in order to take Jerusalem. He outlived their siege. It seems he lost nearly all of Judah apart from Jerusalem. This focus upon the fact Jerusalem was retained is perhaps to show how it was preserved by grace, because of God's special grace toward the throne of David there. But that grace was not limitless, and the situation was to repeat in Hezekiah's time, until finally Jerusalem did fall, because of the persistent evil of the people.

2Ki 16:6 At that time Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath to Syria, and drove the Jews from Elath; and the Syrians came to Elath, and lived there, to this day-

Elath was Judah's eastern port, and yet it was surrounded by Edom. "The Syrians" could be as LXX "the Idumeans", i.e. the Edomites.

2Ki 16:7 So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath Pileser king of Assyria saying, I am your servant and your son. Come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, who are rising up against me-

2 Kings 16:7 "Syria" is LXX "Edom". Although Kings then records the Assyrian attack upon Syria (:17). So perhaps the idea is that the Edomites of 2 Chron. 28:17 were in fact under the control of Syria: "For again the Edomites had come and struck Judah, and carried away captives". It seems Edom was under the control of Syria. And so Ahaz paid Assyria to attack Syria. Or it could be [putting the Kings record together with this] that Ahaz paid Assyria to help him against Edom, but Assyria instead attacked Syria, claiming that was good enough work done for the money. Even though Assyria had their own agenda for attacking Syria (Aram).

2Ki 16:8 Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of Yahweh, and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it for a present to the king of Assyria- Chronicles says that he "gathered together the vessels of the house of God and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God", as if he melted them down to send to Assyria. He showed thereby how little respect he had for the things of Yahweh worship. Gold is a symbol of faith (1 Pet. 1:7), and his faith was clearly not in God but in the might of Assyria- which was to later almost destroy Judah in Hezekiah's time.

2Ki 16:9 The king of Assyria listened to him. The king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried its people captive to Kir, and killed Rezin- 2 Chron. 28:20 comments that "Tilgath Pilneser king of Assyria came to him and distressed him, but didn't strengthen him". Giving God's money to Gentile powers never achieved anything but only ever made matters worse (2 Chron. 16:2; 2 Kings 12:18; 18:15). But even Hezekiah refused to learn this clearly taught theme in the history of God's people. "It didn't help him" was to be Judah's later experience in seeking help from Egypt against Babylon (s.w. Is. 31:1; Lam. 4:17). Again, they failed to learn the lessons from history, unwilling to see that these historical situations spoke directly to their own situations and lives. We too can fail to perceive this. In fact the choice of histories and biographies we have in the Bible have been carefully selected in order that man need never feel alone; in essence, every life situation has been met at some point and time in the past.

2Ki 16:10 King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath Pileser king of Assyria, and saw the altar that was at Damascus-

This was surely one of the mobile altars which the Assyrians took with them. Assyria had conquered Damascus and so were enthroning their gods there. Tiglath Pileser was known for holding regional courts for his vassals as he travelled around on his campaigns.

And king Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the fashion of the altar, and its pattern, according to all its workmanship-

However, Ahaz also tried worshipping the gods of Syria (Aram) whom he had asked Assyria to attack: "For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which struck him. He said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, so I will sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel" (2 Chron. 28:23). The increasing distress upon Ahaz was intended to elicit his repentance and turning to Yahweh. But instead he turned even more to idolatry. This mad obsession with idolatry is described in Ezekiel and Hosea as like a kind of sexual addiction, whereby the more partners a sex addict has, the more they require. Most nations had a set of national gods, and they only changed them if they were conquered by other nations and forced to accept their gods. But God's people had an obsession with every kind of god, until the Jerusalem temple was filled with all manner of shrines to various gods at the time of its destruction. And the bizarre thing was that Syria was to fall at this time to Assyria (2 Kings 16:9); their gods didn't ultimately help them, and in fact Ahaz had paid money to Assyria to attack the Syrians.

"Fashion... pattern" is a similar phrase to that in Gen. 1:26, where God made man in His image and likeness. Here, Ahaz creates after another image and likeness. Just as man has in a sense created gods after his own image and likeness, and not in God's.

2Ki 16:11 Urijah the priest built an altar: according to all that king Ahaz had sent

from Damascus, so Urijah the priest made it for the coming of king Ahaz from Damascus-

If Urijah the priest is the one of Is. 8:2, we see how even Isaiah's inner circle had fallen away. Assyrian altars were small and mobile (see on :10), built on a triangular base with very specific Assyrian inscriptions. We note the pagan associations of the triangle have a long history, which continues in the false doctrine of the Trinity.

2Ki 16:12 When the king had come from Damascus, the king saw the altar, and the king drew near to the altar, and offered on it-

He acted as a priest within the temple. Uzziah did this and was struck with leprosy. Ahaz apparently 'got away with it'. But this connects with the question as to why such a sinful man had such a long reign. We can only assume that this was because God kept trying with him, in the hope of repentance. But God responds differently to sin in every life; and therein lies the fallacy of churches seeking to have a standard policy on how to respond to sin and failure. Each case is different, even if the external sin is apparently the same. Seeing and then worshipping recalls the sin of Adam and Eve, seeing the fruit and then eating it. Their sin was indeed the essence of every sin which was to follow.

2Ki 16:13 He burnt his burnt offering and his meal offering, and poured his drink offering, and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings on the altar-

Again we see Ahaz acting as a priest (see on :12), although with no faithful priest like Azariah to step in and stop him (2 Chron. 26:17). We note he offered peace offerings, something only possible through having persuaded himself that he could worship idols as a form of Yahweh worship. Are we going to be like Israel, who offered peace offerings, and then rose up from their tables to worship idols and indulge their flesh (Ex. 32:5,6)? Are we going to be like those Israelites who offered a peace offering, when actually they were not at peace with God at all (1 Sam. 13:9; 2 Kings 16:13; Prov. 7:14; Am. 5:22)? These are challenges especially appropriate to the breaking of bread meeting, which is a kind of new covenant equivalent for the peace offering.

2Ki 16:14 The bronze altar, which was before Yahweh, he brought from the forefront of the house, from between his altar and the house of Yahweh, and put it on the north side of his altar-

We note he didn't destroy Yahweh's altar nor melt it down as he did other things in the temple (2 Chron. 28:24). He saw himself as reinterpreting Yahweh worship, rather than destroying it.

2Ki 16:15 King Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest saying, On the great altar burn the morning burnt offering, and the evening meal offering, and the king's burnt offering, and his meal offering, with the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their meal offering and their drink offerings; and sprinkle on it all the blood of the burnt offering, and all the blood of the sacrifice; but the bronze altar shall be for me to inquire by-

Again we see Ahaz continuing to worship Yahweh, but claiming to do so through worshipping idols. This has been the perennial temptation for God's people, to mix flesh and spirit, to go the way of the flesh in the name of the Spirit. The king continued to have "his" special offerings. He did not turn away from Yahweh officially, but rather sought to show that he was continuing faithful to the tradition of the king leading the way in offering sacrifice (1 Kings 8:62).

2Ki 16:16 Urijah the priest did so, according to all that king Ahaz commanded-

We must compare the scene with the reminiscence of 2 Chron. 29:7: "Also they have shut up the doors of the porch, and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense nor offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel".

I suggest that offerings were offered there, but to Yahweh through the pagan gods.

But this was not therefore offering to the God of Israel, who demands totally devotion to Himself as the only true God. For the temple services continued on some level (2 Kings 16:14-16), although Ahaz had brought idols into the holy place of the temple (2 Chron. 29:5).

Ahaz didn't totally reject Yahweh worship (see on 2 Chron. 28:24). He had mixed Yahweh worship with idolatry, which in essence is the temptation we all have.

Scientific atheism, a total rejection of our God, is likely not our biggest temptation; rather is it to mix His ways with those of the flesh and the secular world.

2Ki 16:17 King Ahaz cut off the panels of the bases, and removed the basins from off them, and took down the sea from off the bronze oxen that were under it, and put it on a pavement of stone-

Ahaz saw no need for cleansing within the rituals of worship. He had no conscience of personal sin. And so his desecration of the laver is particularly recorded. The 'gathering together' of the temple vessels (2 Chron. 28:24) may mean he melted them down. However 2 Kings 16:17 implies this was only done to the huge supports of the laver. I suggest Ahaz retained some level of belief in Yahweh, for the temple services continued on some level (2 Kings 16:13), although Ahaz had brought idols into the holy place of the temple (2 Chron. 29:5). He had mixed Yahweh worship with idolatry, which in essence is the temptation we all have. Scientific atheism, a total rejection of our God, is likely not our biggest temptation; rather is it to mix His ways with those of the flesh and the secular world.

2Ki 16:18 The covered way for the Sabbath that they had built in the house, and the king's entry outside the house of Yahweh, he changed because of the king of Assyria- 2 Chron. 28:24 says that "Ahaz gathered together the vessels of God's house, cut in pieces the vessels of God's house, and shut up the doors of the house of Yahweh; and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem". But perhaps 2 Kings 16:18 helps understand this as meaning that he shut up one door or gate of the temple and devoted it to the idols of Assyria; without meaning that all the doors or gates of the temple were closed. It's doubtful Ahaz resigned all belief in Yahweh, but rather wanted to treat all his gods equally. Lest he offend any of them. The fundamental teaching that Yahweh is one, the one and only God, was ignored. This particular "way" was the passage between the king's house and the temple which he used every Sabbath. He "changed" it, or perhaps named it in honour of the king of Assyria.

These changes to the temple and its equipment in :17,18 are similar to how the Egyptian kings are recorded as mutilating their gods and temples when the gods fell out of favour with them. However we noted on :15 that Ahaz continued the semblance of worship of Yahweh, but dedicated it instead to his new gods. It is too simplistic to think that he totally rejected Yahweh for other gods. Our temptations likewise are not a case of becoming atheists.

2Ki 16:19 Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz which he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-

This may not be the same book of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles. See on 2 Kings 15:21.

2Ki 16:20 Ahaz slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David; and Hezekiah his son reigned in his place-

The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 17

2Ki 17:1 In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel for nine years-

2 Kings 15:30 says that Hoshea began to reign in the twentieth year of Jotham; but Jotham only reigned 16 years (2 Kings 15:33). But 2 Kings 17:1 says that Hoshea became king of Israel in the 12th year of Ahaz. There are various possibilities here. One is that if 2 Kings 15:30 "in the twentieth year of Jotham" means "in the twentieth year from the accession of Jotham" i.e. in the fourth year of Ahaz, as Jotham reigned sixteen years (2 Kings 15:33). There may have been some overlap in the reigns, whereby two kings rule at the same time, an "interregnum". Although we must then somehow factor in 2 Kings 15:30. Another possibility is that although Hoshea killed Pekah in the fourth year of Ahaz (2 Kings 15:30), he didn't fully become king until eight years later. Eight years of anarchy between the death of Pekah and establishment of Hoshea as king would not be unimaginable, given the terribly divided state of Israel at the time.

2Ki 17:2 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, yet not as the kings of Israel who were before him-

There are degrees of sin. God sees some wicked men as more wicked than others; for He is sensitive to every one of their sins. "For three transgressions and for four" of Israel or the Gentiles, God would still punish Jew and Gentile alike (Am. 1,2)- i.e. He still feels the fourth sin, He doesn't become insensitive after the third sin. See on :7.

2Ki 17:3 Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant, and brought him tribute-

Shalmaneser appears from the inscriptions to be the Shalman of Hos. 10:14, and the Sargon of Is. 20:1.

2Ki 17:4 The king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year. Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison-

Hoshea paid the tribute for six years (cp. :5,6). The notice that he was imprisoned will be explained in :5,6 as to how it came about. He was likely imprisoned after Samaria fell. Although it is possible there was a battle with the Assyrians before the siege began, during which Hoshea was captured.

Judah were intended to learn from the judgments upon the ten tribes. For they were not much better, and Ez. 16,20 say that finally they were worse than the ten

tribes. As Samaria was besieged, so was Jerusalem to be besieged by the same nation. But Hezekiah apparently didn't learn the lesson. As Israel tried to avoid paying tribute to Assyria and instead made a covenant with Egypt for help (2 Kings 17:4), so did Hezekiah. And the message 'don't ever trust in Egypt' was engrained in the Biblical narrative. But likewise we find the consistent theme that God's people refuse to learn from their history. See on :7.

2Ki 17:5 Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years-

The King of Assyria “came up” throughout the land promised to Abraham (2 Kings 17:5). The Hebrew word used is *alah*, meaning to ascend up- and this is the very battle cry of the Islamic fundamentalists, *Allah ahbar*. The Assyrians were persuaded that the one true God, Yahweh, had sent them against Israel (2 Kings 18:25)- just as the Islamic fundamentalists are today. The three years were not three whole years, but one year and parts of two others (cp. 2 Kings 18:9,10).

2Ki 17:6 In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away to Assyria-

It seems that in this very year (BC722), Sargon succeeded Shalmaneser IV in a revolution. Sargon in his annals refers to his victory over Samaria as his earliest act. 2 Kings 18:9,10 record that Shalmaneser "came up against Samaria, and besieged it" but "they took it" rather than "he took it". It seems the representatives of these kings are referred to, and they were not personally present. Sargon as it were capitalized on the progress made whilst Shalmaneser was king. The annals of Sargon claim that 27,290 people were deported from Samaria. But those annals also imply many were left in the land and paid tribute to him.

And placed them in Halah-

Perhaps the Calah of Gen. 10:11, the old capital of Assyria.

And on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes-

Assyria had only recently overrun those cities, and so the captured Israelites were used to populate them and thus dilute the ethnicity of the local population.

2Ki 17:7 It was so, because the children of Israel had sinned against Yahweh their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They had feared other gods-

Hoshea is not recorded as being a wildly sinful king, and although not a true believer, he did not sin as badly as those before him (:2). And yet judgment came in his day. The judgment is presented here as being because of the sin of the people, not so much their leaders. The reformers of God's people were it seems lone voices, with very little groundswell of support amongst the ordinary people. The fearing of other gods is here blamed upon their refusal to learn the spirit of the Passover, to refuse to be awed by the great redemption which they had historically experienced. This continues the consistent theme that God's people refuse to learn from their history. See on :4. The equivalent for us would be a failure to learn the lesson of historical redemption which is intended to be regularly learned through the breaking of bread memorial service.

2Ki 17:8 and walked in the statutes of the kings of Israel which they had made, and of the nations, whom Yahweh cast out from before the children of Israel-

2 Kings 17 points a contrast between people deciding to follow the *customs* and *manners* of their own kings and the pagan nations, rather than accept the

commandments of God; His commandments were and are designed to elicit a way of life, to be the alternative to the customs or tradition which we previously lived by. Judah walked in the habits ["customs"] of the heathen and of the kings of Israel; "they followed vanity and became vain and went after the heathen" (:15). The habits of our world likewise are vain; wasting time online, following gossip and speculations, and in the end we become as vain as the vain habits we have slipped into. Once habit solidifies, it becomes effectively part of our nature and almost impossible to change, at least in human strength- so Jer. 13:23 teaches us: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good, that are accustomed to do evil". The Hebrew translated "accustomed" carries the idea of repeated habit. The Hebrew idea of 'teaching' is connected to the words for 'habit' or 'custom'; because teaching was by repetition.

2Ki 17:9 The children of Israel did secretly things that were not right against Yahweh their God. They built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fortified city-

There was no ultimate secret, for God knew their ways, and their actions were manifest on "every high hill and under every green tree" (:10). The 'secrecy' was in that they thought their deeds could be kept secret from God. And the record reflects their wrong perspective with no further comment. It is for us to perceive it. And the same is true with the matter of demons. This is one reason why the apparent error isn't corrected.

Having high places "in all their cities", from lonely watchtowers to their larger fenced cities, contrasts with the intention of centralized worship in Jerusalem at the temple. The division with Judah precluded that; and so we see how division amongst God's people sets up the possibility of not serving Him as we ought.

2Ki 17:10 and they set them up pillars and Asherim on every high hill, and under every green tree-

Large, flourishing green trees weren't so common in the landscape, and they therefore came to be seen as the presence of fertility gods. This is the huge significance of the old covenant promising fertility from Yahweh- for most of the pagan gods were seen as fertility gods, and this is why they were worshipped by largely agricultural people.

2Ki 17:11 There they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the nations whom Yahweh carried away before them; and they worked wicked things to provoke Yahweh to anger-

God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

2Ki 17:12 and they served idols, of which Yahweh had said to them, You shall not do this thing-

"Idols" here translates an unusual word, a form of *galal*, meaning "dung". We always feel how God so detests idolatry. And this is how He sees it. Plain simple commandments (Ex. 20:4,5,23) were just ignored by them.

2Ki 17:13 Yet Yahweh testified to Israel and to Judah, by every prophet and every seer, saying, Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets-

See on Jer. 23:18,22. "Testified" is the language of the court room. In the court of Heaven, they had been testified to by the prophets. The last generation had the testimony of "every" prophet against them. God's word became a cumulative weight of evidence against them. And we in our last days, having a completed Bible so readily available to us, likewise have a greater responsibility than those of earlier days. We cannot claim ignorance to God's will. See on :16.

2Ki 17:14 Notwithstanding, they would not listen, but stiffened their neck, like the neck of their fathers, who didn't believe in Yahweh their God-

Judah in their last days were to fail to learn from the example of Israel (2 Chron. 36:13). See on :4,7. The hardening of the neck was in order to refuse the yoke of Yahweh's covenant which was placed upon them; they refused to cooperate and work with Him. It was for this reason that Judah too were taken into captivity (s.w. Jer. 7:26; 17:23; 19:15). We would likely have focused upon their idolatry as the reason for their judgment. But the essential problem, as always, was human pride in refusing to hear God's word. They were intended to have the yoke of the covenant upon them, but they like a difficult beast of burden refused it. They didn't want covenant relationship with Yahweh. They "did" the ordinances as a matter of casuistic legal obedience, but didn't live in their spirit.

2Ki 17:15 They rejected His statutes and His covenant that He made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified to them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom Yahweh had commanded them that they should not do like them-

See on :8. Although it is true as it was with Saul that those who reject Yahweh's word are rejected (1 Sam. 15:23), God's grace is beyond such a simplistic picture. Israel were to despise / reject God's word (s.w. Lev. 26:15,43), "and yet for all that.. I will not reject them / cast they away" (Lev. 26:44 s.w.). Israel rejected Yahweh when they wanted Saul to be their king (s.w. 1 Sam. 8:7; 10:19), and yet He did not reject them immediately because of that. The relevance to the exiles was in that they were in captivity because they too had rejected God's word and therefore God had rejected them (2 Kings 17:15 cp. 2 Kings 17:20; 23:27), because they rejected His prophetic words, He rejected them (Jer. 6:19,30; Hos. 4:6), "and yet for all that.. I will not reject them / cast they away" (Lev. 26:44; Jer. 31:37 s.w.). For ultimately God has not rejected / cast away His people (Is. 41:9; Jer. 33:26; Rom. 11:2). This is the mystery of grace, no matter how we may seek to explain it away by Biblical exposition and balancing Bible verses against each other.

2Ki 17:16 They forsook all the commandments of Yahweh their God, and made them molten images, even two calves, and made an Asherah-

This is clearly a historical survey of Israel's sins, but the last generation are going to be judged for it because they refused to repent; and as noted on :13, that last generation had the testimony of "every" prophet against them. God's word became a cumulative weight of evidence against them. As it is with our generation too. The Asherah or grove refers to that set up by Ahab.

And worshipped all the army of the sky-

This was not mentioned previously in the accounts of Israel's apostasy, although it is in the record of Judah's. Star worship was specific to the Assyrians and Babylonians, so it seems they accepted a whole package of Assyrian gods and idolatry. See on :24.

And served Baal-

Jehu's reforms were not therefore permanent (2 Kings 10:28).

2Ki 17:17 They caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, to provoke Him to anger-

Sin is serious. An example of this occurs in the fact that the last generation of Israel were judged for their sins not because they had sinned more than any other generation, but because the collective, unforgiven sin of Israel had accumulated with God to such an extent that His judgments fell (2 Kings 17:2,13-18; Ez. 9:9). God is not passive and overlooking of unrepented sin, even though His patience and the high threshold level He sets before releasing judgment may make it look like this. The Amorites were likewise only judged once the cup of their iniquities reached a certain level (Gen. 15:16).

"Sold themselves" is the language of prostitution, and is commonly used by the prophets of the time, Hosea especially. Every and any idol is a form of competition with Yahweh, and this remains chillingly true to this days.

2Ki 17:18 Therefore Yahweh was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of His sight. There was none left but the tribe of Judah only-

We see how in a way, Israel and Judah are spoken of as the same entity. There was nothing left of "Israel" apart from "Judah". God has never recognized the divisions amongst His people, and neither should we.

2Ki 17:19 Also Judah didn't keep the commandments of Yahweh their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel which they made-

The contrast is between God's "commandments", and the "statutes" of Israel, by which they had enshrined their idolatry. Whilst "statutes" is indeed used of God's commandments, there may be an intended contrast here between God's commandments, and the "statutes"- s.w. "custom", "manner", referring more to tradition and culture. For this is the basis of most merely religious forms of Christianity, and it stands in contrast to following God's living word.

2Ki 17:20 Yahweh rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them and delivered them into the hand of spoilers, until He had cast them out of His sight-

See on :15. Jonah, a contemporary prophet, recognized "I am cast out of Your sight" (Jonah 2:4), the very language of condemnation used at this time (1 Kings 9:7; 2 Kings 17:20; 21:2; 23:27; Jer. 7:15). But the lesson was that there was hope that even through the traumas in the sea of nations, Israel could still be restored and resume their intended mission in the Gentile world. We marvel at how Jonah was so proud of Israel and nationalistic that he didn't want the Assyrians of Nineveh to repent. But Israel were so unspiritual at his time.

2Ki 17:21 For He tore Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. Jeroboam drove Israel from following Yahweh, and made them sin a great sin-

God tore them, and Jeroboam drove them. Clearly the division amongst God's people was from God, even though He didn't recognize it in some ways. The division was the fault of men, and yet God caused it. He will confirm divisive behaviour just as He will confirm the spirit of true unity. "Tore" is the word usually used for the rending of clothes. It is as if even at the time of the division, God tore His own clothes in grief at the behaviour of His people. The word used for how Jeroboam "drove" Israel away from Yahweh to idols is that used in Dt. 4:19; 13:5,10,13 of the false prophet who should be killed for doing this. But Israel didn't do that to Jeroboam, and Judah were so parochial and arrogant that even their better leaders didn't consider that dealing with Israel's apostasy was their duty. So the end of Israel and Judah was really a case of failure all around. But we can also translate that Israel tore themselves away from the house of David. So the Divine judgment of division was in fact only confirming men in what they themselves had done and set up. All Divine judgment and condemnation is really only giving men what they themselves lived out in their lives.

2Ki 17:22 The children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they didn't depart from them-

Israel had been commanded to "not depart" from the way of Yahweh's commandments (Dt. 28:14; Josh. 1:7), but the frequent lament of the historical records is that they did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam. The Bible, especially in Proverbs, constantly reduces human moral choice to that between two ways of life and being. We constantly wish to argue that "it's not so simple" because there are grey areas. But the 'grey area' argument is what leads us so often into sin, into following the "way" of sin.

2Ki 17:23 until Yahweh removed Israel out of His sight, as He spoke by all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away out of their own land to Assyria to this day-

"Removed" is s.w. 'departed from' in :22. They did not depart from their way of sin, and so they were departed from. The frequent references to Israel being removed from His sight, or eye (e.g. 2 Kings 17:23) may refer to the way that an Angel was permanently present in Israel, the land in which the Angel eyes of the Lord ran to and fro. By going into captivity, Israel were thus removed from God's Angelic 'eye'. This would explain how Israel were never out of God's sight in the sense of His awareness of them. And yet language of limitation is being used here- because the Angel dwelling in Israel no longer 'saw' the people. This idea may be behind the references to God's eye not sparing nor pitying Israel (Ez. 7:4)- when in fact God Himself did and does spare and pity Israel. The implication would then be that His grace and pity is even greater than that of His Angels- which is an encouraging thought to us here on earth who struggle to believe in the extent of God's personal grace to us.

2Ki 17:24 The king of Assyria brought men from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel; and they possessed Samaria, and lived in the cities of it-

This was really living out how Israel had taken to themselves the gods of Babylon, whom Assyria had only recently conquered, as their gods. For the reference to their worship of the stars is something distinctly Babylonian (see on :16). They let their gods possess their hearts, and so the people of those gods took their inheritance.

2Ki 17:25 So it was, at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they didn't fear

Yahweh; therefore Yahweh sent lions among them, which killed some of them-
Even in judgment and great sorrow for sin, for God takes no pleasure in punishing sin, God still worked toward human salvation. His vision was of Gentiles from throughout the land promised to Abraham (:24) living in His land and worshipping Him. So He sought to move them toward Him by acting as they imagined, as if the land was unhappy with them because they weren't worshipping its God.

2Ki 17:26 Therefore they spoke to the king of Assyria saying, The nations which you have carried away and placed in the cities of Samaria, don't know the law of the god of the land. Therefore he has sent lions among them, and behold, they kill them, because they don't know the law of the god of the land-

There were plenty of Israelites left in the land, but none of them could teach the law of Yahweh. And it seemed Judah were not much better. "Law" here is the word for "judgment". The truth is, neither Israelite nor Gentile perceived the judgment of God, considering the invasion and captivity as just the passage of time and tide. Lions would have naturally increased with a depleted population, but God was surely behind this, and those lions elsewhere represented the Gentile nations who entered the land.

2Ki 17:27 Then the king of Assyria commanded saying, Carry there one of the priests whom you brought from there; and let them go and dwell there, and let him teach them the law of the god of the land-

The main priestly duty was to teach God's word to the people. A whole string of texts make this point: Dt. 24:8; 2 Kings 17:27; 2 Chron. 15:3; Neh. 8:9; Mic. 3:11. Note too the common partnership between priests and prophets. Because of their role as *teachers*, it is understandable that the anger of the first century priesthood was always associated with Christ and the apostles *teaching* the people: Mt. 21:33; Lk. 19:47; 20:1; Acts 5:21. The priests felt that their role was being challenged. As part of the priesthood, our duty is to *all* teach or communicate the word of God to each other. It was God's intention that natural Israel should obey the spirit of this, so that they would "teach every man his neighbour and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord" (Heb. 8:11). That was how God intended Israel of old to fulfil this idea of being a priestly nation.

The priesthood had failed to teach God's law earlier. But now God was working through the fallacious idea that Yahweh was a mere localized God of the land, who needed to be placated lest He send lions, in order to give the priesthood a chance to do what they ought to have done before- to teach His law. And to be a light to the Gentile world thereby, for He had allowed Gentiles to be brought to live in the land. We see how God's judgments are always ultimately creative, and designed towards restoration- they were not the lashing out in anger of an offended deity.

2Ki 17:28 So one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and lived in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear Yahweh-

See on :27. Bethel had been the centre of idolatry before the captivity, the location of one of the golden calves. The priest would surely have reflected that their captivity had been because of that, and would have apparently taught them the true fear of Yahweh.

2Ki 17:29 However every nation made gods of their own, and put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, every nation in their cities in which they lived-

This was the same miserable story of Israel's apostasy all along. True worship of Yahweh was apparently taught (:28), but mixed with their own idolatry. The fear of Yahweh which was taught would surely have included the fact that to fear or worship Him meant having no other gods. But this cardinal point in the fear of Yahweh was ignored, and His worship again reduced to mere ritualism.

2Ki 17:30 The men of Babylon made Succoth Benoth-Zir-banit, the wife of Merodach (also known as Bel).

The men of Cuth made Nergal-

The Babylonian god of war (cp. Mars). Cuthah was therefore near Babylon, the city devoted to Nergal located between the Tigris and Euphrates.

The men of Hamath made Ashima-

The god of shepherds and the woods, the equivalent of Pan.

2Ki 17:31 the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites burnt their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim- Even though burning children in fire had led to Israel's expulsion from the land, the newcomers continued to do so. Again the theme repeats, of nobody learning anything from history, although the Bible is full of it.

2Ki 17:32 So they feared Yahweh, and made to them from among themselves priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the houses of the high places- They accepted the teaching about fearing Yahweh (:28), and yet continued in their idolatry. Even though the most basic tenet of Yahweh worship was that He was to be the only God, and no other god was to be worshipped. Their acceptance of the teaching was therefore only on the level of theory and ritual, and we have to ask ourselves whether we have not done just the same.

2Ki 17:33 They feared Yahweh, and served their own gods, after the ways of the nations from among whom they had been carried away-

See on :32. The mixed worship of the Samaritans is almost derided by the all demanding Yahweh: "So these nations feared Yahweh, and served their graven images... as did their fathers, so do they unto this day... unto this day they do after the former manners: they fear not the Lord" (2 Kings 17:33,34,41). Did they fear Yahweh, or didn't they? They did, but not wholeheartedly; therefore from God's perspective, they didn't fear Him at all. The Lord wasn't just trying to shock us when He offered us the choice between hating God and loving Him (Mt. 6:24 cp. James 4:4); He was deadly literal in what He said. The Lord hammered away at the same theme when He spoke of how a tree can only bring forth one kind of spiritual fruit: bad, or good (Mt. 7:18,19). James likewise: a spring can either give sweet water or bitter water (James 3:11). We either love God, or the world. If we love the world, we have *no* love of God in us (1 Jn. 2:15).

2Ki 17:34 To this day they do what they did before: they don't fear Yahweh, neither do they follow their statutes, or their ordinances, or the law or the commandment which Yahweh commanded the children of Jacob, whom He named Israel-

Jacob's name change reflected God's perception that Jacob had changed. And yet at that point in time, it seems Jacob didn't realize his change; for he had to be reminded of the change of name later, he had to be encouraged to accept that it was really true.

See on :38. 2 Kings 17:34 criticizes men for worshipping Yahweh but also their own gods; they are rebuked with the comment that God had made a covenant with "the children of Jacob, whom he named Israel". The suggestion is surely that when Jacob became Israel, he quit the life of half-hearted service to God. This was the decision he came to that night when he wrestled with the Angel, and his name was changed.

2Ki 17:35 Yahweh had made a covenant with them and commanded them saying, You shall not fear other gods, nor bow yourselves to them nor serve them nor sacrifice to them-

It seems unclear whether this is a historical reminiscence of how Yahweh became Israel's God (:34), or whether the "them" refers to the people living in Israel after the Assyrian invasion. The ambiguity is perhaps purposeful, because God did make a covenant with those people, just as He did with Israel; but they responded as Israel did, breaking the covenant by worshipping other gods as well as Yahweh. See on :40. It was God's intention in all this that Gentiles would join a repentant Israelite remnant in the land, and be taught to fear Him in truth (:28), enter covenant with Him- and thus form a reestablished Kingdom of God in Israel. And He as it were tried to push this through with them, making a unilateral covenant of grace with them, even though they were not fully committed to Him. For neither were Israel when they entered covenant with Yahweh, for Ezekiel says they had with them the idols of Egypt which they carried through the Red Sea. And so the fulfilment of these things has to be in the last days.

2Ki 17:36 but you shall fear Yahweh, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt with great power and with an outstretched arm, and you shall bow yourselves to Him, and you shall sacrifice to Him-

God's deliverance of Israel by grace was intended to be the abiding memory or awareness which defined Israel's later faithfulness. Just as we are to remember the wonder of our Red Sea baptism and the shedding of the saving blood of the lamb of God for us. We are therefore to remember these things at the breaking of bread service regularly, as well as all the time.

2Ki 17:37 The statutes and the ordinances, the law and the commandment which He wrote for you, you shall observe to do for evermore. You shall not fear other gods- That law was designed to help Israel achieve the awareness of their great redemption mentioned in :36. It was not a meaningless set of regulations and laws designed just as simple tests of obedience. They had a far higher intention. Through obedience to those laws, there would be achieved an abiding awareness of their salvation by grace, and a desire to remain in covenant.

2Ki 17:38 You shall not forget the covenant that I have made with you; neither shall you fear other gods-

The "covenant" referred to is not the covenant of circumcision, for the Gentiles now in the land weren't asked to be circumcised. Rather it refers to the covenant at Sinai (Ex. 19:5-8). For it is this which Israel were urged never to forget (Dt. 4:23; 8:11; 26:13). Just as spiritually weak, idolatrous Jacob was called Israel because of the covenant of grace, so these Gentiles could be called Israel.

2Ki 17:39 But you shall fear Yahweh your God; and He will deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies-

This promise had been reiterated so often, and it was available to the Gentiles now offered covenant relationship with Yahweh (Ex. 23:27; 26:8; Dt. 6:18,19; 20:4; 23:14; 28:7). Whenever Israel had been faithful, then this had been fulfilled. The Assyrians were equally enemies of the Babylonians and others who had been transported to live in Israel. They too could be free from those enemies, if they joined in covenant with Yahweh.

2Ki 17:40 However they did not listen, but they did what they did before-

I suggested on :35 that these words apply to both historical Israel, and to the mixed peoples of the land after the Assyrian transportations. God also entered into covenant with them. This is why the "they" of :40 identifies naturally with the "these nations" of :41. This making of a covenant with Gentiles didn't work out; and so it was reapplied and deferred to the work of the Lord Jesus, through whom the Gentiles along with Israel could enter a new covenant with God.

2Ki 17:41 So these nations feared Yahweh, and served their engraved images. Their children likewise, and their children's children, as their fathers did, so they do to this day-

At baptism, we changed masters, from 'sin' to 'obedience'. It may seem that we flick back and forth between them. In a sense, we do, but from God's perspective (and Rom. 6:16-20 describes how *God* sees our baptism), we don't. The recurring weakness of natural Israel was to serve Yahweh *and* the idols (1 Sam. 7:3; 2 Kings 17:41; Zeph. 1:5). For the new Israel in the first century, the temptation was to fellowship with both the Lord Jesus and the idols (1 Cor. 10:21,22). But there is no lack of evidence that this was actually counted as total idol worship in God's eyes; thus the prophets consistently taught the need for wholehearted devotion to Yahweh, and nothing else. In essence, we have the same temptation; to serve God and mammon, to have a little of both, to be passive Christians; to flunk the challenge of the logic of devotion.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 18

2Ki 18:1 Now it happened in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign-

This was a parade example of a wicked man having a righteous son, who in turn had a wicked son [Manasseh]; and the reverse happened in Biblical history. And this is how we would expect, if indeed people must each ultimately build their own personal relationship with God rather than merely follow the religion of their fathers. Wicked Ahaz was married to Abijah (:2), apparently a Godly woman. True spirituality is about being a new creation, breaking with the ties that apparently bind.

2Ki 18:2 He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem-

Hezekiah reigned 29 years (2 Kings 18:2), and the sickness after which he was given 15 years therefore happened in the 14th year of his reign- the very same time that Assyria invaded (Is. 38:1). Trials so often come together, in such an intense and extreme way that the situation can only be of God rather than mere bad luck or coincidence. Hezekiah's healing came just before the miraculous destruction of the

Assyrians (2 Kings 20:6 "I will add to your days fifteen years and I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria"). I suggest the healing of Hezekiah was to encourage faith in the possible deliverance of Jerusalem from a likewise humanly impossible situation. We have meetings and encounters with others in our lives, we hear their testimonies of deliverance, in order to encourage us in our situations.

His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah-
Or "Abijah", as in the Chronicles record, meaning "Jehovah is my father". Zechariah may be the one of Is. 8:2.

2Ki 18:3 He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, according to all that David his father had done-

It seems that in the last 15 years of his life, Hezekiah turned away from God. I have commented quite negatively upon Hezekiah in 2 Chron. 32 and Is. 39. The way he gave the gold of the temple to the Assyrians and trusted in Egypt really speaks for itself. Isaiah is very critical of Hezekiah in his prophecies. His work fortifying Jerusalem and building the water tunnel are criticized by Isaiah as faithless. Rabshakeh points out that Hezekiah both trusted in Yahweh and in Egypt. He showed faith in breaking his servitude to Assyria, then declined from that faith and paid whatever Assyria demanded of him, then turned to Egypt for help... but by turning to Egypt for help, he provoked Assyria. And so he was left really with only Yahweh to turn to. This sounds like faith born from desperation rather than a pure faith. Even when offered 15 years extra, he still asks for a sign God will actually do it. And the way Isaiah applies a poultice of figs to his boil seems the sort of thing one does to someone who is weak in faith. For the figs of themselves didn't give him the extra 15 years. And yet we are told here that he did what was right, as David did. But David was far from perfect and spiralled downwards spiritually in the last decades of his life. Perhaps this is simply a record that he did what was right, as we read about here and especially in Chronicles- before the deliverance from Assyria, after which he was lifted up in pride and fell away. I suggest this is an example of where the Biblical narrative is at times intentionally open or ambiguous, because it invites us to reflect, and try to enter into the characters and situations. Because we could also argue that just as David sinned at many points in his life, and ended his life on a spiritual low, ordering the deaths of those he had earlier forgiven... so Hezekiah too failed at specific points, and ended his life on a spiritual low, but was ultimately seen as acceptable to God. But the correct interpretation of these words is, it seems to me, left intentionally vague; to exercise our thoughts. For by doing so, we are led to examine ourselves. And to not be wrongly judgmental of others' lives.

2Ki 18:4 He removed the high places, and broke the pillars, and cut down the Asherah-

This was a radical move, as even good kings before him had failed to remove the high places. The tendency to worship Baal as a form of Yahweh worship was so strong, and so attractive. His hatred of idolatry, brought out more strongly in 2 Chronicles, was partly a psychological reaction against his father, who had sacrificed Hezekiah's siblings to idols and perhaps tried to do the same to Hezekiah. Human motivation is never pure, and we must remember this when considering how Hezekiah at many points displays unspirituality.

He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for in those days the children of Israel burned incense to it; and he called it Nehushtan-

The Lord Jesus interpreted it as a symbol of Himself, lifted up on the cross, identified with us as sinners. And just as the bronze serpent was abused and prayed to, so has the cross been abused. "Nehushtan" is literally "the bronze [copper] thing", "the mere piece of bronze" being the idea. Hezekiah called it for what it was, as we should call out idolatry for all it is. An expensive car is just a mass of metal, plastics and chemicals arranged in a certain way. An expensive house can be described in similar terms. And that is what Hezekiah did to the bronze serpent. Archaeologists have uncovered evidence that there were cults of snake worship in Canaan. The usage of the bronze serpent would then be a typical example of how the Jews had mixed paganism with Yahweh worship, the flesh with the spirit... just as we are tempted to do. Rabshakeh rightly points out that the high places he removed were Yahweh's high places- the Jews had mixed Yahweh worship with paganism. We too need to see to the bare naked essence of things, call them as they are for what they are, and strip religiosity down to its essence. And reject it if need be as Hezekiah did here.

2Ki 18:5 He trusted in Yahweh the God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among them that were before him-

If Hezekiah was the stellar example of trust in Yahweh at that time, then Hezekiah's proverb (see on Prov. 25:1) applies to himself: "One who is greedy stirs up strife; but one who trusts in Yahweh will prosper" (Prov. 28:25). Hezekiah has in view the Assyrians, with himself as the prospering one who trusted in Yahweh. He was using these Divine truths to justify himself. As discussed on :3, Hezekiah is commented upon very positively here. But his faith was very weak or non-existent at times; he cut off the gold [representing faith] of the temple and gave it to the Assyrians, and paid the Egyptians to try to save him from the Assyrians- rather than having faith in God. Either this statement describes how things were at one point in his life; or God very graciously counts him as righteous and faithful more than he was.

Hezekiah and faith go together. There was no king like him for his faith / trust [note a similar rubric used about Josiah in 2 Kings 23:25, in relation to Josiah's obedience to the Law]. Josiah was the most obedient king; Hezekiah was the most faith-ful. But 2 Kings 18:6 goes on to say that this faith was "for" or because Hezekiah was obedient to God's commandments. Here we see the upward spiral in the spiritual life, and how each aspect of spirituality reinforces others. His obedience reinforced his faith; indeed the entire Law of Moses wasn't designed as a hopeless obstacle course, it was "holy, just and good" and was intended to lead people to *faith*, especially in the Messiah to come.

We observe that there is a feature in the records to describe a king as incomparably good or bad. The language of Hezekiah being incomparably good is also applied to Josiah in 2 Kings 23:25. And so I suggest that these characters were incomparably good in specific areas; faith, in Hezekiah's case, and reforming in Josiah's case. And yet as Paul observes, faith alone cannot save- if it has not love, or works appropriate to that faith. Faith without works cannot save. Or it may be that e.g. in Hezekiah's case, he was incomparable in how *at one point* he reached a peak of (:6) joining with Yahweh and obedience to Him. But that is not to say that that peak did not later

subside, as it clearly did in the cases of both Hezekiah and Josiah. For both of them died far spiritually weaker than they were at various points in their earlier lives. Solomon likewise had unparalleled wisdom at one point (1 Kings 3:12), but he didn't retain it in his later life. Indeed, dying at a spiritually weaker point than a man was once at... seems to be the story of so many Biblical characters. Gideon, Moses, Jacob and others come to mind; there were flashes of brilliance at some points in their lives, but it was a fade to grey at the end. Our spiritual path is not a simple upwards trajectory. See on :19. Another option is that despite all these weaknesses, God looked finally upon Hezekiah as faithful. Just as we may look back upon a period of time- a week's holiday, 5 years spent living in a place, the childhood of our children- and overall feel it was "good", despite bad parts, experiences and aspects of that period. This is an example of how God's love imputes righteousness.

The Hebrew word for "trust" is played on repeatedly. "Confidence" is s.w. "trust" in :19, and the word is found again in :20,21,22,30. And in 2 Kings 19:10 he admits that Yahweh is the God in who Hezekiah trusts. Hezekiah is commended as having inimitable faith / trust, more than any other king of Judah ever had (see on :5). Clearly Rabshakeh recognized Hezekiah's trust / faith. And yet even that was only skin deep, because he cut off the gold from the temple and trusted in Egypt and horses (:23,24), as Isaiah often laments. Likewise he asks for a sign that he would be healed. We see here the weakness of human faith, and how amazing faith can coexist with unbelief. Even Hezekiah, who had so much confidence in Yahweh that it exuded from him and was noticed by even his enemies, still collapsed into unbelief so easily. Yet God counts his faith very highly, and like the Lord Jesus, views human faith so positively. We recall how the Lord marvelled at the faith of the centurion... when His own faith so far stronger. Is. 30:15 is specific that Judah generally did not "trust", although Hezekiah did at least on one level; and to his credit, it is always hard to have faith / trust when surrounded by others who do not: "in quietness and in *trust* shall be your strength. But you refused". Instead they 'trusted' in oppression and deceit (Is. 30:12 s.w.). The intention of the whole experience with the Assyrian invasion and Hezekiah's sickness was so that "the result of righteousness will be quietness and *trust* forever" (Is. 32:17). The people were even envisioned as singing a hymn about their trust in Yahweh: "In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: You will keep whoever's mind is steadfast in perfect peace, because he trusts in You. Trust in Yahweh forever; for in Yah, Yahweh, is an everlasting Rock. For He has brought down those who dwell on high" (Is. 26:1-5). And yet God's intention that the people should "trust" in Him was apparently not realized. For Hezekiah turned to trust in his wealth and house of armour (Is. 39), and his son Manasseh turned away from faith. Hezekiah's prayers at times allude to Solomon's prayer and idea that the temple of itself would save God's people. This was not God's intention. When Babylon came to destroy Jerusalem, the people wrongly trusted in the temple for its own sake: "Don't trust in lying words by saying, Yahweh's temple, Yahweh's temple... thus will I do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust" (Jer. 7:4,14).

2Ki 18:6 For he joined with Yahweh; he didn't depart from following Him, but kept His commandments which Yahweh commanded Moses-

As discussed on :3 and :5, Hezekiah did at times depart from following Yahweh. So we can conclude this either describes how things were in the earlier, more faithful part

of Hezekiah's life; or it is how God very graciously counted Hezekiah to be, looking at his heart which cleaved or was joined to Him, and not the fact he did depart from Him and ended his life on a spiritual low.

2Ki 18:7 Yahweh was with him; wherever he went forth he prospered. He rebelled against the king of Assyria, and didn't serve him-

After the lapse of faith in paying off Sennacherib, it became harder for Hezekiah to show faith again. After that, it was going to be really hard to rebel against him and refuse the payments. I take the comment here that Hezekiah rebelled against Assyria and refused to serve / worship him as part of a summary of what Hezekiah did in his life. He refused any longer to serve Sennacherib as God, but decided to serve Yahweh alone. This rebellion against Sennacherib is singled out as the most noteworthy thing he did. He had submitted to Assyria, paid what they asked, made an agreement with them. And then he broke it, and so the Assyrians sent their army against Hezekiah. If this isn't the correct reconstruction, then we have the scenario of Hezekiah sending money to Assyria as they requested, but then them coming and invading anyway. In every other case of gold being given to buy off Israel's enemies, it seems the bargain was stuck to, at least in the short term.

2Ki 18:8 He struck the Philistines to Gaza and its borders, from the tower of the watchmen to the fortified city-

This may not be chronological; rather are we reading cameos from Hezekiah's life which demonstrated his faith. As Gaza was the most far south of the five Philistine cities, "to Gaza" may mean the Philistines were entirely subdued, and we never hear much more about them.

2Ki 18:9 It happened in the fourth year of king Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria, and besieged it-

Judah were intended to learn from the judgments upon the ten tribes. For they were not much better, and Ez. 16,20 say that finally they were worse than the ten tribes. As Samaria was besieged, so was Jerusalem to be besieged by the same nation. But Hezekiah apparently didn't learn the lesson. As Israel tried to avoid paying tribute to Assyria and instead made a covenant with Egypt for help (2 Kings 17:4), so did Hezekiah. We likewise are intended to learn from the patterns and experiences of those whom God brings into our lives. We may see the experience of sudden wealth from an inheritance destroying a family we know- and that is to warn us when or if we have the same experience.

The King of Assyria "came up" throughout the land promised to Abraham (2 Kings 17:5). The Hebrew word used is *alah*, meaning to ascend up- and this is the very battle cry of the Islamic fundamentalists, *Allah ahbar*. The Assyrians were persuaded that the one true God, Yahweh, had sent them against Israel (2 Kings 18:25)- just as the Islamic fundamentalists are today.

2Ki 18:10 At the end of three years they took it: in the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was taken-

This may look forward to a three and a half year tribulation of Israel at the hands of a latter day Assyrian.

2Ki 18:11 The king of Assyria carried Israel away to Assyria-

This was in the ninth year of Hoshea (2 Kings 17:6). It seems that in this very year (BC722), Sargon succeeded Shalmaneser IV in a coup. Sargon in his annals refers to his victory over Samaria as his earliest act. 2 Kings 18:9,10 record that Shalmaneser "came up against Samaria, and besieged it" but "they took it" rather than "he took it". It seems the representatives of these kings are referred to, and they were not personally present. Sargon as it were capitalized on the progress made whilst Shalmaneser was king. The annals of Sargon claim that 27,290 people were deported from Samaria. But those annals also imply many were left in the land and paid tribute to him.

And placed them in Halah-

Perhaps the Calah of Gen. 10:11, the old capital of Assyria.

And on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes-

Assyria had only recently overrun those cities, and so the captured Israelites were used to populate them and thus dilute the ethnicity of the local population.

2Ki 18:12 because they didn't obey the voice of Yahweh their God, but transgressed His covenant, even all that Moses the servant of Yahweh commanded, and would not hear it, nor do it-

Israel did not obey / hearken to the voice of Yahweh, and He did not hearken to their voice in prayer (Dt. 1:45; 9:23; 28:15; Josh. 5:6; Jud. 2:20; 6:10 cp. Dt. 8:20 s.w.). 2 Kings 18:12 states this specifically. God hearkened to Joshua's voice in prayer (Josh. 10:14) because Joshua hearkened to His voice. It was to be the same with Saul. He didn't hearken to God's voice (1 Sam. 15:19) and God didn't hearken to Saul's voice in prayer in his final desperation at the end of his life (1 Sam. 28:18). If God's word abides in us, then our prayer is powerful, we have whatever we ask, because we are asking for things according to His will expressed in His word (Jn. 15:7).

2Ki 18:13 Now in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah, and took them-

He succeeded in taking all of Judah apart from Jerusalem. Isaiah describes the invasion as a flood of waters which engulfed Judah "up to the neck", the surviving head referring to Jerusalem and Hezekiah. See on :2. This judgment upon Judah was because of their lack of faith and unspirituality as pointed out by Isaiah in Is. 1-35. The salvation of Jerusalem was by grace alone. And because of the faith of a very small remnant there.

2Ki 18:14 Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish saying, I have offended; return from me. That which you put on me, I will bear. The king of Assyria appointed to Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold-

"I have sinned" (AV) suggests Hezekiah took false guilt; lack of faith in God often is related to false guilt. Faith in God's opinion and perspective on us saves us from such false guilt. Even worse, Hezekiah treated Sennacherib as God, addressing him with the language of confession and repentance which should be directed only to God. By doing so, he believed in Sennacherib as God. And whenever we let people give us false guilt, we are effectively believing in them as God rather than in the one true

God. Hezekiah then stripped the temple of its gold, representing faith, and gave it to the Assyrians. It was a sad blip on the screen in Hezekiah's life of faith. The way he has to deal with the prophet Isaiah through messengers soon afterwards may suggest an estrangement between Hezekiah and Isaiah- exactly because of this.

The Rassam Cylinder and the Taylor Prism lists what the Assyrians claim Hezekiah gave them. It includes "thirty talents of gold" as also stated in 2 Kings 18:14, but also lists many high luxury items made of ivory, and also Hezekiah's daughters. The list would suggest Hezekiah was living a high luxury life and was a lover of wealth. The Cylinder and Prism also claim the Assyrians took not only gold and silver, but also spices, precious oil and the contents of Hezekiah's well stocked armoury, "the house of his armour". But in 2 Kings 20:13 and Is. 39:2, these are the very things which Hezekiah has in abundance after the Assyrian destruction, and shows off to the Babylonians. So we can better imagine psychologically what happened. Hezekiah had amassed great wealth before the invasion, probably from transit taxes on the trade routes he had gained control of through taking the territory around Gaza [there is archaeological evidence of this]. But he gives it all to the Assyrians and Egyptians through lack of faith. But he amazingly receives it all back, and more, after the miraculous defeat of Assyria. And this lead to his pride. How often is this proved true, that wealth brings pride and lack of faith. It is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom. Assyrian records show how much tribute was demanded and paid by various nations over their history- records of tribute from 26 countries have been preserved. The tribute demanded from Judah was one of the highest- indicating the relative wealth of Judah under Hezekiah. This wealth was what led him to lack of faith, and is criticized by Isaiah repeatedly. Archaeological evidence, especially from Lachish, likewise indicates that Hezekiah ruled over a very prosperous and wealthy society.

2Ki 18:15 Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of Yahweh, and in the treasures of the king's house-

He repeated the failure of his father Ahaz, who emptied the treasuries likewise instead of trusting in God (2 Kings 16:8). One major dimension of sin is the example it sets to others, especially within families.

Hezekiah's father, King Ahaz, had stripped the Temple of all its silver and gold, as well as all the gold and silver in the palace treasury, and sent it to Tiglath-Pileser (2 Kings 16:8,9). We see how he reacted against his father's idolatry, but followed the same faithless script of his father in other ways. This again is so psychologically credible. It's how sons are with their fathers, unless they are born again and made free of all the ties that bind. But only 30 years later, Hezekiah was able to give 30 talents (or 900 kg) of gold and 800 talents (or 24,000 kg) of silver to Sennacherib. He had built up considerable wealth quite quickly- especially bearing in mind he is recorded as undertaking huge building and fortification projects, repairing the Temple, providing huge numbers of sacrificial animals for the Passover, funding a campaign against the Philistines and having enough wealth to try to buy Egyptian military support against Assyria.

This suggests Hezekiah was materialistic and on the look out for wealth. He believed his wealth could save him- he offered money to Egypt to help him, and paid a huge amount to Assyria to leave him alone. All of which was criticized by God through Isaiah. When his wealth revived after the Assyrian defeat, again it was his undoing-

because he boasted of it to the Babylonians, who clearly were covetous and thence planned to come and take it by force. Which Isaiah says, God would empower them to do because of Hezekiah's pride. That pride arose from his great and sudden wealth, which was given to him by God: "Hezekiah enjoyed immense riches and honour. He built himself treasuries for gold, silver, precious stones, spices, jewels and every kind of desirable object, as well as storehouses for his returns of grain, new wine and olive oil, and stalls for all kinds of cattle and pens for the flocks. He also provided himself with donkeys in addition to his immense wealth of flocks and herds, since God had made him immensely wealthy" (2 Chron. 32:27-29). The promised blessing upon the land, producing "of itself", seems to have been responsible for the agricultural prosperity. The lands around him had been ravaged by the Assyrian scorched earth policy. They perhaps traded their wealth for food. But we note that this wealth led him to proudly show it off to the Babylonians, who came to find out about "the wonder that was done in the land" (2 Chron. 32:31, i.e. the amazing agricultural blessing). We now understand better why God is careful about giving wealth; because it typically leads to pride and loss of spirituality.

2Ki 18:16 At that time, Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of Yahweh's temple, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria-

We each have two 'people' as it were within us; we act both as spiritual and as fleshly people. The record of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18:16 reflects this: "At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from... the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, because of the king of Assyria". The Hezekiah who faithfully overlaid the pillars with gold was the same man, acting a different persona, who then cut it off faithlessly when under pressure. Likewise the Jews could be described as both Abraham's seed (Jn. 8:37) and not Abraham's seed (Jn. 8:39); as having Abraham as their father (Jn. 8:56), and yet also having the devil as their father (Jn. 8:39-41,44).

This undoubted weakness of faith, recalling that gold represents faith, highlights God's great understanding and grace to stress that overall, Hezekiah was such a man of faith.

2Ki 18:17 The king of Assyria sent Tartan and Rabсарis and Rabshakeh from Lachish to king Hezekiah with a great army to Jerusalem. They went up and came to Jerusalem. When they had come up, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is in the highway of the fuller's field-

The washer or fuller uses the same word for 'washing' as used in the context of cleansing from sin (Ps. 51:2,7; Jer. 2:2; 4:14; Mal. 3:2). The suggestion was that they could repent and be cleansed of their sin. This location was significant, because it was there that Hezekiah's father Ahaz had been met by Isaiah and his son Shearjashub [a man of sign, 'a remnant shall return / repent'], with their demand for Jerusalem to surrender to God (Is. 7:3). So Hezekiah was intended to recall how Ahaz had been faced with Isaiah at that same spot; and the call was to repent, to be washed, to become the remnant which would triumph. Circumstances repeat in our lives and between our lives and those of others; in this case, the experience of Ahaz repeated in the life of his son Hezekiah. And we are intended to join the dots and learn the lesson.

2Ki 18:18 When they had called to the king, there came out to them Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder-

The "scribe" or historian was a senior advisor in the Hebrew court (2 Sam. 8:17; 2 Kings 18:18,37; 2 Chron. 34:8) because of the huge value attached to history in the Hebrew mind, and as reflected in the Bible being largely history. Advice on how to act was to be based upon historical, or as we would now say, "Biblical", precedent.

"Shebna" is an Egyptian name and may have been installed in office by Hezekiah as part of his deal with Egypt, upon whom he trusted rather than solely in Yahweh. He had the office of being "over the house" but by the time of the Assyrian invasion Shebna had been replaced in this office by Eliakim (Is. 22:15,20; 37:2). However, Shebna had not been completely 'hurled away' for his immorality of Is. 22:15-19 as required by Is. 22:17, because he is mentioned here as being the "scribe", a senior secretary, although Eliakim was "over the household". This seems typical of the partial response made to Isaiah's prophecies. Shebna was likely installed in power as part of a deal with Egypt for their help. But it seems Yahweh accepted that partial response and repentance of a remnant, and so the invaders were destroyed and the awful outcome threatened upon Jerusalem in this chapter was averted or at best deferred.

2Ki 18:19 Rabshakeh said to them, Say now to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this in which you trust?-

LXX "Why are you secure". GNB "the emperor wanted to know what made King Hezekiah so confident". Clearly Hezekiah did have some faith; and real faith is always evident to others. Rabshakeh's words are a tacit admission that Hezekiah did indeed trust in Yahweh.

2Ki 18:20 You say (but they are but vain words), 'There is counsel and strength for war'. Now on whom do you trust, that you have rebelled against me?-

"Vain words" is literally "a mere word of the lips". If the lips in view are Isaiah's, the idea is 'What good can words do? Even the words of the Bible, God's words. Hard evidenced support in visible terms is what man needs...'. And we have all given in to this so many times.

The immediate reference is to how "he took *counsel* with his princes and his mighty men to stop the waters of the springs which were outside of the city" (2 Chron. 32:3).

GNB "Do you think that words can take the place of military skill and might?". This is the essence of our temptations today- to think that the ideas of God's word are merely abstract and philosophical, and have no cash value in reality. But God's word is active and powerful, once spoken, it is done. The "counsel" in view is primarily the prophecies of Isaiah (s.w. Is. 5:19; 28:29), and in the last day application, the "counsel and strength" of the Messiah of Israel (Is. 11:2 s.w.). But Rabshakeh may have been mocking the "counsel" of the false prophets (see :6), which had been to trust in Egypt rather than Yahweh (s.w. Is. 19:3,11; 29:15; 30:1; Jer. 19:7). The "counsel" or prophetic word of Yahweh, however, was what could save Israel; it was that which would bring them back from captivity and reestablish Yahweh's Kingdom in the land

(s.w. Is. 44:26; 46:10). Although most in Judah still refused to trust in Yahweh's "strength for the war" (s.w. Is. 30:15), yet by grace and in respect to the faith of the remnant, He still saved them from Assyria at this time.

Hezekiah had taken counsel with men in order to try to avert the fall of Jerusalem (2 Chron. 32:3). Isaiah had earlier warned against trust in human "counsel" (s.w. Is. 5:19; 19:3). Woe was pronounced upon those (like Hezekiah?) who took counsel from men rather than God (Is. 30:1 s.w.). Prov. 25:28 LXX advises doing things with "counsel". As explained on Prov. 25:1, this may be a justification of Hezekiah, who dealt with the Assyrian crisis by saying he trusted in God's counsel to overcome the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:20 AV). Like Solomon, Hezekiah's Proverbs are all Divinely inspired and true, but he seems to insert into them a subtext of self justification.

Rabshakeh observes that Hezekiah trusts in both Yahweh and in Egypt (:20,21). He wasn't wrong in his observation, and his presentation of Hezekiah as a fickle leader not worth following. He really did try to have a foot in both camps.

2Ki 18:21 Now, behold, you trust in the staff of this bruised reed, even in Egypt- "Bruised reed" is better "broken reed", and this is the very phrase used about how the Messiah, the Lord Jesus, would not break a "bruised / broken reed" (Is. 42:3). Egypt were a broken reed, recently broken in battle and now useless to save Israel. They were too weak to uphold the weight of Judah if they were to lean upon it for strength. God turns the figure around- He as it were is in need of man, He wishes to trust upon us; and although we are broken reeds, we will not be crushed nor will He be disappointed. He so wishes to work with us.

If a man leans on it, it will go into his hand, and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust on him-

Hezekiah paid all the wealth of Judah to Assyria and entered an agreement with them. And it seems he impoverished Judah yet more by then making some arrangement with Egypt to throw off the Assyrian domination (2 Kings 18:21,24). Hezekiah really did mess up. But then he breaks the agreement with Assyria, inevitably provoking an Assyrian invasion of his now impoverished country. He must've been almost alone in this. Because doing this made no human sense; his cabinet and people would've surely been against it. Following our conscience often puts us in situations like this.

"Lean" here is the same word for "steadfast" in Is. 26:3 "You will keep whoever's mind is steadfast in perfect peace, because he trusts in You". The LXX understands this to be a description of the "righteous nation" of Is. 26:2. They are saved from their traumas by the state of their mind. And Yahweh will respond to this through the work of His Spirit on the human spirit, to keep their mind in perfect peace. This is the peace which comes from knowing sin is forgiven. "Mind" here is literally 'imagination'. We must ask what are our fantasies, our hopes, according to which we live, think and feel day by day. If they are above all for the Kingdom, then we will be 'kept' in this. In Isaiah's immediate context this was in contrast to leaning upon Egypt for salvation (s.w. "lean"). The great salvation of the restored Kingdom could have come apart at that time, but it was precluded by a lack of real faith and focus on the Kingdom in the majority of Israel.

Judah did as it were trust in Egypt, and so were left with pierced hands. But that was exactly what the Lord Jesus experienced on the cross. Here we have one of many examples of where although He did not personally sin, He on the cross experienced

the sufferings for sin which were due to God's people.

2Ki 18:22 But if you tell me, 'We trust in Yahweh our God'; isn't that He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and has said to Judah and to Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?'

Rabshakeh argues as if the high places and altars to the idols were actually used for Yahweh worship. And that was true. There is plenty of archaeological evidence for this: "The Asherah, one of the main targets of cult criticism, was closely connected with Yahweh and his cult, as shown by the inscriptions from Kuntillet Agrud and Khirbet-el-Qom". Judah justified their idol worship by claiming it was a form of Yahweh worship; and that is an abiding temptation for God's people of all ages. Rabshakeh mocked at the idea of a religion which had only one altar and high place; although that was indeed appropriate to the worship of the one true God who had given one specific way of approach to Him.

2Ki 18:23 Now therefore, please give pledges to my master the king of Assyria, and I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them-

Although many in Judah had fled into Jerusalem, the siege conditions and battle losses meant that there were not even 2000 fighting men within the city. But the Assyrians were destroyed by just one Angel, a member of the Angel cherubim, the heavenly horses and riders who stood for Israel. They were left with no human horses nor army, so that they might trust in Yahweh of Hosts of Angelic armies and the cherubim chariot. And this is why we too at times are stripped of all human strength.

"Make a pledge" is literally to be sweet or pleasing, and it appears to be sarcastic. But it is the word used by Hezekiah when he asks Yahweh to "undertake" or be sweet to him in the oppression of his sickness, which came at the same time as the siege of Jerusalem (Is. 38:14). See on :2.

2Ki 18:24 How then can you turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put your trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?-

This was clearly wrong for the king of Israel, as the law specifically stated. Hezekiah had been repeatedly criticized for this by Isaiah in several prophecies. There are various translation options here. LXX "And how can ye then turn to the face of the satraps? They that trust on the Egyptians for horse and rider, are our servants"; GNB "You are no match for even the lowest ranking Assyrian official, and yet you expect the Egyptians to send you chariots and horsemen". 2 Chron. 32:21 uses the same phrase to describe the king of Assyria turning away his face in shame from Jerusalem after the Angelic destruction of his army; all was to be dramatically reversed overnight. Just as Joseph was elevated from prison rags to royal glory in a few hours, so God can work very quickly to save us from otherwise humanly impossible situations.

2Ki 18:25 Have I now come up without Yahweh against this place to destroy it? Yahweh said to me, 'Go up against this land, and destroy it'

The King of Assyria "came up" throughout the land promised to Abraham (2 Kings 17:5). The Hebrew word used is *alah*, meaning to ascend up- and this is the very battle cry of the Islamic fundamentalists, *Allah ahbar*. The Assyrians were persuaded that the one true God, Yahweh, had sent them against Israel (2 Kings 18:25)- just as the Islamic fundamentalists are today.

Rabshakeh appears to have been an apostate Jew, speaking fluent Hebrew, fully aware of the situation within Judah and of the prophetic message that Yahweh would be behind their invaders; and quoting Isaiah's prophecies. We can look to some possible equivalent in the events concerning the latter day Assyrian.

2Ki 18:26 Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, Shebna and Joah said to Rabshakeh, Please speak to your servants in the Syrian language; for we understand it. Don't speak with us in the Jews' language, in the hearing of the people who are on the wall- Rabshakeh knew Hebrew and was likely a renegade Jew. The fact the Jewish leadership knew the Assyrian language is a tacit reflection of the way they had made it their business to communicate with them in the past, in seeking ways around the Assyrian threat other than through trust in Yahweh.

2Ki 18:27 But Rabshakeh said to them, Has my master sent me to your master, and to you, to speak these words? Hasn't he sent me to the men who sit on the wall, to eat their own dung, and to drink their own water with you?-

Rabshakeh was aware of the prophecies of Micah and Isaiah. He was fully aware that Isaiah had opened his prophecies by insisting that his message of judgment was against both the heavens and the earth, the leadership and the ordinary people; for they were alike guilty.

2Ki 18:28 Then Rabshakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and spoke, saying-

This very loud voice becomes the prototype for the great voice of Babylon (Jer. 51:55), akin to the great voice of Goliath the Philistine / Palestinian, which is to be answered by the far greater voice of Yahweh in the last days commanding the Angels to unleash judgment upon the latter day Assyrian confederacy (Joel 2:11; Rev. 16:1; 18:2). But in the immediate context, this "loud voice" is that of Is. 29:6 bringing destruction and judgment upon Jerusalem; they were condemned, but were saved by grace and God's respect of the prayers and repentance of a small minority. The loud voice of the "great king" of Assyria is being set up as a parody of that of Yahweh, who is the supreme "great king" (s.w. Ps. 47:2; 95:3; Mal. 1:14).

Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria-

"Hear [*shema*] the word of the great King, the King of Assyria" (2 Kings 18:28) is a conscious imitation of the *shema* to Israel from their King, Yahweh. "The great king" is a title of Yahweh. The king of Assyria was parodying the giving of the Law to Israel, implying his commandments were a new Torah for Israel; and some Islamic fundamentalists have spoken of producing a new Torah, making him the one mentioned in Daniel as changing laws.

2Ki 18:29 Thus says the king, 'Don't let Hezekiah deceive you; for he will not be able to deliver you out of his hand-

This was part of his narrative, that the gods of the nations were "not able to deliver" them from the Assyrians (s.w. 2 Chron. 32:15). He encouraged them to see the one true God as just another god, another source of secular strength as good as anything else. Yahweh the one true God is not, however, just another religious system. There is something awesomely and radically different. Surely all those who were raised as believers have at some point wondered whether Christianity is simply another one of

many religious systems which are equally useless. Here we have the answer- that there is ultimate truth and relationship with God which thereby makes the others all appear for what they are. Those who convert to Christ from atheism or non Christian backgrounds have a great advantage here and need to appreciate the difficulties for those who were raised Christian. Rabshakeh's words recognize that Hezekiah alone was seeking to lead the people to totally trust in Yahweh. His influence was considered hugely significant. As we noted on Is. 1:1, the reforms of Hezekiah were largely ineffective in encouraging the general populace towards spirituality. In accordance with that, Rabshakeh perceived Hezekiah as effectively seeking alone to persuade the people to trust Yahweh.

2Ki 18:30 Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in Yahweh saying, Yahweh will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria- Rabshakeh appears to know the very words of Hezekiah within Jerusalem, supporting the suggestion made that he was a renegade Jew. Hezekiah's faith that the city wouldn't fall was presumably based upon Isaiah's prophetic words; and yet Isaiah also speaks as if the city would fall, unless there was repentance in Judah. Perhaps Hezekiah really believed that the repentance of a minority would be counted by God as enough, and that their prayers would ensure the salvation of Zion. And this huge faith in Divine grace was rewarded.

It would seem from Rabshakeh's words to the people of Jerusalem that Hezekiah had begun a 'Trust in God!' campaign: "Do not let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD by saying, 'The LORD will surely deliver us, and this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria'... do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you by saying, The LORD will deliver us" (2 Kings 18:30,32 AV). "The Lord will deliver us" therefore appears to have been a catch cry of Hezekiah to all the people. Jerusalem was surrounded by her strong enemies, whom Hezekiah had sorely provoked by faithlessly siding with Egypt against them and then in faith towards God breaking off his agreement with the Assyrians. So now Hezekiah was driven to throw himself upon God for a miracle. His utter confidence is recognized by God, when He speaks of how the faithful remnant in Jerusalem- the "virgin daughter of Zion"- had despised Assyria, laughed her to scorn, and wagged her head at Assyria (2 Kings 19:21). That would've required an extraordinary level of faith to do that. Hezekiah wasn't just hoping for the best, using prayer as a last resort, a kind of back up insurance policy after doing all he could. This was the prayer and faith of utter confidence, believing that things that are not are in fact, and being so sure they will come about that this faith actually affects our feelings. Hezekiah felt confident, superior to the Assyrians, all the feelings that come from knowing that one is in a far stronger position. This is a challenge in our self-assessment. To what extent does our confidence in faith affect our emotions and feelings?

2Ki 18:31 Don't listen to Hezekiah'-

It seems Hezekiah was singlehandedly seeking to persuade the people to totally trust in Yahweh.

For thus says the king of Assyria, 'Make your peace with me, and come out to me- LXX "If ye wish to be blessed, come out to me". Receiving peace or 'blessing' (LXX) was what comes from Yahweh; Judah were being offered covenant relationship with a false pretender to Yahweh. All this is the stuff of the latter day antiChrist; for an anti-Christ is strictly not someone against Christ but rather posing as the Christ, a fake,

imitation Christ.

And every one of you will eat of his vine, and every one of his fig tree, and everyone will drink the waters of his own cistern-

Rabshakeh promised the Jews an Assyrian Kingdom where everyone sat under their own vine and fig tree- consciously parodying Micah's contemporary prophecies of God's future Kingdom (Mic. 4:4). The Assyrian Kingdom was set up as a parody of Solomon's, which was the Kingdom of God (1 Kings 4:25; 2 Chron. 9:8). A glance through the descriptions of the beasts- the Kingdoms of this world- reveals that they are all set up in terms of the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. Rabshakeh was aware of Isaiah's prophecies as he quotes from them here; see on :10. And in essence the world today offers a fake, imitation Kingdom of God.

2Ki 18:32 until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and of honey, that you may live, and not die. Don't listen to Hezekiah when he persuades you saying, Yahweh will deliver us-

As noted on :31, Assyria was presented as an imitation kingdom of God. The language all alludes to God's descriptions of the promised land, which were familiar to Rabshakeh as a renegade Jew. The allusions are to Num. 14:7; Dt. 8:7-9; 11:11,12. "Persuade" is 'seduce', as if the Assyrians had the one true religion and Hezekiah was seducing Judah away from it. The Assyrian inscriptions describe and portray their wars as religious wars between their god Asshur and the gods of the nations they conquered. It was perhaps this very aspect to the Assyrian boasts which as it were provoked Yahweh to action. His unique victory against Asshur when all other gods and religious systems had failed was intended to help the Gentile nations see the utter supremacy of Yahweh- and to turn to Him.

2Ki 18:33 Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria?-

It seems that when Hezekiah said "The Lord will surely deliver us", he said it with such confidence that the people were inclined to share his faith. Several times, Rabshakeh picks up this word "deliver" and mocks that no other nation had been 'delivered' from Assyria, so why should Judah be. It seems Hezekiah took this catchword from Isaiah's earlier prophecy of Is. 31:5, where he had stated that "Like birds hovering, so the LORD of hosts will protect Jerusalem; he will protect and deliver it". Hezekiah had heard those words of the Lord; and he believed them, even when they appeared to have no human chance of fulfilment. We too need to cling on to just one verse of Scripture and believe it. Of course we try to excuse our lack of faith by spiritualizing it away, wondering whether it can really apply to me, here, today. Hezekiah must've gone through the same. But it seems he ceased upon that one verse... and clung to it. This is where our faith in the Bible as God's word isn't merely a painless academic assent to a proposition. To believe God's word is true demands an awful lot from us.

2Ki 18:34 Where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand?-

Rabshakeh, knowing the prophecies of Isaiah as a renegade Jew, may be alluding to the common prophetic theme that Judah were in fact no better than Israel, and would face the same judgment. And he knew that Samaria, the ten tribes, had trusted in the gods of the surrounding nations. Hamath and Arpad were in Syria, and so probably Sefarvaim was likewise. Is. 8 and Is. 10:9-11 had condemned Israel for their trust in Syria against Assyria, and clearly their covenant with Syria had involved taking on the worship of their gods.

2Ki 18:35 Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of my hand, that Yahweh should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?' - The point of course was made: Who or what indeed were any of those gods compared to Yahweh.

2Ki 18:36 But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word; for the king's commandment was, Don't answer him-

I suggest that Prov. 26:4 alludes to this: "Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him". This verses is clearly intended to be connected with Prov. 26:5 ["answer a fool according to his folly"], the idea being that there are times when a fool should be answered according to his folly, and times when he shouldn't be. This is one of the Hezekiah Proverbs (see on Prov. 25:1), and the allusion may be to how Hezekiah commanded the people not to answer Rabshakeh, who is thereby interpreted as the archetypical "fool". But a fool must at times be answered (Prov. 26:5), and the idea may be that God will answer fools like Rabshakeh in His own way and in His own time; and we don't need to. But we then get the hint that Hezekiah, like Solomon, was using the Divine truth of the Proverbs with a subtext of his own self justification, just as we can.

2Ki 18:37 Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, came with Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder, to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and told him the words of Rabshakeh-

This sign of sorrow was to be turned into joy. But for now, there was sorrow. Their deep grief however suggests they didn't believe Hezekiah's assurances of Divine salvation. They were not part of the daughter of Zion whom Isaiah describes as laughing at the Assyrian threats.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 19

2Ki 19:1 It happened, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he tore his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of Yahweh-

Instead of devising human schemes of salvation, he does as we should, turning to God's house, His presence, and His people. Although we are left wondering, especially after reading Isaiah's criticisms of Hezekiah, whether he turned to God as a last resort rather than a first resort. Because by strengthening the walls and building the water tunnel in his own strength, trusting in Egypt... he appears only to be turning to God now all that had apparently failed. He could have prayed anywhere, but he felt that God's presence was there in particular. Judah's leadership had torn their clothes but not dressed in sackcloth (Is. 36:22). Sackcloth was a sign of repentance, as witnessed by the response of Nineveh. Nineveh had repented the generation before; and it seems Hezekiah is now seeking to imitate their repentance. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria; if their repentance had been permanent, they would not have

invaded Judah. Hezekiah was seeking to imitate Nineveh but make it permanent, although after the crisis passed, it seems his repentance likewise didn't hold. God knew all this from the start, and yet still so respected the repentance of Hezekiah and Nineveh in their extremity that He still changed His threatened judgment of them. Hezekiah was aware that he had sinned by trying to buy off the Assyrians with the gold of the temple, representing faith sacrificed to human expedient; and Judah had definitely trusted in Egypt for help rather than God. His words of :3 are a recognition that the invasion was a Divine rebuke and rejection of him. But a man may be rejected by God in this life, having a foretaste of condemnation ahead of time; but still change the verdict. Hence Peter went out from the Lord's presence and wept and gnashed his teeth, the very language of the rejected; but changed the verdict. This is the intensity of our situation, as Paul in Romans emphasizes; we stand condemned, and yet in this life we can change the verdict, by God's grace.

This repentance by Hezekiah may be what is in view in 2 Chron. 32:26 "Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart". He repented at the time of the Assyrian invasion, but after that was resolved and he had been healed, 2 Kings and Is. 39 leave us to understand that he slipped away from personal faith.

Is. 28:14,17-19: "hear the word of the LORD, ye scornful men, that rule this people which is in Jerusalem... the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place... when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report". This is the same idea in Hezekiah's lament that he would die by morning. His terminal illness, which was delayed by grace, represented Judah's judgment. Elsewhere the Assyrian invasion is likened to flood waters which swallowed all Judah, and left Jerusalem alone with head above water, about to be drowned. It was God's intention that Jerusalem also would fall. It didn't by grace alone, and the power of Isaiah's intercession. There is the possibility in Is. 28:22,23,26 that repentance could change the outcome: "Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord GOD of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth [land, including Jerusalem]. Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech... For his God doth instruct him to discretion, and doth teach him". There was some repentance, shown by Hezekiah and the leadership wearing sackcloth. This and Isaiah's prayers changed the outcome.

It was in the context of the Assyrian invasion that Is. 29:13 had described the state of Judah: "this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me". Is. 31:8,9 are clear that Judah were worshipping idols right up to the Assyrian defeat: "In that day every man shall cast away his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which your own hands have made unto you for a sin. Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, not of a mighty man; and the sword, not of a mean man, shall devour him: but he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be discomfited". Hezekiah's repentance, as well as the peoples', was therefore required because the great reforming zeal of 2 Chron. 30 had been on the cusp of emotion and had not been permanent. That was why the Assyrian invasion came.

2Ki 19:2 He sent Eliakim, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz-

Humanly speaking, sending your right hand men to a prophet was not the way out of the situation. But he realized as should we, that the only ultimate recourse is to God's word. The covering of the leadership with sackcloth as noted on :1 was a sign of repentance, again imitating how the leadership of Nineveh repented in sackcloth and achieved a change of the Divinely promised judgment. Seeing Isaiah had been so critical of Hezekiah in his prophecies, we wonder whether this sending of messages to Isaiah reflects some stress or distance in their relationship. For three years Isaiah had walked naked and barefoot to plead either Judah not to trust the Egyptians and other Gentile powers. His prophecies of doom against the surrounding nations were in the context of appealing to Judah not to trust in them. But Hezekiah and the Jerusalem leadership did just that. This too would explain Hezekiah's reticence in going directly to Isaiah.

2Ki 19:3 They said to him, Thus says Hezekiah, 'This day is a day of trouble, of rebuke, and of rejection-

As noted on :1, Hezekiah understood he had sinned, hence his sackcloth and desperate repentance. Isaiah has repeatedly condemned Judah for trusting in Egypt for help from the Assyrians (Is. 20:5, 6; 30:1-4; 36:6,9). Those passages all say that if Judah did this, they would be rejected by God, as they were rejecting His help. And Hezekiah realizes that now those prophecies were going to come true. But the depth of his repentance meant that they didn't; just as the destruction of Nineveh in 40 days didn't happen, all because of human repentance. See on :1,4; Is. 22:5, which prophecy Hezekiah appears to allude to here. Yet the grace of it all is that God knew that despite this cusp of intensity in repentance, Hezekiah would later slip away from it. But it's as if He so respects human faith and repentance that when it is displayed at specific moments, it as it were melts His heart and He responds. Even though He foreknows that intensity will not be retained.

The "trouble" that came upon them was the promised judgment for persistent sin. Thus the word is used often, e.g. Dt. 31:17,21. Hezekiah's reforms had only been on the surface. His covering with sackcloth in :1 was in repentance, and this is the referent in 2 Chron. 32:26 where we learn that because he and the people humbled themselves, the wrath upon Zion was deferred: "His heart was lifted up; therefore there was wrath on him, and on Judah and Jerusalem. Notwithstanding, Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of Yahweh didn't come on them in the days of Hezekiah". I suggest this doesn't refer to any repentance by Hezekiah after the events of Is. 39. So here we have another example of the grace praised in Neh. 9:27- God by grace saved them from the "trouble" He brought upon them, when they cried to Him.

Likewise, the word "rebuke" leads to reflection on the fact that most occurrences of the word concern God's rebuke of His people, ultimately through judgment upon Zion. His wrath against Zion was coming to a climax, again indicating that Hezekiah's reforms had been very superficial. If the "rebuke" was not from God, who was it from? Likewise "of rejection" surely refers to Divine rejection of His people. The reforms of 2 Chron. 30 and zealous keeping of Passover were therefore done on the cusp of emotion and group psychology. For the language here speaks of God's wrath coming to a peak, and only being deferred by Hezekiah's repentance.

For the children have come to the point of birth, and there is no strength to deliver them-

The birth of a remnant is spoken of in Isaiah in spiritual terms; "the children" here are "the remnant" of :4. The sense may be that Hezekiah sensed there had been some

spiritual reformation, which he himself had done so much to bring about through his banishing of idolatry in Judah, but the final strength for the birth was lacking; they had indeed trusted in Egypt and in gold rather than in God, despite all the purging of idolatry. This was the tragedy which Hezekiah felt, as we do; that there was some genuine spirituality, but not enough. That may be the idea in Hos. 13:13 where the imagery is used again. However as noted above, the wrath of God had been provoked throughout Hezekiah's reign, leading to His rebuke and rejection of His people. His reforms had therefore been hollow and shallow. But Hezekiah likes to see this as the spiritual new life of Judah having come to the point of birth- but he somehow holds God guilty for now being about to slay them, when he claims they are just about to be born. Hezekiah so often comes over as self justifying, especially in his claim to God that he has lived a sinless life and therefore the judgment of death upon is unreasonable. He likewise appears here to consider God's judgments upon Judah to be unreasonable.

Is. 26:27,18 shows Isaiah's perspective: Judah had brought forth, but just wind. Her suffering had been in vain, because she had not repented: "Like as a woman with child, that draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain, and crieth out in her pangs; so have we been in thy sight, O LORD. We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind; we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth". Hezekiah however twisted this to saying that she was in labour, but God had not allowed her to bring forth because of the Assyrian invasion.

Hezekiah's perspective differed from God's. He saw the people as children whose birth was being unjustly stopped by God through not empowering the mother. Whereas Yahweh had lamented of His people at this time "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me" (Is. 1:2). That same chapter speaks of a time when the cities of Judah had all fallen to the invader, apart from Jerusalem. So the context is precisely that of the Sennacherib invasion.

Is. 66:9 can be read as an implicit criticism of the words of Hezekiah at the time of the Assyrian invasion, who lamented that the children had come to be born but there was no strength to bring them forth: "Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? says Yahweh: shall I who cause to bring forth shut the womb? says your God". God is saying that He will certainly bring forth the new nation of Zion out of their trauma at the hands of their invaders. He is not powerless, and therefore Hezekiah was wrong to imply this. Why the children were not brought forth at Hezekiah's time was because of the lack of spirituality in the daughter of Zion, rather than because of God's limited ability.

2Ki 19:4 It may be Yahweh your God-

This continues the connection with Nineveh's repentance (see on :1,3); in this case, to Jon. 3:9 "Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we might not perish?". However "your God" is a recognition by Hezekiah that Isaiah stood closer to God than he did.

We note that Hezekiah tries to get Isaiah to pray to Isaiah's God, rather than praying himself. This is the way of religion. When he receives the letter from Rabshakeh, he himself goes to the temple and prays. But when he was personally sick and terminally ill, he turns to the wall away from all others and on his own bed himself prays to God. This is God's intention, to lead us away from religion, step by step, and to personal engagement with Him.

Will hear all the words of Rabshakeh-

"Hear" is used at times to mean 'hear and respond to', as God in that sense 'hears' all things and there is no need to ask Him to hear anything.

Whom the king of Assyria his master has sent to defy the living God-

This is not just Hezekiah trying to get God to see the situation from the viewpoint of His own glory; rather was there a real and actual spiritual dimension to the invasion. The idea of 'defying' Israel's God is stressed so much (Is. 37:4,17,23,24); although Isaiah concludes by using this word about what Judah had effectively done to their own God (Is. 65:7 "they defied Me upon the hills" in their high places). Sennacherib really did despise Yahweh and wanted to impose his gods upon Judah, and this will be the dominant feature of the latter day Assyrian invasion of the land. Radical Islam would appear the obvious latter day equivalent.

And will rebuke the words which Yahweh your God has heard- "Rebuke" here is a legal word, used of legal reasoning against an accuser in court (as in Is. 1:18; 11:3,4; 29:21; Mic. 6:2). Hezekiah had a strong sense of the court of Heaven; and so the answer is expressed in terms of an Angel 'coming out' from that court room and articulating the agreed judgment (:36). This is a huge comfort; that all situations on earth are reflected in Heaven, and judged there.

Therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left'. So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah-

The remnant would refer not only to the fact that Jerusalem alone remained, but to the righteous remnant within the city who were now repentant. The desire to get others to pray for issues is found throughout the Bible. But we should not draw the implication that God is as it were hard of hearing and only responds if enough of us offer enough prayers. But on the other hand, the combined prayerful requests of many of God's children are not unnoticed by God.

In response to Isaiah's prayer, an Angel 'went forth' on earth and slew 185,000 Assyrians (2 Kings 19:35). Hezekiah was aware of the court of Heaven responding to his prayer; for he had commented that God would there "reprove the words" of Rabshakeh (2 Kings 19:4). The Hebrew for "reprove" is a legal term, meaning to convict, judge, plead etc. Hezekiah knew that the court of Heaven was considering Rabshakeh's words, and his prayer was a plea for those words to be convicted in Heaven's court, and an answer sent out. And this is what happened. Later, we read of Hezekiah asking that same court to "remember" his good life- again using a word capable of having legal overtones, of considering witness. And God replied by saying that He had "heard" that prayer- the same Hebrew word is translated 'to make a proclamation', as if He had considered Hezekiah's 'plea' and would respond (2 Kings 20:3,5).

Isaiah's prayer was an amazing intercession. Is. 22:4,5 suggests Isaiah had been shown that there was to be no escape from the day of trouble coming upon Judah. Just as Hezekiah their representative was to die. But Isaiah intercedes and changed or delayed the judgment, just as happened for Hezekiah's terminal illness: "Therefore said I, Look away from me; I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me, because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people. For it is a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity by the Lord GOD of hosts in the valley of vision, breaking down the walls, and of crying to the mountains". Is. 22 goes on to show that they had refused the call to repent and so judgment had to come. We note Isaiah's criticism of Hezekiah's fortification work: "Ye made also a ditch between the two walls for the water of the old pool: but ye have not looked unto the maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago. And in that day did the Lord GOD of

hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth: and behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for to morrow we shall die. And it was revealed in mine ears by the LORD of hosts, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord GOD of hosts".

2Ki 19:5 Isaiah said to them, Thus you shall tell your master, 'Thus says Yahweh, Don't be afraid of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me-

We too can fear words, forgetting that the only ultimate reality in all things is God. "Servants" here translates a word which is almost colloquial, the idea being "lackeys". Just as the risen Lord referred to the disciples as "guys, fellas" (see on Jn. 21:5), so His Father is able to relate to people on their language level too. "Don't be afraid of the words..." connects with "Perhaps [the Hebrew may mean "surely"] Yahweh will hear the words of Rabshakeh" (:4). The idea is that we should not be put in fear by words, because Yahweh has heard those words. "Yahweh will [also] hear" is the response to "the words you have heard".

2Ki 19:6 Behold, I will put a spirit in him-

Sennacherib retreated because God "put a spirit in him". The AV has: "I will send a blast / spirit upon him". Was it not that the Angel who later destroyed his army came upon him and put a spirit / disposition of mind within him that made him want to retreat? We see how God can directly affect the human spirit / mind. He can give a holy spirit, or an evil spirit. The Old Testament sets us up to understand that God can work directly on the human spirit, and then the New Testament says that He can give us a holy spirit, working again directly on the human mind and perception.

And he will hear news, and will return to his own land. I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land'-

The "news" could have been of the destruction of Rabshakeh's army; or of the approach of Tirhakah, or some other threat to his empire. The situation points ahead to how the latter day "king of the north" will likewise hear "news" (s.w. Dan. 11:44 "tidings"). The Lord 'caused' Sennacherib to fall by the sword in that He put a spirit of jealousy in his sons, resulting in the murder of :39.

"Send a blast" is the same phrase used in 1 Kings 22:23 for how God put a spirit in the mouths of the false prophets. And of how conversely He will put a new spirit in the heart of His people as part of the new covenant (Ez. 36:26).

The connection with God putting a lying spirit in Ahab's prophets (1 Kings 22:20-23) could lead us to think this "news" was in fact a false rumour. For it was this kind of thing that led to Israel's enemies fleeing at various times. Thus 2 Thess. 2:11 says that "God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie".

2Ki 19:7 So Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah; for he had heard that he had departed from Lachish-

Sennacherib was aiming for Egypt and was attacking the fortresses on the route there; and Libnah was just south of Lachish, which he had destroyed. This is the scene we have in Dan. 11, where the "king of the north" attacks "the king of the south", Egypt, ransacking Palestine along the way, but then had to return to his own land after hearing the "tidings" of Dan. 11:44. The historical invasions of Israel and Judah therefore follow a pattern; and this will be repeated in the final latter day invasion which all the previous invasions point forward to. The image of Dan. 2 stands

complete in the last days, and all the beasts of Dan. 7 are incorporated into the mega beast of the last days. This is to say that the final destructive entity oppressing Israel in the last days will combine features of all her historical oppressors, including the Assyrians. We note too the difference between Rabshakeh and Sennacherib, and wonder how far this points forward to the "false prophet" of Revelation who appears to be an agent of the beast.

2Ki 19:8 When he heard it said of Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, Behold, he has come out to fight against you, he sent messengers again to Hezekiah saying-

Tirhakah was the dominant king in Egypt at the time. We wonder if the much criticized efforts of Judah to get "Egypt" to help them were actually directed towards Tirhakah. But we wonder why therefore God still used this person to play a part in His plan to destroy Sennacherib. Or it could be that Tirhakah was the one who had destroyed the Egyptians upon whom Judah had hoped [rather than upon their God], and so it was appropriate that he and not Egypt played a part in the Divine plan to destroy "the king of the north".

2Ki 19:9 Thus you shall speak to Hezekiah king of Judah saying, Don't let your God in whom you trust deceive you saying, Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria-

The king recognizes that Hezekiah does indeed trust in God, and that Yahweh was indeed his God. This may have comforted him, as we noted on :4 that Hezekiah speaks of God as Isaiah's God rather than his God.

2Ki 19:10 Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly. Will you be delivered?-

This is the classic challenge to faith; no other god achieved anything, therefore, the one true God can't either. But the point is that the gods of this world didn't achieve anything precisely because they are not God. The 'utter destruction' of conquered lands by Assyria is historically well attested. But the word has the sense of 'sanctified' in a religious sense; like the latter day "king of the north", the invader thought that they were serving their God by destroying people, and the barbarity of the destruction was a sign of how far they had devoted people and lands to their God. Jihadist Islam exactly fits this scenario.

2Ki 19:11 Have the gods of the nations delivered them, which my fathers have destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph and the children of Eden that were in Telassar?-

These were the very cities to which the Assyrians had deported the ten tribe Kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 17:6; 18:11). The implication is that Judah would be taken there likewise.

The historical Assyria 'destroyed utterly' the nations around Israel (2 Kings 19:11); but the Hebrew word used specifically means to consecrate or dedicate. It has a distinctly religious sense. And this is precisely the idea of *jihad*- taking land in a holy war in order to dedicate that land to Allah. In practice, the Assyrians did this by 'destroying' or 'drying up' these lands. *Charab*, 'to dry up', is used about their scorched earth policies (2 Kings 19:17), and Assyria threatened to 'dry up' Judah (2 Chron. 32:11), just as he boasted "with the sole of my feet have I dried up all the rivers of besieged places" (2 Kings 19:24); and the metaphor continues with the idea of Assyria being like a river gushing forth over the land they had dried up (Is. 8:7). This is why God's answer to the Assyrian threat to Judah is expressed in terms of His

reminding Judah that it is *He* who has ultimate power to dry up rivers and nations (Is. 44:27; 50:2; 51:10- every time, the same Hebrew word *charab* is used).

2Ki 19:12 Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena and Ivvah?-

The kings of these cities are paralleled with their gods (:11). The parallel Is. 36:19 asks "Where are *the gods*" of these same cities. Truly we become like that which we worship; football fans become like their idols, in spirit. And if we worship the one true God of Israel, Yahweh, then we will become like Him.

Is. 10:9-11 speaks specifically of Rabshakeh's taunts: "Is not Calno as Carchemish? is not Hamath as Arpad? is not Samaria as Damascus? As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?". It is clear that Hezekiah's reforms and the idol smashing of 2 Chron. 30, 14 years earlier, were all of a surface level. The Jerusalem under siege by Assyria in Hezekiah's time was full of idols. And Is. 2 lamented that the land of Judah was "full of idols".

2Ki 19:13 Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it. Then Hezekiah went up to the house of Yahweh, and spread it before Yahweh-

Hezekiah responded to the threats of Assyria by sending to Isaiah, and up to :12 we have the story of the response to that. But he also himself prayed to God, and we are now reading about that here. Hezekiah read the letter- out loud, the Hebrew definitely means, even suggesting he cried it out. This parallels his spreading it before Yahweh. It was his way of expressing transparency before God, demonstrating his trust that God really saw and heard all that he was seeing and hearing.

"Spread" translates the same Hebrew word used about spreading abroad the hands in prayer (Ex. 9:29,33 etc.). It was as if the letter was the prayer. Our situation is read by God as our prayer. There are times especially in serious illness when we are too weak or mentally unclear to be able to verbalize prayer; or where the situation is so complex that we do not know what to pray for in terms of our desired outcome. And some are simply better at verbalizing than others. But the essence is our faith that God sees the situation and will respond. It was in this sense that Hezekiah spread the letter before Yahweh, as we might place an unpleasant hospital diagnosis on the kitchen table and attempt to pray, but what we are doing is bringing the situation before God and asking for His wise and powerful response.

Rabshakeh confirmed the threatened destruction of Jerusalem with a letter. Hezekiah took this "before the Lord". His first response was not to turn to Egypt; he'd learnt the wrongness of that. He went to the house of the Lord. Whilst we are always in God's presence, there is surely a sense in which coming into His presence through prayer is drawing yet closer to Him. And so it was with the special presence of YHWH in the temple at that time. Hezekiah was aware that YHWH 'dwells between the cherubim' (2 Kings 19:15). Presumably standing before the ark, Hezekiah "spread out" the letter (2 Kings 19:14). The Hebrew word translated 'spread out' is the same as that usually used about how the wings of the cherubim were 'spread out' over the ark (Ex. 25:20; 37:9). It's also the word used in Solomon's prophecy of how repentant people would spread out their hands in the temple at the time of the punishment for their sins, and receive forgiveness and help: "Whatever prayer, whatever plea is made by any man or by all your people Israel, each knowing his own affliction and his own sorrow and stretching out his hands in this house, then hear from heaven your

dwelling place and forgive” (2 Chron. 6:29,30). And Hezekiah would also have been only too aware of Isaiah’s judgment against Judah of a few years earlier: “When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen” (Is. 1:15). But Hezekiah summoned his faith in God’s forgiveness, and spread out his hands as he spread out the letter. He showed his deep repentance, and his faith in forgiveness to such an extent that he was bold enough to ask God for deliverance. Faith in forgiveness of our sins is perhaps one of the hardest things to believe in- strangely enough, seeing that God delights in forgiveness.

2Ki 19:14 Hezekiah prayed before Yahweh and said-

As noted on :13, the situation itself was the prayer; but Hezekiah, like us, does his best to articulate things in words. I discuss on :15 how "before Yahweh" refers to the temple (:13). Hezekiah prayed in the temple because he thought this was how God would best 'hear' him and 'see' the problem. But he was later shown that in fact God hears sincere prayer from the heart wherever it is offered, even outside the temple. 1 Kings 8:37 envisaged Israel when sick or besieged praying to God and being heard because of the physical temple: "If their enemy besieges them in their cities; whatever plague, whatever sickness there is; whatever prayer and supplication is made by any man, or by all Your people Israel, who shall each know the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: then hear in heaven". Hezekiah was both besieged and sick. But he was to be taught that Solomon's envisioning of the physical temple as a kind of talisman was incorrect. Even after he is healed he immediately wants to go to the temple: "Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign that I will go up to the house of Yahweh?" (Is. 38:22). He couldn't as it were live without that temple.

The outcome of Hezekiah's loss of faith and wrong attitude to the temple was that Judah would be destroyed by Babylon, along with the temple, and go into captivity. I suggest this is one reason for this material being put into the historical interlude of Is. 36-39. The good deeds of Hezekiah in his earlier life are not dwelt upon in that interlude. The material is used at that point because Is. 40-66 is relevant to the exiles in Babylon. The anti Babylon polemic in Is. 40-45 follows straight on from the explanation in Is. 39 as to why they are suffering under Babylon. The Hezekiah material is in order to remind them why they were in exile. It was because of Hezekiah's wrong attitude to the temple and self satisfied, partial faith. Despite earlier having been of strong faith. This was exactly the position of Judah in exile. He serves as a warning to them, and an explanation as to why the temple was in ruins and they were in exile. This is surely why Isaiah alone records Hezekiah's song of praise in Is. 38:9-20; because it is full of phrases relevant to the later exiles. Thus he says that he feels as if his life is a shepherd's tent that is being taken down (Is. 38:12). But the restored Zion will be a shepherd's tent that will not be taken down (Is. 33:20). Hezekiah in sickness was therefore Zion in destruction and exile. His sin was theirs; although there is also an element to which he, like the Lord, carried their sin. Zion too is likened to a chronically sick man. And Hezekiah's judgment of death was deferred, not removed. As with Zion's. Zion likewise pleaded "Do not take me away, O God, in the midst of my days" (Ps. 102:25) in the very words of Hezekiah in Is. 38:10. "You restore me", after confession of sin (Is. 38:16), is of course the obvious connection with the restored Zion. If they did this, then like Hezekiah they would feel as in Is. 33:24 "The inhabitant won't say, I am sick because the people who dwell therein will be forgiven their iniquity". The connection between Hezekiah and the people is made

clear in 1 Kings 20:6: "I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria".

Yahweh, the God of Israel, Who sits above the cherubim-

Hezekiah has just "spread" the letter before Yahweh (:13), using the same word for how the cherubim 'stretched forth their wings' (Ex. 25:20; 1 Kings 8:7 etc.). He knows that God is in Heaven with the cherubim as it were around Him, and also in the Most Holy place of the temple where Hezekiah was. And he imagined that letter as being with God, spread out as the cherubic wings were spread out. Those wings were spread out over the mercy seat, the cover over the ark, which was sprinkled with the blood of atonement each year. This is a profound insight into prayer. Our situations are not unnoticed. They are placed as it were upon the blood of the Lord Jesus, in the very presence of God, with the cherubim overshadowing them, peering down into them. And we can understand the cherubim in this context as representing God's Angelic might. And appropriately enough, an Angel was sent to bring about the great deliverance sought. There over our kitchen table with the troubling letter placed upon it, as with Hezekiah, there are the cherubim and the presence of Almighty God Himself.

God, whom we reflect, is not something nebulous of which we cannot conceive. Ezekiel saw God enthroned above the cherubim, with the silhouette of "the likeness of a man" (Ez. 1:26; 10:20); it is God Himself who is located above the cherubim (2 Kings 19:14 RV). All this has a practical import; because we are in the image of God, because it is imprinted on every part of our bodies, we must give that body to God, just as men were to give the penny which had Caesar's image on it to Caesar (Lk. 20:25).

You are the God, even You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth-

Believing that the cosmos was created and didn't evolve from nothing isn't a painless academic decision which we take somewhere within our brain cells. To believe God is the creator means that we believe that nothing in the life of this planet or our own lives is therefore too hard for Him to do.

Reflection upon God's power in creation should inspire our faith too; the God who could do that has made all men and their kingdoms, and is unlimited in what He can do for us. To let 'science' diminish our faith in God as creator is to remove such inspiration from us. Hezekiah states that God alone is the God of all kings or kingdoms of the earth; and yet we have just learnt that those kings were identified with their idols and were no more. Perhaps Hezekiah was using the present tense as God does, speaking of the reality of the final Messianic Kingdom as being so sure of ultimately coming about.

The appeal to God as creator was still an appeal to grace alone. Is. 26:17 had said that they were beyond the mercy even of their creator: "Therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour".

2Ki 19:15 Incline Your ear, Yahweh, and hear. Open your eyes, Yahweh, and see. Hear the words of Sennacherib, with which he has sent to defy the living God-

The appeal for God to open His eyes alludes to Solomon's prayer, that God's eyes would be open towards the temple (1 Kings 8:29,52). The statement in :14 that Hezekiah prayed "before Yahweh" could suggest he went into the temple to pray. He thus betrays a 'religious' view of the temple, as if God was obligated to hear him because he was praying in the temple, or at least, because of the temple's very

existence. Perhaps this is why his prayer not to die was responded to with the comment that God had indeed seen, and once healed, Hezekiah after three days would go to the temple [to praise God for His grace]. Hezekiah therefore prayed that prayer not in the temple, but on his deathbed at home, facing the bedroom wall. He was thus being taught that God opens His eyes to sincere prayer- not simply because of the religious value of the temple. I take this to be God showing that He was not particularly in agreement with Solomon's 'religious' idea that the temple of itself would obligate God to hear prayer. And that is surely why the final judgment upon Hezekiah was that the Babylonians would come and sack Jerusalem, which included destroying the temple.

This is not to say that God is deaf and blind usually. Seeing and hearing are being used with the sense 'See, hear and respond'. God sees and hears but doesn't respond immediately, usually; He waits until judgment day. Hezekiah is asking for an immediate response in the here and now, for the essence of judgment day to come now, just as we noted on :16 that he was in expectation of the Messianic Kingdom being established.

Perhaps he even placed the letter upon the top of the ark, beneath the spread out wings of the cherubim, upon the blood-sprinkled mercy seat or atonement cover, symbolizing the future work of the Lord Jesus. He brought the situation before the presence of God. He asks God to open His eyes and see. I take this as a tacit recognition from Hezekiah that God had turned away His eyes from Judah and Hezekiah personally because of their sin. But Hezekiah believed in the promises of forgiveness, and asks God to therefore respond to the awful situation they were in. He believed that the cherubim-Angels, God's eyes, would take note of that letter. And it's significant that God's response was to send an Angel to destroy the Assyrians. It may help us to focus our faith in prayers by being aware of the way that God responds to prayer through sending out Angels. He is enthroned, as Hezekiah put it, upon the cherubim.

2Ki 19:16 Truly, Yahweh, the kings of Assyria have laid waste the nations and their lands-

"Destroyed / laid waste" is the word for sanctifying and devoting in a religious sense. The king of Assyria, like his latter day equivalent, was deeply religious, and saw the cruel destruction of other lands and peoples as part of his service to God, and a sign that his god was triumphant over their gods and belief systems. This exactly fits the spirit of jihadist Islam, which I suggest is the latter day equivalent.

Goliath's defiance of Israel is a major theme (s.w. 1 Sam. 17:10,25,26,36,45). David's victory over Goliath was inspirational to other Israelites, just as the Lord's triumph on the cross should be to us. The history of Goliath would have been inspirational when the Assyrians likewise defied the living God, and again this is a theme of the record (2 Kings 19:4,16,22,23; 2 Chron. 32:17 s.w.).

2Ki 19:17 and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. Therefore they have destroyed them-

Here we have an example of the Bible using language from the viewpoint of men on earth. They thought their gods were indeed "gods", but they were "no gods". Likewise the language of demons is used in the New Testament, but this doesn't mean demons exist or have power in reality.

Passages like this almost define God by reason of His being uncreate. Whatever is created, is not God. And it follows that if we think that we have truly created

anything, or that we are anything that God didn't create, then we are in fact playing God. Understanding God as creator, in its true, deep and thought-through sense, leads to an understanding of grace. That all we have, are, were, shall ever be, is purely His gift. Likewise, to take for ourselves what is God's is to play God. Materialism and selfishness are in this sense playing God

2Ki 19:18 Now therefore, Yahweh our God, save us, I beg You, out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You, Yahweh, are God alone-

This alludes to the statement just made in :15 "You are the God, even You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth". Hezekiah is asking that his faith and understanding of God would be accepted by all peoples. Hezekiah wants people to understand and perceive what is potentially true for them. And this is really the function of all evangelism.

Hezekiah's confident assurance to the people that the Assyrians were an arm of flesh compared to Yahweh (2 Chron. 32:7,8) is hard to square with his own apparent lack of faith at this time. He stripped the temple of its gold [faith], made alliances with Egypt, and fortified the city in his own strength- which Isaiah strongly criticized in Is. 22. One solution is to recognize that faith and unbelief can co-exist in a "believer", and yet when speaking to others, we may give a stronger exhortation to faith than we personally believe ourselves.

The day when all earth's kingdoms shall know Yahweh is the Kingdom age, as Isaiah points out elsewhere with the same Hebrew phrase (Is. 12:5; 49:26; 61:9). Hezekiah envisaged salvation from the "king of the north" as leading directly to the establishment of the Kingdom; and that is the scenario in Dan. 11:40-12:3. Perhaps it was potentially possible; but Judah's general lack of repentance and Hezekiah's apostasy meant it was deferred in fulfilment. The desire for salvation was therefore not simply for the sake of personal safety, but for the wider glory of God in the earth.

There will come a day when all the world realizes that God is one (Is. 37:20 Heb.)- in that they will realize that He alone is God and all else is pure vanity. Because God alone is holy, only He will be worshipped then (Rev. 15:4). "The Lord alone shall be exalted in that day" (Is. 2:11,17).

Hezekiah's faith was also strengthened by having the right motives: "Save us, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone". This is alluded to by the Lord in His prayer just before His death: "That the world may know" (Jn. 17:23). Hezekiah's prayer for the Assyrian destruction was in fact so that the Gentile nations around Judah would come to know Yahweh, to accept Him. What finer motivation! This was no selfish shriek for help.

That God is one is a command, an imperative to action (Mk. 12:28,29). It underlies the whole law and prophets (Mt. 22:40)- it's that fundamental. If there were two Gods, Yahweh would only demand half our energies. Nothing can be given to anything else; for there is nothing else to give to. There's only one God. There can be no idolatry in our lives, because there is only one God (2 Kings 19:18,19). Because "there is none else, thou shalt keep *therefore* his statutes" (Dt. 4:39,40). The Hebrew text of Dt. 6:4 suggests: "The Lord is our God, the Lord is one", thereby linking Yahweh's unity with His being our God, the sole Lord and unrivalled Master of His people. It also links the first principle of the unity of God with that of the covenant to Abraham; for "I will be their God" was one of the features of the covenant. The one God has only one people; not all religious systems can lead to the one Hope of Israel.

2Ki 19:19 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah saying, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, 'Whereas you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard you-

Answers to prayer don't often come through bolts of revelation; in this case it was through another believer, Isaiah. And we note the power of one man's prayer- because of this prayer, God's word of :20 was uttered. See on Mk. 2:5. The implication could be that it was Isaiah's prayer and not Hezekiah's which was answered.

2Ki 19:20 This is the word that Yahweh has spoken concerning him: The virgin daughter of Zion has despised you and ridiculed you. The daughter of Jerusalem has shaken her head at you-

The remnant within the closed city of Jerusalem, likened to a protected virgin who had not been 'opened', had hardly despised and ridiculed the Assyrians. They were terrified of them. But their faith was counted to them for more than it was; according to Ps. 2, it was God within Zion who despised and ridiculed the armies outside the walls. But His characteristics were counted to them. This is exactly the reasoning of Paul in Romans about imputed righteousness. The idea may also be that the Assyrians had intended to enter and take Zion's virginity; but the prophetic perfect is used of how soon, the inhabitants of Zion would come out and shake their head in ridicule at the remaining Assyrians as they fled homewards. She had retained her virginity from them.

2Ki 19:21 Whom have you defied and blasphemed? Against whom have you exalted your voice and lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel-

When and how was this mocking made? I suggest on Prov. 25:1 that a number of the Proverbs in the later part of the book of Proverbs were rewritten in the context of the Assyrian crisis at the time of Hezekiah. We may have a clue in Prov. 26:6: "One who sends a message by the hand of a fool is cutting off his own feet and drinking violence". Rabshakeh, the servant of the king of Assyria, is presented as a "fool" (see on Prov. 26:4), and by using him, the king of Assyria was cutting off his own feet. This and other of Hezekiah's Proverbs (see on Prov. 25:1) which mock messengers would then be the reference of 2 Kings 19:21, where we read that the daughter of Zion had mocked at and despised the Assyrians and their messengers. There is no other recorded fulfilment of this. Defeat by Assyria looked certain, and so to mock them at the time when they would [humanly speaking] soon be seeking their grace- was a true act of faith. See on :32.

That would've required an extraordinary level of faith to do that. Hezekiah wasn't just hoping for the best, using prayer as a last resort, a kind of back up insurance policy after doing all he could. This was the prayer and faith of utter confidence, believing that things that are not are in fact, and being so sure they will come about that this faith actually affects our feelings. Hezekiah felt confident, superior to the Assyrians, all the feelings that come from knowing that one is in a far stronger position. This is a challenge in our self-assessment. To what extent does our confidence in faith affect our emotions and feelings?

Sennacherib was fully aware that he had done all these things against Yahweh; the motivation for his rage against Jerusalem was his particular hatred of Yahweh. And so it shall be in the latter day invasion, which will also be strongly motivated by religion. This verse is simply restating the truth about Sennacherib. It is addressed to

him, so presumably Isaiah's duty was to get the message to him. We wonder why God would, as it were, bother. But there are many points of contact with Pharaoh. God even tried to bring him to repentance, and perhaps this address to Sennacherib was to likewise give even him a chance. This is great encouragement to us, to never consider anyone not even worth trying with.

2Ki 19:22 By your messengers you have defied the Lord, and have said, 'With the multitude of my chariots I have come up to the height of the mountains, to the innermost parts of Lebanon-

The intensive plurals here refer to the great mountain, of Zion. Sennacherib spoke in the present tense because he was certain he would achieve it. His intention was to desecrate the innermost parts of the cedar-of-Lebanon decorated temple.

And I will cut down its tall cedars, and its choice fir trees; and I will enter into His deepest dwelling place, the forest of His fruitful field-

This could continue the allusion to the cedar-of-Lebanon covered temple. Or the whole verse may be simply as GNB: "You sent your servants to boast to me that with all your chariots you had conquered the highest mountains of Lebanon. You boasted that there you cut down the tallest cedars and the finest cypress trees, and that you reached the deepest parts of the forests". However, an obsession with destroying the temple would fit the theme of Sennacherib's rage against Yahweh and particular desire to destroy the temple and gain the temple mount. This would match the similar motivations of the latter day Assyrian.

2Ki 19:23 I have dug and drunk strange waters, and with the sole of my feet will I dry up all the rivers of Egypt'-

Rabshakeh tried to cut off water from Jerusalem (hence Hezekiah's tunnel of 2 Kings 20:20). Perhaps the idea is that despite this, the Assyrians had dug wells and found new water sources for their army. Isaiah had criticized Hezekiah for doing this rather than trusting in God. And it would seem that Hezekiah's efforts didn't succeed anyway. Sennacherib considered victory against Egypt as just as certain; although he was clearly fazed by Tirhakah's approach. In fact the Assyrian army was to never set foot in Egypt at this time.

2Ki 19:24 Haven't you heard how I have done it long ago, and formed it of ancient times? Now have I brought it to pass, that it should be yours to lay waste fortified cities into ruinous heaps-

This is the Divine response. Understanding predestination helps us see the frailty of all human strength and device; and Paul introduces it into his argument in Romans to likewise demonstrate that salvation is of grace and not by works. "Destroy" is literally to rush upon, and the word is used of how the rushing of the nations against God's people would be turned back (see on Is. 17:13).

2Ki 19:25 Therefore their inhabitants were of small power. They were dismayed and confounded. They were like the grass of the field, and like the green herb, like the grass on the housetops, and like grain blasted before it has grown up-

Similar language is used in Is. 40:6 of how "all flesh" is like this. The reference is to the "all flesh" of the nations around Israel whom the Assyrians had conquered, who trusted in their own human strength.

2Ki 19:26 But I know your sitting down, and your going out, and your coming in, and

your raging against Me-

This reflects David's awareness that God knows our every physical movement, standing or sitting. God knew Sennacherib's going out from his homeland and how he would return there. Sennacherib's rage was against Yahweh; he intended to utterly subvert the true faith; see on :27.

2Ki 19:27 Because of your raging against Me- There was a specifically religious, spiritual aspect to the invasion; the idea was that the claims of this Yahweh were to be shown false. The motivation of the latter day Assyrian will be the same. Dan. 11:40 [see note there] envisages the "king of the north" likewise raging against the God of the fortress of Zion.

And because your arrogance has come up into My ears, therefore will I put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way by which you came- This is the language of the latter day invasion by Gog (Ez. 38:4), which has this Assyrian invasion as its prototype. The Gog confederacy, of 10 nations headed by a *rosh*, a charismatic leader, will likewise be unsuccessful.

The language of coming up to God's ears usually refers to the prayers of the righteous - in the Hezekiah context, "their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to His holy habitation, even to heaven" (2 Chron. 30:27). What came up to His ears was the blasphemy of His enemies. But perhaps the idea is that the situation of His people is read by Him as their prayer. Hezekiah spread the blasphemous letter "before Yahweh" and prayed over it. This reflected faith and trust that God did in fact see and hear what was written there, and here we have confirmation of that.

2Ki 19:28 This shall be the sign to you: You shall eat this year that which grows of itself, and in the second year that which springs of the same; and in the third year sow, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat its fruit-

They were besieged in Jerusalem. This sign was a medium term sign, not the short term indication of salvation they perhaps wanted. The sign was that there was the potential for the house of Judah to bear fruit "upward", to God (:29); the fruit of repentance. But there are hints later in Isaiah that this sign was not believed; they did not respect the Jubilee year, they did sow instead of trusting that the land around Jerusalem would miraculously bring forth its own fruit. And this reflects how they did not bring forth the fruit of the Spirit "upward" to God but rather of their own strength (:29). See on :30. The language here seems to suggest that the events of the Assyrian invasion and deliverance happened around a year of Jubilee, which later in Isaiah is alluded to as a type of the time of the Lord's return and the Messianic Kingdom. It could have come then; but Is. 58 and other hints in later Isaiah are that the Jubilee year was not respected, they did plant instead of trusting in the Lord's provision, and so the Kingdom was precluded from coming then. The idea of planting vineyards and eating their fruit is used in Is. 65 of the Messianic Kingdom; it is kingdom language.

The verse has been translated: 'Ye did eat (the first year) such as groweth of itself, and in the second year that which springeth of the same, but in this third year sow ye'. This would mean that they were now in the third year of the Assyrian invasion. Perhaps there was a three and a half year domination of Judah by the Assyrians, just as there shall be in the last days.

2Ki 19:29 The remnant that has escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward-

See on :28,30. Apart from Jerusalem, Judah had been overrun by the Assyrians, so

this remnant who escaped could refer to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; or it could be that "the remnant" refers to the spiritually faithful minority.

Is. 4:2 had spoken of how this "remnant" (s.w.) would be the basis of a revived kingdom of God in Judah, based around a Messianic "Branch", "in that day" - the day of Is. 4:1, when Jerusalem would be overcome and left in ruins with hardly any men left. These "survivors" are those saved from the ruins of a desolated Jerusalem, those who "escaped" the Assyrian invasion (s.w. Is. 10:20); the same word is used in Joel 2:32; Obadiah 17, the "remnant" of Ez. 14:22 (s.w.). The destruction of Jerusalem was intended to elicit repentance and to lead seamlessly into a revived Zion and reestablished Kingdom of God in Israel, when again all things would be "glorious" (s.w. Is. 24:23; 35:2). But this didn't happen. Jerusalem was saved by grace, and yet Hezekiah failed to act as "Yahweh's branch", and Judah were impenitent, unmoved by their salvation by grace.

2Ki 19:30 For out of Jerusalem a remnant will go out, and out of Mount Zion those who shall escape. The zeal of Yahweh will perform this'-
This is the language of Obadiah about the final establishment of Messiah's Kingdom. As noted on :28, this could have happened then, if Judah had kept the year of Jubilee as intended and brought forth spiritual fruit "upward" to God.

2Ki 19:31 Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning the king of Assyria, 'He shall not come to this city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither shall he come before it with shield, nor cast up a mound against it-

This is in contrast to Sennacherib's first approach to Jerusalem, when according to his own inscriptions he did cast up a mound: 'Because Hezekiah, king of Judah, would not submit to my yoke, I came up against him, and by force of arms, and by the might of my power, I took 46 of his fenced cities, and of smaller towns scattered about I took a countless number. And I carried off as spoil 200,150 people. And Hezekiah himself I shut up in Jerusalem, his capital city, like a bird in a cage, building towers round the city to hem him in. Then upon this Hezekiah there fell the fear of the power of my arms, and he sent out to me the chiefs of Jerusalem, with 30 talents of gold and 800 talents of silver'. The fact not an arrow would be fired must be compared with how Is. 22:6 had predicted the presence of the archers of Elam around Jerusalem at the invasion, who would overthrow her. It was deferred until this same nation came with the Babylonians against Jerusalem at a later date (Jer. 49:35). Likewise Is. 22:7 foresaw the Assyrians 'coming before' the city; but this too was averted by the repentance and intercession of a minority. It is all a great lesson in the power of the repentance and intercession of a minority.

2Ki 19:32 By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and he shall not come to this city', says Yahweh-

The promise that the Assyrians would not build forts against Jerusalem alludes to Is. 29:1-3: "Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices. Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness and sorrow... And I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee". This was averted or delayed by repentance and intercession. Is. 29:4 continues: "And thou shalt be brought down, and shalt speak out of the ground, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be, as of one that hath a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and thy speech

shall whisper out of the dust". This is the language of Hezekiah's prayer when he was terminally ill, again showing he represented Jerusalem.

This unsuccessful invasion is like that of Ez. 38 and Ps. 2; the nations surround Jerusalem but fail to capture it because of the Lord's presence there. Jerusalem will indeed fall in the last days and be desecrated, but the Lord will return and save Israel, establish Himself in Zion- and then there will be this unsuccessful invasion which He crushes.

As discussed on :21, the Proverbs of Hezekiah are relevant to this situation. At this point, Prov. 26:8 "As one who binds a stone in a sling, so is he who gives honour to a fool". I suggested on Prov. 26:4,6 that the particular fool in view is Rabshakeh, who had been honoured by the king of Assyria. But because of God's anger with this "fool", the military technology of Assyria would be confounded. Not a stone would be hurled at Jerusalem- exactly as stated here.

2Ki 19:33 'For I will defend this city to save it, for My own sake and for My servant David's sake'-

The implication could be 'not for the sake of your righteousness, but by grace alone; for My sake, and because I respect the covenant of grace I gave David'. Perhaps this is why 2 Kings 20:6 reminds Hezekiah that his other prayer, for personal healing, is likewise because God is the God of David his ancestor: "Thus says Yahweh the God of David your father, I have heard your prayer. I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you". This was by grace, and not because of Hezekiah's allusions to praying towards the temple and thereby being saved, both nationally and personally.

2Ki 19:34 It happened that night, that the angel of Yahweh went out-

He went out from the throne room of heaven, where the case had been as it were considered; see on :4. Isaiah 37 is shot through with allusions to the Angel cherubim destroying the Assyrian host. The Angel went out- perhaps referring to Him physically going forth out of the temple where He dwelt to slay the Assyrians outside the walls of Jerusalem. This phrase 'went out' is nearly always used about literal physical movement, which we have seen is what Angels literally do. Thus in the Ezekiel visions of the cherubim, they and the lightnings "went forth", physically and literally, in performing God's work. "Let my sentence come forth from Thy presence (Angelic language); let Thine eyes (Angels) behold the things that are equal", seeing they are involved with the 'coming forth', according to the parallelism of this verse. Similarly Job's satan Angel "went forth" from the presence of the Lord (Job 1:12). And so it happened that there were Angels on earth, as it were. Zech. 2:3 also has an Angel going forth to answer the prayers concerning restoring the fortunes of Jerusalem (see Zech. 5:5 too). Ps. 81:5 describes the Angel going out through the land of Egypt in order to "remove (Israel's) shoulder from the burden". Ps. 81 is 'Angelic', following Ps. 80, which is another such Psalm. Heb. 1:14 also offers support: the Angels are "sent forth" to minister to us- by answering prayers offered in the spirit of Hezekiah's prayer here?

And struck one hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians. When men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies-

The bodies were spoiled by the Jerusalem Jews (Is. 33:4). The agent of destruction appears to have been fire and hail (Is. 29:6; 30:30), both of which may be used in the last days too. We observe that this major event was never prophesied by Isaiah in all the previous material we have in Isaiah. Hezekiah's illness and healing was intended to be programmatic for Judah. Just as Hezekiah's death was determined but was delayed

for 15 years by God's response to his prayer, so it could be that it was indeed God's intention to destroy Jerusalem at this point. But it was deferred, just as Hezekiah's death had been, because of the faith of a very few. We again see the openness of God.

2Ki 19:35 So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and lived at Nineveh-

This was due to the "tidings" he received (:8), presumably of the destruction of his army outside the walls of Jerusalem. His murder by his sons is recorded in Assyrian inscriptions, but a space of about 20 years after his withdrawal from Judah. We enquire why God waited so long, by human standards. Surely it was because He sought this man's repentance, as with Pharaoh.

2Ki 19:36 It happened, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer struck him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Esar Haddon his son reigned in his place-

As noted on Is. 38:7, this was caused by God putting a spirit / attitude of mind in these sons to do this. His Spirit, as today, confirmed the human spirit. He was killed as he was worshipping, about 20 years later; worshipping a god who had spectacularly failed him. We see here the terrible power of religion in blinding men to spiritual reality. He was given a chance to repent; just as was Pharaoh. God was extremely patient with him.

We note the contrast between the two kings. Both go into the house of their God but with different outcomes. Likewise the three delegated representatives of the king of Assyria, Tartan, Rabshakeh and Rabsaris, are paralleled with the three representatives of Hezekiah king of Judah, Shebna, Eliakim and Joah (2 Kings 18:18). The Angelic horses and chariots thus correspond to the much vaunted horses and chariots of Assyria. In this context we understand how Rabshakeh offers a fake Kingdom of God, alluding consciously to the descriptions of God's Kingdom in Mic. 4 and Isaiah.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 20

2Ki 20:1 In those days was Hezekiah sick to death-

Hezekiah reigned 29 years (2 Kings 18:2), and the sickness after which he was given 15 years therefore happened in the 14th year of his reign- the very same time that Assyria invaded (Is. 36:1). Trials so often come together, in such an intense and extreme way that the situation can only be of God rather than mere bad luck or coincidence. The full title of Isaiah is given perhaps because the theme is that Hezekiah was to live because of the prophetic word.

It could be that Hezekiah shared the smiting of the Assyrians, so that his suffering [the basis of Isaiah 53] was on account of suffering the judgment upon Israel's enemies- all so looking forward to the Lord's death. And his recovery from certain death at this time was intended to encourage the people to have faith that they too could be saved from certain destruction by the Assyrians, against all odds. We likewise are often given encounters with others whose experiences are to encourage us as we pass through the same, in essence.

Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, Thus says Yahweh, 'Set your house in order; for you shall die, and not live'-

We should not assume too quickly that Hezekiah had no family at this stage; for he is commanded here to put in order his household ("house" is so often 'family' rather than the bricks of a house). Indeed the very same phrase is used of how Abraham would "command his household" to keep God's laws (Gen. 18:19). Perhaps that was the idea. He was to urgently teach his household more of God's ways as he was to soon die.

2Ki 20:2 Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed to Yahweh saying-

The divans, which were also beds, were arranged next to the walls. We are left with the impression of a man utterly alone with God, turning his face away from Isaiah when he had delivered the message, facing the wall- and praying to Yahweh.

Hezekiah doesn't specifically request healing. But this is how his prayer was interpreted by God, and that was the answer given. We have here another example of how God understands the essence of our thinking and treats that as prayer. Romans 8 is clear that we know not how to pray for as we ought, but the Lord Jesus as "the Lord the Spirit" intercedes according to our spirit. Those who can't verbalize are not therefore any weaker in prayer than those to whom verbalization comes much easier.

We note that earlier, Hezekiah had prayed for those who kept the Passover whilst unclean, and they had been "healed" according to his prayer (2 Chron. 30:20 "Yahweh listened to Hezekiah, and healed the people"). Hezekiah is here "healed" (s.w. 2 Kings 20:5,8). We wonder why he doesn't specifically request his own healing? Perhaps he was too depressed. Or just willing to accept God's will. Or perhaps it was that the peoples' plague was due to infringement of Divine law, whereas he wrongly felt he had not sinned. He therefore felt he didn't deserve his death, and pleads with God to remember his spotless life. Something is clearly wrong here in his thinking, as it is in the thinking of all who consider death to be somehow unfair.

2Ki 20:3 Remember now, Yahweh, I beg You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Your sight-

This is another allusion to Solomon's prayer. Solomon's idea was that if Israel walked before God with a perfect heart, then their prayers would be heard because of the physical temple; for Yahweh "keeps covenant and grace with Your servants who walk before You with all their heart" (1 Kings 8:23). But Hezekiah was to be shown that this was far too simplistic. God hears prayer by grace and not because of the existence of any temple. And so Hezekiah prays this prayer not in the temple; for the answer he gets assures him that in three days he will be able to enter the temple.

Hezekiah claimed to have lived with a good conscience but was at the same time aware of his sins (Is. 38:3 cp. 17); and his cutting off the gold of the temple to try to buy peace was surely a failure. Yet the conscience can be cleansed of sin, through the depth of the power of God's forgiveness. This is not the same as forgetfulness, self-righteousness or minimization of personal failings. Paul must surely have had twinges of guilt over his behaviour at times (not least over the bust up with brethren Barnabas and Mark, Acts 15:39 cp. 2 Tim. 4:11); and yet he insists that he always had a good conscience. Paul likewise claims that the Jewish forefathers served God with a pure conscience (2 Tim. 1:3 NIV). Yet the Jewish fathers, dear Jacob particularly, must have had plenty of twinges of guilt over their years.

Walking in truth is the term used to characterize the seed of David (1 Kings 2:4; 3:6), as David personally walked in truth (Ps. 26:3; 86:11), and may not of itself mean that Hezekiah is saying he has not sinned; it's as if Hezekiah assumed that because he was the seed of David, he therefore ought not to die. As will be explained later, the

adding of days to his life was a way of saying that he was being accepted as the seed of David; and yet he failed to use those years to save his people. It could be argued that by refusing to die when asked to, Hezekiah was disallowing his being the fulfilment of the Messianic suffering servant who was to die for his people.

Hezekiah wept bitterly-

Perhaps in prayer, asking God to change the outcome. For as with Nineveh, in the gap between Divine statement and its fulfilment, we can repent and change the word which otherwise would have come true (Jer. 18:8-10). See on 2 Kings 19:35. In 2 Chron. 30 we read of Hezekiah having to make decisions at the great Passover which he organized. Some ate it on the second month, and others ate it unclean or with priests unclean. Numbers 9 allowed for those who were distant or travelling to keep the Passover a month later. But that legislation doesn't cover the eventuality here- that the priests were unclean. Likewise in 2 Chron. 30:18, "yet they ate the Passover otherwise than it is written". So we see how God's laws were not seen as a leash, as a letter that had to be literalistically obeyed. By contrast, contemporary Hittite laws condemned any failure to keep a festival on its specified day. The law of Moses is hereby shown to be open to interpretation and obedience according to spirit and not letter. Perhaps it was this perception of Divine flexibility that led Hezekiah to reason with God to change His plan that Hezekiah should die.

The bitterness may have been because he perceived, as most then did, that premature death was a judgment from God because of sin. The Psalms ask for wicked men to be cut off in their prime (Ps. 54:23; 89:45); and long life was a blessing of keeping the covenant (Dt. 6:2; 32:47). Perhaps indeed Hezekiah had sinned. And had to repent of his pride. He considered himself righteous- when measured against men. But his later psalm of gratitude, recorded in Is. 38, shows him appreciating that his sins had been cast behind God's back in forgiveness. We too experience things which help us to perceive our sinfulness, and to stop justifying ourselves by our relative righteousness when compared to men. We also could note that Hezekiah seems to have little conception of a future resurrection. He wants to be healed so he can return to the temple and do his music...

2Ki 20:4 It happened, before Isaiah had gone out into the middle part of the city, that the word of Yahweh came to him saying-

Once he reached the middle court of the palace, he was told by God to "turn again" and give Hezekiah assurance of healing. The whole incident shows the speed with which God responds to prayers, and His sensitivity to human prayer and repentance.

2Ki 20:5 Turn back and tell Hezekiah the prince of My people, 'Thus says Yahweh the God of David your father, I have heard your prayer. I have seen your tears. Behold, I will heal you. On the third day, you shall go up to the house of Yahweh-

The defence of Zion at this time was predicated upon God's grace; judgment was intended to come unless they repented, and most of them hadn't. And so God stresses He will save Zion by grace, for His own sake and not that of His peoples' prayer or repentance. The cure was not instant, it took three days; for the same reason as there will be the process of judgment between our resurrection and entrance to the Kingdom. The period between God's pronouncement of blessing and the realization of it is for our benefit, that we might grow in appreciation. The healing enabled Hezekiah to enter the temple; from God's perspective, the most significant aspect of his illness was that its uncleanness precluded him from entering the temple. We notice

the parallel between Hezekiah's prayer and his tears; God reads situations as prayers. Prayer is understood by Him far wider than simply words as lexical items. Otherwise those more able to verbalize would pray 'better'; and acceptable prayer is not related to our ability to verbalize.

See on 2 Kings 19:15. I suggest there that in his prayer for national deliverance, Hezekiah had prayed in the temple, thinking that God "saw" things uttered there. But he is being taught that God 'sees' sincere prayer regardless of the temple building. And after three days, Hezekiah was to go to the temple just to praise God for His grace.

2Ki 20:6 I will add to your days fifteen years-

The years 'added' to the king's life are expressed in the words of Ps. 61:6, where David felt that God would "prolong [s.w. "add to"] the king's life [s. w. "days"]". The clear allusion to David's words was perhaps to show that God considered Hezekiah to be the Davidic king who could have been the Messianic Son of David. But Hezekiah despised that and wasted those years in self-satisfaction. There is also a theme in Solomon's teaching that his son would have 'days added' (the same Hebrew phrase) to his life, because of his obedience to wisdom (Prov. 3:2; 9:11; 10:27). Again, the idea is that the adding of days to Hezekiah's life was confirming him as the seed of David.

We frequently read of a man's "days" as if there is a Divinely appointed number of says to each human life. But God can cut short a wicked man, so that he doesn't live out half his days (Ps. 55:23). With Hezekiah, God added to his days. Just as Dt. 27:20 promised that the good king would "prolong his days". Dt. 4:26 warns Israel that if they sinned, they would not prolong their days- as if the idea of prolonging was potentially there for them, but they might miss it. The very idea of years being "added" to Hezekiah suggests that an original plan was amended. So again we see God's openness and sensitivity to human prayer and behaviour, modifying plans accordingly.

There is a strong sense that God has determined a number of "days" for our mortal life (Ps. 23:6; 2 Sam. 7:12), and David like all of us wished to know how many those days were for him, in order that he might live an appropriately humble life in response to realizing his frailty (Ps. 39:4). But that predetermined number of days can be cut short (Ps. 102:4,23,24) or extended (1 Kings 3:14; Prov. 9:11). Hezekiah would be the parade example of this; his days were cut short (Is. 38:10), and then lengthened in response to prayer (2 Kings 20:6). God is open to dialogue, His timetable in our personal lives is flexible according to our prayers; and He is also responsive to human behaviour. Like Job we should perceive our life as "my days" (he uses this term multiple times), so that we might use each of them for Him.

I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for My own sake, and for My servant David's sake'-

Yahweh had earlier stated that He would not "deliver" (s.w.) Jerusalem from the Assyrian lion (Is. 5:29). But as in Hosea, God speaks in wrath but then His grace is such that He doesn't carry out what He threatens. He has emotion and speaks and acts in that fire of passion. That was normal in the Middle East; it is the western obsession with niceness and measured responses which make outburst behaviour and language appear inappropriate. Micah was contemporary with Isaiah, and he spoke of the 'deliverance' (s.w.) of the city from the Assyrians as being due to the appearance of a Messianic figure (Mic. 5:6). Here, the deliverance of Hezekiah personally from inevitable death is tied up with the deliverance of Jerusalem from inevitable judgment. He surely could have been one of the possible fulfillments of the Messianic figure, which makes his failure to rise up to it all the more tragic.

We learn here that although Hezekiah's sickness and the deliverance from the Assyrians happened at about the same, Hezekiah's healing from sickness happened before the deliverance of the "sick man" of Judah from the Assyrians. It was all by grace, and Hezekiah's healing was intended to give inspiration to others to believe that the Assyrian "death" would also be removed. We likewise encounter people whose experiences of God's grace are designed to inspire us in our issues.

2Ki 20:7 Isaiah said, Take a cake of figs. They took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered-

It's surely significant that Hezekiah is stated to be Judah's most faithful King, and yet he had a major lack of faith when he cut off the gold of the temple and gave it to the Assyrians; and he asks God to give him a sign that the promised healing was really going to happen. Indeed the whole nature of the dialogue here seems to indicate a man of somewhat faltering faith, needing every encouragement. And so although the healing was completely through God's power, perhaps this human mechanism of the cake of figs was used for Hezekiah's benefit; not because it had any efficacy of itself.

2Ki 20:8 Hezekiah said to Isaiah, What shall be the sign that Yahweh will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of Yahweh the third day?-

Hezekiah asks for a sign "to prove" that God's predicted cure of him was going to happen. And when given the option of the shadow of the sun jumping forward by ten degrees, he almost mocks that as too 'easy'. Yet this is the man with the accolade that no King believed in God like he did. Perhaps he reached his heights of faith through having these low moments. 'Putting God to the test' as it seems Hezekiah did is seen in Scripture as not fully believing in Him (Num. 14:20-24; Dt. 6:16; Is. 7:12; Lk. 11:33-36). Maybe God left Hezekiah to test him in the matter of the ambassadors from Babylon as a kind of response- 'You put me to the test, I'll put you to the test' (2 Chron. 32:31). Let's remember that in Bible characters like Hezekiah, we are reading only a few cameos of their lives. Most of his life history, his inner thoughts, are unknown to us. But God's summary statement was that he was the most believing King of Judah. So when we read cameos from his life that reflect a weakened faith, we surely have little option but to conclude that somehow in the Divine economy, low points of faith lead a person to higher and stronger ones. And we can all take a lot of comfort from that conclusion as we survey our own lives.

2Ki 20:9 Isaiah said, This shall be the sign to you from Yahweh, that Yahweh will do the thing that He has spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten steps, or go back ten steps?-

It seems that unlike his father Ahaz, Hezekiah had asked for this sign (:8). It is apparent that the experiences of believers are often suggestive of those of other believers. Insofar as we appreciate this, we will find strength to go the right way. Consider how Hezekiah was intended to see the similarities between himself and the earlier king Ahaz his father, and learn the lessons. They were both threatened by invasion and tempted to turn to human help (Is. 7:2; 37:1); Visited by Isaiah and told to not fear (Is. 7:4-9; 37:6,7). Ahaz was unfaithful by "the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the fuller's field" (Is. 7:3); and in just the same place Hezekiah's faith was tested and he learnt the lessons of Ahaz' failure (Is. 36:2). Both were given a sign by God and promised deliverance (Is. 7:14; 37:30). Ahaz refused to ask for a sign when offered one (Is. 7:11); whereas Hezekiah learnt, and asked for a sign (Is. 38:7,22). Thus his asking for a sign was not a sign of faithlessness but rather his

seeking to not be like Ahaz. "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform it" was spoken to both Ahaz (Is. 9:6) and Hezekiah (Is. 37:32).

2Ki 20:10 Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go forward ten steps. Nay, but let the shadow return backward ten steps-

Hezekiah's attitude in asking for a sign, and the way he responds to the offer for the shadow to go forward, all hardly indicates firm faith and trust. And yet he had earlier had such faith. The Hebrew word translated "light" can mean two things, and neither of them read very nicely for Hezekiah to say this. It can mean 'easy'; and to say it was easy for the light to go forward, involving the apparent manipulation of the sun and therefore the entire cosmos, was no "light" thing for God to do. The word can by extension mean "despised" or "cursed", and is often translated like that. Hezekiah is saying that for life to be 'fast forwarded', for him to be cut off in the midst of his days by the sun advancing forward, is easy for God. But it would be harder, surely, for God to make the sun as it were go backward, to create time, to reverse the time of his life by giving him more time. And despite that unpleasant, bitter attitude to God, God responds by giving him more life. *Hezekiah had faith, but so did Elijah; but faith without hope and love is nothing, as Paul says. And Elijah was removed from his ministry despite having so much faith.* The reversal of time spoke only of a delay; Hezekiah's death was not removed, but delayed by 15 years. The time shift would have reminded the perceptive of Joshua's long day, when again time was as it were tampered with- in order to enable a military victory. And a similar victory was given against Assyria at this time.

2Ki 20:11 Isaiah the prophet cried to Yahweh; and He brought the shadow ten steps backward, by which it had gone down-

"Gone down" is the word used by Hezekiah in speaking of how he feels he had "gone down" into the grave (:18). It is as if Hezekiah has died, the sun gone down those degrees, and then resurrected, brought up the same amount. He could have been a Messianic figure in a reestablished kingdom of God in Judah. The "return backward" of the sun is a phrase often used of the return of the exiles from Babylon to be part of that reestablished Kingdom. Hezekiah's revival / resurrection was to be seen as that of his people. How the miracle happened is not the essential question; but it could have been caused by the glory of Yahweh bursting forth so that the shadow was chased back.

Shadows can go back if a light brighter than the sun shines upon the object causing the shadow. This was observed during the meteorite incident in Chelyabinsk, Russia, which was brighter than the sun. It is Isaiah who speaks of God's glory in Zion appearing brighter than the sun (Is. 60:19; 62:21). The intention of this was to be that Gentiles came to this light and brightness (Is. 60:3). The Babylonian ambassadors came to enquire of the sign done in the land. So it seems that the bright light of Yahweh's glory appeared in the land and changed the shadow. This is far preferable to speculation that the earth, and the entire solar system, reversed its direction of travel. This was a foretaste to Judah, in their dark hour surrounded by their enemies, of what potentially could happen. The Kingdom of God could then have been established in some form. But Hezekiah let the ball drop. Instead of converting the Babylonians, he boasted to them. And brought judgment upon Zion. We reflect that if Hezekiah had asked to bring the shadow forward, then God had another option in view. We see here the interplay between human freewill and Divine openness.

Is. 30:26 again parallels Hezekiah's sickness with Jerusalem's woeful state [as does Is. 33:24 "the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity"]. The healing was to be associated with a bright light, and that is what made the shadows go back: "Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound".

On the dial of Ahaz-

"The stairway built by King Ahaz", Hezekiah's father, was part of his idolatrous sun worship which Hezekiah ought to have destroyed. It was a kind of small ziggurat. It was the Babylonians who had begun telling the time in this way; there is no mention of "hours" of the day in the Hebrew Bible until the time of Daniel. Here we have another hint at the incomplete spirituality and reformation of Hezekiah. The "songs of degrees" were written or rewritten to apply to this experience of the sun returning ten degrees or steps. There are 15 of them, matching the 15 extra years of life given to Hezekiah. It seems that 10 of the 15 songs of degrees were written by Hezekiah, perhaps connecting with how the shadow returned 10 degrees. We enquire however why the shadow returned ten degrees to symbolize how Hezekiah was being given fifteen years. One possibility is to consider that the Hebrew term for "fifteen" is two distinct words, the words for 'five' and 'ten'. God's openness is such that perhaps He is hinting that He would add five or ten or fifteen years.

It could also be that the sundial of idolatrous Ahaz had probably been brought from Assyria, as such things were common there and had pagan associations. Hezekiah had not destroyed his father's idol- another hint that his devotion to God was far less than ideal.

2Ki 20:12 At that time Berodach Baladan the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah; for he had heard that Hezekiah had been sick- Gentiles bringing presents to Zion is the language of the reestablished kingdom (Ps. 68:29). It could have come about then, when the surrounding nations brought presents to Hezekiah; but human pride and impenitence precluded it. See on Is. 18:7. And Hezekiah and his descendants adopted the ways of those nations rather than ruling over them and helping them toward Israel's God. 2 Chron. 32:31 describes these people as "the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon", but an unusual word is used there for "ambassadors"; it is the word usually translated "scorner" or "mocker". The idea is clearly that these men had an agenda and were not sincere. And Hezekiah was willfully duped by them, falling for their agenda and being blinded by their gifts, rather than seeking to share the ways of Yahweh with them. Hezekiah ought to have learnt not to trust in them, seeing that trust in the "princes and ambassadors" of Egypt had been proven so false just in recent history (Is. 30:4). God likewise brings situations into our lives whereby situations repeat- to test our faith and understanding.

The "letters" and 'ambassadors' recall the 'letter' from the ambassadors of Assyria in Is. 37:14. He didn't respond spiritually to this 'trial by prosperity'. Hence: "However concerning the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that He might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chron. 32:31). "The wonder" could refer to the miracle on the sundial, or to the miraculous revival of the land physically in line with Isaiah's prophecies.

2Ki 20:13 Hezekiah listened to them-

Is. 39:2 "Hezekiah was pleased with them". "Pleased" is s.w. "joy", "to rejoice". It is used of how Hezekiah previously had rejoiced in spiritual things (2 Chron. 29:36; 30:25). Now he rejoices in material things, and being respected by Gentiles rather than God. His "joy" or 'pleasure' ought to have been solely in Yahweh's salvation (Is. 25:9 s.w.). Hezekiah rejoiced "with them"; the Hebrew text is emphatic about this joy "with them". But the whole land had been charged not to rejoice at the fall of Assyria because it would revive in another form (s.w. Is. 14:29). Hezekiah is presented as totally ignorant of all this.

And showed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, the gold, the spices, the precious oil, the house of his armour and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah didn't show them-

LXX "the houses of his treasures". This sounds as if his kingdom had become like that of Egypt and Solomon, where treasure cities were associated with gross materialism and refusal of the things of God's Kingdom. The Babylonians had revolted against Assyria, and they wanted help from Judah to form a political alliance against Assyria. But Hezekiah was taken in by the presents and attention paid to him, responding in pride rather than telling them he had nearly died because of his alliances; he ought to have told Babylon to accept Yahweh as their God, and thus be saved from Assyria as Judah had been. Presumably he agreed to the alliance; hence the judgment given, that his people would go into captivity in Babylon. He had recently been so lacking in gold that he had stripped the temple's gold and given it to the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:16). This sudden abundance of wealth may well have come from nations such as Babylon, who were eager to have Judah onside with them as a now significant and respected ally against Assyria. The wealth of the Gentiles flowed in to the liberated Zion, but only as a very weak foreshadowing of the things of the Kingdom. Human "armour" ought not to have been gloried in; for the entire message of Zion's deliverance was that it was achieved by God's power and grace and not at all by human strength. But the same Hebrew word is used repeatedly of the temple vessels which Hezekiah had earlier sanctified for usage (2 Chron. 29:19,26,27; 30:21). But now he had removed them out of temple service in Yahweh's house into his *own* house. His focus was upon *his* kingdom ["dominion"], rather than the things of Yahweh's Kingdom. It was these very vessels which were to be carried to Babylon (s.w. 2 Chron. 36:7).

2Ki 20:14 Then Isaiah the prophet came to king Hezekiah and said to him, What did these men say? From where did they come to you? Hezekiah said, They have come from a far country, even from Babylon-

Surely these were rhetorical questions aimed at rebuking Hezekiah. His reply was made in pride (2 Chron. 32:25, although see note there). The prophetic intention had been that the Gentiles would come from far countries to Israel's God with offerings to Yahweh, but Hezekiah sees it in terms of them coming to *him* with presents and respect for *him*. He uses the very phrase of Dt. 28:49, of how a nation "from a far country" was to come and destroy Israel.

2Ki 20:15 He said, What have they seen in your house? Hezekiah answered, They have seen all that is in my house. There is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them-

As in :14, these are rhetorical questions; and rather like those given to Adam in Eden, they were intended to elicit repentance. LXX "yea, also the possessions in my

treasuries". Note the emphasis on "my... my.. I". The focus on his possessions and treasures suggests the Lord quarried the parable of the rich fool from Hezekiah, who thought he had wealth to enjoy for the remainder of his days; see on :17. "My house... your house" stands in contrast to the temple / house of Yahweh which ought to have been Hezekiah's focus. All that was in his house was to be taken to Babylon (:17). The intention was that the Gentiles "from a far country" (s.w. Is. 5:26) would come to Zion and "see" or "be shown" (s.w.) God's glory (Is. 49:7; 52:15; 60:5; 61:9; 62:2; 66:18 s.w.). But instead Hezekiah showed them his own glory. He precluded the fulfilment of these prophecies in terms of his kingdom being the reestablished kingdom of Yahweh.

2Ki 20:16 Isaiah said to Hezekiah, Hear the word of Yahweh-

"Hear" may be an appeal to repent and stop the prophesied outcome from happening in accordance with Jer. 18:8-10.

2Ki 20:17 'Behold, the days come, that all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have laid up in store to this day, shall be carried to Babylon. Nothing shall be left', says Yahweh-

This would have seemed impossible; for Babylon was one of many apparently irrelevant small powers whom both Sargon and Sennacherib had overrun, destroyed her towns, and enforced direct Assyrian rule. That in 160 years' time Babylon would be the dominant power and would take Judah captive... appeared laughable. But God had just demonstrated that He could destroy the Assyrian army in a moment; and indeed it happened (2 Kings 24:13). 'Storing up' is surely alluded to by the Lord in the parable of the rich fool; he stored up riches only to lose them in a moment of Divine judgment, and was not rich toward God. See on :15.

2Ki 20:18 'Of your sons who shall issue from you, whom you shall father, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon'-

There is a theme in Isaiah of conceiving, suffering pain in labour- but bringing forth in vain (Is. 26:18; 33:11; 59:4). And so did Hezekiah, in that he and his children turned away from true faith (Is. 39:7). In Isaiah's immediate context, the application would have been to the sense that the remnant had come to the birth but there was not strength to bring forth (Is. 37:3); apart from a few individuals, there was no bringing forth of a significant repentant remnant who would be the basis for the restored Kingdom. It felt like they were still under the curse of bringing forth in pain but in vain. The pain in vain at the time of the Assyrian invasion led to Micah offering a reworked version of all this; they were to be in pain at the hands of the Babylonians, but would bring forth in Babylon in that they would there repent, and the spiritually reborn remnant would emerge and their captors therefore judged (Mic. 4:10). But that possibility also didn't work out. And so this idea of bringing forth but not in vain, but rather finding meaning in the resurrection of Messiah and all in Him, came to be reapplied to the birth of the Lord Jesus from the grave in resurrection; and it would characterize the establishment of the Kingdom age in Zion (Is. 65:24). Hezekiah's immediate sons "who will issue from you, whom you shall father" weren't permanently taken to Babylon. Manasseh was taken there but repented and returned to Judah (2 Chron. 33:11-13); but it was in Dan. 1:3 that "the king's seed" were all deported there permanently. Again we have an example of a prophecy being delayed and suspended in fulfilment. This could have been because of the prayer and

repentance of a minority, not least Manasseh; the spirituality of Josiah; or God's constant pity towards His people.

2Ki 20:19 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, The word of Yahweh which you have spoken is good. He said moreover, Isn't it so, if peace and truth shall be in my days?-

Sadly despite the warning from the example of Shebna (see on Is. 22:15) and the specific command not to just live for today and resign ourselves to an eternal death (Is. 22:13), Hezekiah at the end of his life gave in to just this same mentality. The sense is as GNB "King Hezekiah understood this to mean that there would be peace and security during his lifetime, so he replied, "The message you have given me from the LORD is good". "Peace and truth" is the language of the restored kingdom of God (Jer. 33:6); and it is the same term used by Hezekiah when he failed to grasp the potential of the Kingdom being reestablished in his times; he was content with peace and truth in his times alone (see on Is. 38:18,20). Likewise the Jews of Esther's time were content with "peace and truth" in their times, rather than seeing that what had happened was to lead them towards the eternal peace and truth with God of His Kingdom and not their own (see on Esther 8:13-16; 9:30). And this is the abiding temptation for all believers; to be satisfied with some degree of "peace and truth" emotionally and intellectually in their lives now, but resign the far greater realities of the Kingdom to come when "peace and truth" shall be in eternal reality.

2Ki 20:20 Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and all his might-

This is the common rubric found in the histories of the kings (1 Kings 15:23; 16:5,27; 22:45; 2 Kings 10:34; 13:8,12; 14:15,28; 20:20). "His might that he showed" uses a word for "might" which has the sense of victory / achievement. But the contrast is marked with the way that David so often uses this word for "might / victory / achievement" in the context of *God's* "might"; notably in 1 Chron. 29:11, which the Lord Jesus places in our mouths as part of His model prayer: "Yours is the power [s.w. "might"], and the glory and the majesty". The kings about whom the phrase is used were those who trusted in their own works. It therefore reads as a rather pathetic memorial; that this man's might / achievement was noted down. But the unspoken further comment is elicited in our own minds, if we are in tune with the spirit of David: "But the only real achievement is the Lord's and not man's". All human victory and achievement must be seen in this context. The same word is used in Jer. 9:23,24: "Don't let the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might [s.w.]... but let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth". The glorification of human "might" is often condemned. "Their might [s.w.] is not right" (Jer. 23:10; also s.w. Jer. 51:30; Ez. 32:29; Mic. 7:16 and often).

And how he made the pool and the conduit and brought water into the city, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-

Hezekiah's doing this is cited in Is. 22:9 in a negative light, as if done without faith and in seeking to defend Jerusalem in his own strength rather than God's. It was done in *his* might- not Yahweh's.

2Ki 20:21 Hezekiah slept with his fathers; and Manasseh his son reigned in his place-

Typically there is some Divine commentary upon a king when he dies. When Hezekiah began reigning, he receives a very positive accolade from God. But the silence at the end is perhaps because he messed up and failed to realize the great

potential there was for him. I suggested earlier that the comment that he was faithful with God may be ultimately true, although he undoubtedly ended his life on a spiritual low. And he raised one of Judah's most wicked kings during his last 15 years. His complaint that he was dying without an heir is therefore to be contrasted with how things actually worked out.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 21

2Ki 21:1 Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign; and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hephzibah-

"Causing to forget" is a strange name for a child unless the father [like Joseph] had a previous life he wanted to forget. Manasseh was born three years into Hezekiah's final 15 years of life in which he turned away from God. So I suggest that his name reflects Hezekiah's desire to 'forget all that God stuff' and get on with 'enjoying' his last 15 years without God. And this was naturally reflected in the way he raised a son who was one of Israel's most evil rulers.

2Ki 21:2 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, after the abominations of the nations whom Yahweh cast out before the children of Israel-

We may wonder why God let such an evil man live and reign for 55 years (:1), the longest reigning of any king. Surely if he had been slain for his wickedness, as other men were, then he would have led fewer people astray? I suggest the answer is that God worked for decades towards this evil man's repentance- and it paid off. He did repent in the end. And we can look forward to eternity together with him. We see in this the huge meaning and value God places upon the individual person, and how He will not give up searching for the lost until He finds them. Manasseh would be the parade example of that.

See on :15. Jonah recognized "I am cast out of Your sight" (Jonah 2:4), the very language of condemnation used at this time (1 Kings 9:7; 2 Kings 17:20; 21:2; 23:27; Jer. 7:15).

2Ki 21:3 For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made an Asherah, as did Ahab king of Israel, and worshiped all the host of the sky, and served them-

This revival of idolatry would not have been possible unless the people generally were eager and willing for it. I suggested previously that Hezekiah's reforms were largely on the cusp of his becoming king. They were partly a psychological reaction against the misery of Ahaz's reign, and the reforms of 2 Chron. 31 were often a result of group psychology rather than personal reformation of the heart. They were all too sudden and spontaneous, at the same moment, to have been the outcome of all the concerned individuals having the same heart response. There was a group psychology there, a going with the crowd. And so it is unsurprising that they all turned away relatively soon afterwards.

2Ki 21:4 He built altars in the house of Yahweh, of which Yahweh said, I will put My name in Jerusalem-

The Name is called upon us; and therefore and thereby we are Yahweh's servants, dominated by His principles and character. Because the Name was called upon the temple, therefore it was simply impossible that those who realized this could worship idols in it (2 Kings 21:4,7); whatever has God's Name called upon it, whatever bears

His image, must be devoted to Him alone. The Lord pointed out that this applies to our very bodies, which being in God's image should be given over to Him.

This was precisely the behaviour of his grandfather Ahaz. I suggest that this was only done by persuading themselves that these altars were in fact a form of Yahweh worship. For there is never any specific statement that Judah formally renounced Yahweh. And this continues to be the abiding weakness of God's people; to justify wrongdoing by claiming it is part of worshipping God. Such as justifying luxury homes and goods in the name of needing them to serve God with.

2Ki 21:5 He built altars for all the host of the sky in the two courts of the house of Yahweh-

These were the court of the priests, and the court of the common people (2 Chron. 4:9). The priesthood were surely complicit in this. For when Uzziah had tried to offer incense himself, 80 faithful priests resisted him. But there is no record of any such resistance to Manasseh. The priests in Hezekiah's time had been reticent to devote themselves solely to Yahweh (1 Chron. 29:34). I suggested that this was because they were accustomed to being priests both of Yahweh and of the pagan gods. This means that they took a cut from all the offerings to all the gods.

2Ki 21:6 He made his son to pass through the fire, and practised sorcery, used enchantments and dealt with those who had familiar spirits and with wizards-

This would have meant that his surviving children would have hated him for slaying their siblings; although passing through the fire may have been a dedication ceremony rather than actually burning them to death. 2 Kings 21:6 has "his son", 2 Chron. 33:6 has "his children". As he had more than one son, we are to infer surely that this focus upon "his son" meant that one of his sons in particular passed through the fire, and that could imply that he sacrificed his son [maybe his firstborn]. Israel should have removed from amongst them a man who did this (Dt. 18:10), and the fact they didn't suggests they therefore passively supported him in his apostasy.

The valley of Hinnom, Ge Hinnom, was to later be known as Gehenna, and became a symbol used by the Lord for complete destruction (Mt. 5:22). As they burnt their children there, to destruction, so sinners would be burnt to destruction in that same place. Joachim Jeremias explains how the literal valley of Gehenna came to be misinterpreted as a symbol of a 'hell' that is supposed to be a place of fire:

"[*Gehenna*]...since ancient times has been the name of the valley west and south of Jerusalem... from the woes pronounced by the prophets on the valley (Jer. 7:32 = 19:6; cf. Is. 31:9; 66:24) because sacrifices to Moloch took place there (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6), there developed in the second century BC the idea that the valley of Hinnom would be the place of a fiery hell (Eth. Enoch 26; 90.26)... it is distinguished from *sheol*" (*New Testament Theology*, London: SCM, 1972 p. 129). AV "a familiar spirit" is misleading, and many of the modern versions give something like "witch" or [ESV, GNB] "a medium". LXX has "a divining spirit". It doesn't mean she did actually have any such spirit; but that she was considered as having this. Such people were thought to be able to be possessed by the spirit of dead people, and to therefore speak in their name. But the Bible clearly teaches that the "spirit returns to God" (Ps. 146:4; Ecc. 12:7), and that death is unconsciousness. The spirit of dead persons don't enter other people. I would go so far as to say that the record of the witch at Endor, who supposedly had a "familiar spirit", is deconstructing this belief. For Samuel himself appears, and speaks directly to Saul, and not through the "medium". The woman therefore screamed in shock when Samuel actually appeared. He was resurrected,

briefly, in order to give God's final message to Saul. The people claiming to have "familiar spirits" lay on the ground and mumbled hard to understand words in a voice seeking to imitate the dead person (Is. 29:4) but Samuel appeared in person and spoke clearly to Saul, directly. We also note that Samuel appeared to Saul standing upright, because Saul bowed before him: "Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and showed respect" (1 Sam. 28:14). This was quite different to how the mediums lay on the ground and mumbled words into the dust.

He worked much evil in the sight of Yahweh, to provoke Him to anger- God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

2Ki 21:7 He set the engraved image of Asherah that he had made, in the house of which Yahweh said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, will I put My name forever- Manasseh is criticized for placing an idol in the very place where God's Name of Yahweh was meant to dwell. He replaced the invisible things- the more abstract things of the characteristics of God which the Name speaks of- by something material and visible. We make the same mistake when we turn away from true spirituality and become lost in physical works. If Judah had not forgotten the Name [and this must refer to their lack of appreciation of it rather than forgetting the letters JHVH], then they wouldn't have served Baal and other gods (Jer. 23:27). It is this particular idol which it seems was returned to the temple just prior to the destruction of the temple (Ez. 8:3), despite Manasseh himself removing it on his repentance.

2Ki 21:8 neither will I cause the feet of Israel to wander any more out of the land which I gave their fathers, if only they will observe to do according to all that I have commanded them, and according to all the law that My servant Moses commanded them-

This is apparently (:7) a quotation from what God said to David and Solomon. But it appears to be an adaptation about the promises to the singular seed, that he must continue in obedience if the promises were to be fulfilled through him. But just as Abraham's seed is both the Lord Jesus and all those in Him, the true Israel of God, so the promises about David's seed also have a collective dimension.

2Ki 21:9 But they didn't listen: and Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations did whom Yahweh destroyed before the children of Israel-

God's tolerance of Judah in His land was therefore by grace, and in hope of their repentance. Their doing "more evil" than the Gentiles could refer to the fact that as in covenant relationship with God, they were the more responsible for their sins. Or the idea may be that most Gentiles were faithful to their set of gods, only changing them if that was enforced upon them by the military dominance of a neighbour. But Judah went running madly to every god they could, described by Hosea under the figure of sexual addiction.

2Ki 21:10 Yahweh spoke by His servants the prophets saying-

2 Chron. 33:10 Yahweh spoke to Manasseh, and to his people; but they gave no

heed". "They gave no heed", or 'did not listen', is a phrase used in the later prophets as they appeal to the exiles (Neh. 9:34; Zech. 1:4). The sins of Manasseh in 'not listening' to God's word are cited as the main reason for the exile. We note that refusing to listen to God's word is the essence of all the sins of idolatry etc. It is the spurning of relationship with God which appears to hurt Him even more than the list of sins which Manasseh was also guilty of.

2Ki 21:11 Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations, and has done wickedly above all that the Amorites did who were before him, and has made Judah also to sin with his idols-

Making others to sin is a major dimension of human sin, although personal sin is still a significant issue here in the condemnation of Manasseh. The mention of the Amorites is because they were cast out of the land once they had sinned to a certain point, and Israel were treated in the same way (Gen. 15:16).

2Ki 21:12 therefore thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, 'Behold, I bring such evil on Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears shall tingle-

God is repeatedly presented as the ultimate source of "evil". There is no radical evil in the cosmos outside of His control. There is no cosmic Satan figure; all "evil" is under His control, and performed by His Angelic "armies" manifested through human armies used by them, as the Babylonians were at this time.

2Ki 21:13 I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab-

They would be judged like Israel, because they had sinned in fact worse than Israel, according to Ezekiel's parable of the two adulterous sisters.

And I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down-

The idea is that not one drop would be left. And yet by grace many were left in Judah, and there was even some attempt at worship at the temple site, according to Jeremiah. "Turning it upside down" is 'to turn it upon its face', as if never to be used again. "Wipe" is s.w. for utter destruction (Gen. 7:4; Ex. 32:33; Num. 5:23). We could render it as 'wiping out'. Yet this was spoken in wrath, and in wrath God remembered mercy. For a set time to remember Zion was yet to come, and He would restore Jerusalem. It is this kind of apparent contradiction within God which Hosea speaks of, as His "repentings" being "kindled together" (Hos. 11:8). See on :14.

2Ki 21:14 I will cast off the remainder of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies. They will become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies-

But Israel were not cast off eternally. See on :13, where we can understand the apparent contradiction as the wrath of love, a threat and feeling which was not carried out. Or we can argue that Israel's not being cast off was a result of a reinterpretation and redefinition of God's people. Paul's positive approach to Israel's conversion is reflected in his whole reasoning in Romans 11, his classic statement about preaching to Israel. He begins by saying that God has not cast off His people Israel totally, because some, e.g. himself, have turned to Christ. So, seeing that God will not cast off His people Israel in the ultimate sense, it perhaps follows that in every generation some of them will come to Christ as Paul did (Rom. 11:1,2). In some sense, God has cast off His people (2 Kings 21:14 RV; Zech. 10:6); and yet, because a minority of them will always accept Christ, it is not true that God has cast off His people in a total sense (Rom. 11:1 RV). It was only because of this remnant that Israel have not

become like Sodom (Rom. 9:29)- even though Old Testament passages such as Ezekiel 16 clearly liken Jerusalem to Sodom. Yet they are not as Sodom ultimately, for the sake of the remnant who will believe.

The Lord Jesus was well aware of the connection between God's refusal to answer prayer and His recognition of sin in the person praying (2 Sam. 22:42 = Ps. 2:2-5). It is emphasized time and again that God will not forsake / cast off those who love Him (e.g. Dt. 4:31; 31:6; 1 Sam. 12:22; 1 Kings 6:13; Ps. 94:14; Is. 41:17; 42:16). Every one of these passages must have been well known to our Lord, the word made flesh. He knew that God forsaking Israel was a punishment for their sin (Jud. 6:13; 2 Kings 21:14; Is. 2:6; Jer. 23:33). God would forsake Israel only if they forsook Him (Dt. 31:16,17; 2 Chron. 15:2). We can therefore conclude that His desperate "Why have You forsaken me?" was because He was so intensely identified with our sins that in the crisis of the cross, He indeed felt forsaken because of sin. He did not sin, but felt like a sinner; He thereby knows how sinners feel.

2Ki 21:15 because they have done that which is evil in My sight, and have provoked Me to anger, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt even to this day'- God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions (see on :13), and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

2Ki 21:16 Moreover Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another; besides his sin with which he made Judah to sin, in doing that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh- Josephus claims many prophets were slain at this time. Jewish tradition has it that Isaiah was slain by being "sawn asunder", and that apparently is alluded to in Heb. 11:37.

2Ki 21:17 Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh and all that he did, and his sin that he sinned, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?- We wonder why Kings says nothing of Manasseh's repentance, which is recorded in detail in Chronicles and was one of the most amazing examples of human repentance (2 Chron. 33:12-19). Perhaps it is because the record wishes to provide a relatively uninterrupted record of the sins of God's people. For the Babylonian destruction was not because of the sins of the kings so much as for those of the people.

2Ki 21:18 Manasseh slept with his fathers, and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza; and Amon his son reigned in his place- The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2Ki 21:19 Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign; and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Meshullemeth the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah-

He had been raised in the spirit of his father's apostacy, and was apparently unimpressed by Manasseh's amazing repentance.

2Ki 21:20 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, as Manasseh his father did-

2 Chron. 33:22 adds: "He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, as did Manasseh his father; and Amon sacrificed to all the engraved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them". Manasseh had removed the images, but not apparently destroyed them. The history of the kings abounds with such references to idolatry being reformed, and then so quickly revived. The speed of its revival reflects the fact that the heart of the people generally was with the idols. And we must assess our own episodes of apparent repentance in this light. Manasseh had repaired the temple (2 Chron. 33:16), but by Josiah's time it needed repairing again; so it could be that Amon also desecrated and damaged the temple yet further.

2Ki 21:21 He walked in all the way that his father walked in, and served the idols that his father served, and worshipped them-

See on :20. He revived the idols his father had destroyed on his repentance.

2Ki 21:22 and he forsook Yahweh the God of his fathers-

We get the impression Amon was never "with" Yahweh, so his forsaking Yahweh may refer to how there is a conscience toward God in every man, however latent, but he had forsaken this.

And didn't walk in the way of Yahweh-

Think through the implications of Lk. 3:4, where we read that John's preaching was in order to make [s.w. 'to bring forth fruit'] His [the Lord's] paths straight- but the ways of the Lord are "right" [s.w. "straight"] anyway (Acts 13:10). So how could John's preaching make the Lord's ways straight / right, when they already are? God is so associated with His people that their straightness or crookedness reflects upon Him; for they are His witnesses in this world. His ways are their ways. This is the N.T. equivalent of the O.T. concept of keeping / walking in the way of the Lord (Gen. 18:19; 2 Kings 21:22). Perhaps this is the thought behind the exhortation of Heb. 12:13 to make straight paths for our own feet. We are to bring our ways into harmony with the Lord's ways; for He is to be us, His ways our ways.

2Ki 21:23 The servants of Amon conspired against him and put the king to death in his own house-

There seems a special stigma and shame attached to being murdered in ones' own home, rather than on a battlefield or dying from old age.

2Ki 21:24 But the people of the land killed all those who had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his place-

The final part of Judah's history, like that of Israel's, involves division between brethren, conspiracy and politics. Those who indulge in such things are really living out their own condemnation, as well as sounding the death toll for their own communities of God's people (see on Gal. 5:15).

2Ki 21:25 Now the rest of the acts of Amon which he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-

This may not necessarily be the books of Chronicles which we have in our Bibles.

2Ki 21:26 He was buried in his tomb in the garden of Uzza; and Josiah his son reigned in his place-

Josiah means 'foundation of Yah'. It's unlikely this was the name Amon gave him, although a repentant Manasseh may have influenced it. However, at no point did even kings like Amon and Manasseh formally deny Yahweh. They worshipped Him, so they thought, through worshipping idols. So it is not impossible that indeed this was Josiah's birth name. And from that we can take yet another warning, to serve Yahweh with our whole hearts; and not assume that our service of the flesh is serving Him.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 22

2Ki 22:1 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath-

Josiah means 'foundation of Yah'. It's unlikely this was the name Amon gave him, although a repentant Manasseh may have influenced it. However, at no point did even kings like Amon and Manasseh formally deny Yahweh. They worshipped Him, so they thought, through worshipping idols. So it is not impossible that indeed this was Josiah's birth name. And from that we can take yet another warning, to serve Yahweh with our whole hearts; and not assume that our service of the flesh is serving Him.

2Ki 22:2 He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, and walked in all the way of David his father, and didn't turn aside to the right hand or to the left-

There is a huge imputation of righteousness to human beings, reflected right through Scripture. God sought them, the essence of their hearts, and was prepared to overlook much ignorance and misunderstanding along the way. Consider how good king Josiah is described as always doing what was right before God, not turning aside to the right nor left- even though it was not until the 18th year of his reign that he even discovered parts of God's law, which he had been ignorant of until then, because the scroll containing them had been temporarily lost (2 Kings 22:2,11). Josiah is described as having done "that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh"- even though he was ignorant of part of God's word and law (2 Kings 22:2,10-13), not knowing *all* "that is enjoined us to do" (2 Kings 22:13 RVmg.), and not knowing all that was in "the book of the covenant" (2 Kings 23:2). Full knowledge, even of some quite important things, didn't stop Josiah from being credited with doing what was right before God and not 'turning aside to the right hand or to the left'. He was judged according to how well he responded to that which he *did* know. And this may be a helpful window for us into how we should feel towards those who sincerely seek to follow the Lord and yet with imperfect knowledge.

2Ki 22:3 It happened in the eighteenth year of king Josiah that the king sent Shaphan, the son of Azaliah the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of Yahweh, saying- We wonder if Meshullam was a relative of Meshullemeth, the female form of Meshullam, who was Josiah's grandmother (2 Kings 21:19). Shaphan was the father of Ahikam (:12) and the Gemariah of Jer. 36:10-12) and the grandfather of Gedaliah of Jer. 39:14; 40:5,9,11. Shaphan would have been elderly, as 35 years later his grandson Gedaliah was set up as governor of Judah by the Babylonians.

2Ki 22:4 Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may sum the money which is brought into the house of Yahweh, which the keepers of the threshold have gathered of the people-

Hilkiah is well attested as the one who found the lost book of the law (2 Kings 22:8), helped in Josiah's reforms (2 Kings 22:14-20) and arranged the great Passover observance of 2 Chron. 35:1-19. But Hilkiah did all this despite being the son of a High Priest called Shallum (1 Chron. 6:12,13), whose name can mean 'bribe' (s.w. Mic. 7:3 about the corruption of the priesthood). Perhaps this was what he was known for. But his son / descendant rose above that bad background, as we can. The "scribe" or historian was a senior advisor in the Hebrew court (2 Sam. 8:17; 2 Kings 18:18,37; 2 Chron. 34:8) because of the huge value attached to history in the Hebrew mind, and as reflected in the Bible being largely history. Advice on how to act was to be based upon historical, or as we would now say, "Biblical", precedent.

2Ki 22:5 Let them deliver it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of Yahweh; and let them give it to the workmen who are in the house of Yahweh, to repair the breaches of the house-

The half shekel temple tax was to be paid when a census was taken, and it seems this is what he did. 2 Chron. 34:9 notes the generosity of the people even in the northern tribes, as well as the Israelites living in Judah ["the remnant of Israel"].

2Ki 22:6 to the carpenters, to the builders and to the masons, and for buying timber and cut stone to repair the house-

2 Chron. 34:10 says this was because "the kings of Judah had destroyed" the temple. The destruction of the temple by these kings may not have been because they totally rejected Yahweh. The essence of their apostasy, as ours, was to use the things of Yahweh for idolatry, to mix paganism and the way of the flesh with Yahweh worship. So it is likely that when we read of men like Manasseh building other temples or shrines to idols in the vicinity of the temple, what happened was that they took the materials from the temple structure and used them for the idol temples. For materials like cut stone and timber were expensive and hard to source; Solomon had spent huge effort in bringing them from far away to build Yahweh's temple.

2Ki 22:7 However there was no accounting made with them of the money that was delivered into their hand; for they dealt faithfully-

This is exactly the same as happened in 2 Kings 12:15. This may be in implied contrast to the priests and Levites who had not done the work at that time, perhaps because of embezzlement of the funds. The money was delivered to these overseers directly from the one who had received and counted in, and not via the priesthood.

2Ki 22:8 Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of Yahweh. Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan, and he read it-

All spiritual endeavour leads to the Lord inviting us deeper into that endeavour; thus it was as Barnabas and Paul went about their ministering to the Lord that they were invited to go on a missionary journey (Acts 13:2). Likewise it was as the Levites were in process of collecting funds for repairing the temple, that they found the book of the law- perhaps because they needed more space in which to store the donations, and whilst making space they found the scroll. In the process of being a deacon, faith is

developed (1 Tim. 3:13). The very process of service and obedience leads to greater faith in practice.

2Ki 22:9 Shaphan the scribe came to the king, and brought the king word again and said, Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of Yahweh-

There is an apparent parallel between money being found in the temple, and the book of the law being found (2 Kings 22:8,9). The idea is that as David often says in Ps. 119, Yahweh's law was the greatest treasure. So much so that the Chronicles record focuses so much on the book of the law being found that no mention is made of the money also found along with it. Even in Kings, the discovery of the money is only mentioned in passing, as if the greatest discovery was not wealth, but God's law. And that is an abiding principle.

2Ki 22:10 Shaphan the scribe told the king saying, Hilkiah the priest has delivered a book to me. Shaphan read it before the king-

This book was probably not the entire Pentateuch, but the curses for disobedience in Dt. 28, for Josiah's response is appropriate to someone who had just heard them read. But see on :5. Jer. 15:16 refers to this: "Your words were found, and I did eat them... [they] were to me the joy and the delight of my heart: for I am called by Your name, Yahweh". Jeremiah rejoiced in those words of judgment. And as a result, "I am called by Your name"- the language of a woman marrying and taking her husband's name (Is. 4:1). The word of God was his "joy [and] delight"- two words used four times elsewhere in Jeremiah, and always in the context of the joy of a wedding (Jer. 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; 33:11). Jeremiah saw his prophetic task as actually a marriage to God, an inbreathing of His word and being, to the point that he could say that he personally was "full of the wrath / passion of God" (Jer. 6:11). Jeremiah's lament that the people had no joy or delight in God's word (Jer. 6:10) is the basis for this comment that when *he* found God's words, they were his joy.

What was read were the curses for disobedience. The harder side of the Father and the Lord Jesus should actually serve as an attraction to the serious believer. Peter knew that if it really was the Lord Jesus out there on the water, then He would bid him walk on the water to Him. Peter knew his Lord, and the sort of things He would ask men to do- the very hardest things for them in their situation. He knew how Jesus could be a demanding Lord. Jeremiah "knew that this was the word of the Lord" when he was asked to do something so humanly senseless- to buy property when he was in prison, when the land was clearly about to be overrun by the Babylonians (Jer. 31:8). When Jeremiah had earlier found the curses for disobedience recorded in the book of the Law which had been lost, He 'ate them', those words of cursings were "the joy and rejoicing of my heart" - they so motivated him (Jer. 15:16 = 2 Chron. 34:18-21). When Ananias and Sapphira were slain by the Lord, fear came upon "as many as heard these things" .

2Ki 22:11 It happened, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he tore his clothes-

Although Josiah was personally innocent, he felt so passionately for God's people. We too need to have hearts that bleed for others, and not be solely concerned with our own standing before God. For our standing before Him involves our attitudes to

others and our concern for their salvation, if we truly seek God's glory and not our own. See on :2.

2Ki 22:12 The king commanded Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the king's servant saying-

We note Josiah didn't go to her himself. For the significance of this, see on :15.

2Ki 22:13 Go inquire of Yahweh for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found; for great is the wrath of Yahweh that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that which is written concerning us-

"Poured out" in Chronicles is "kindled" in 2 Kings; the sense was that he realized the wrath of God was kindled and was literally about to burn against them, and so repentance must be immediate with no time to lose.

2Ki 22:14 So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the second quarter); and they talked with her-

"The second quarter" may refer to a newer area of Jerusalem (Zeph. 1:10 RV), or as AV "the college", implying as a prophetess she had a kind of Bible study centre.

"Keeper of the wardrobe" may refer to the priestly garments (cp. 2 Kings 10:22).

2Ki 22:15 She said to them, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: 'Tell the man who sent you to Me-

We see here how Josiah had no direct vision from God. He was dealing all the time through the prophetic word relayed to him, and his obedience to it is the more commendable. Because it reflects his humility to God's revealed word, in a way more impressive than if these words had come directly to him. We are in his position, and should learn from him.

2Ki 22:16 Thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will bring evil on this place and on its inhabitants, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read-

2 Chron. 34:24 adds: "even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah". The reference to curses suggests that the scrolls discovered contained at least Dt. 28 and Dt. 27:15-26.

2Ki 22:17 Because they have forsaken Me, and have burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore My wrath shall be kindled against this place, and it shall not be quenched-

God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

Idolatrous Israel never *consciously* tried to provoke Yahweh to anger with their apostasy; the words of the prophets must have seemed to them a gross exaggeration. But this was really how God saw it (2 Chron. 34:25).

Although "it shall not be quenched", Josiah knew God well enough to try to quench it, by getting all His people to make a from the heart commitment to Him. Even though God had told Josiah that His wrath with His people would not be quenched, it would seem that there was still some possibility of "remedy", had the people accepted God's word in their hearts (2 Chron. 36:16). We see here His absolute eagerness for their repentance, and unwillingness that any of His people should have to perish. And that is the same God with whom we have to do.

2Ki 22:18 But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of Yahweh, thus you shall tell him, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: Concerning the words which you have heard-

See on :15 for the significance of Josiah not receiving these words directly.

2Ki 22:19 because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before Yahweh when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and have torn your clothes, and wept before Me; I also have heard you, says Yahweh-

We see here the mutuality between God and man; He hears the man who hears Him. We see the root of humility as being in having a heart / mind sensitive to Him. But "tender heart" is the same phrase used for being "faint hearted" in time of battle (Dt. 20:3; Is. 7:4; Jer. 51:46). It was as if Josiah saw the judgment of God coming, as if it had come, and was faint hearted before the soldiers he saw coming against him. And yet even such a tender heart can be given by God (s.w. Job 23:16), for He can also give attitudes of mind by His sovereign operation .

Josiah's zealous reforms started with reading "the book of the covenant" (2 Kings 23:2), probably the list of curses which were to come for disobedience (2 Kings 22:19 = Lev. 26:31,32). In this sense Paul used the terror of possible condemnation to persuade men (2 Cor. 5:11). Interestingly, the very words which Jeremiah was tempted not to speak forth, so stern was their message of judgment to come, were what had the power to lead Israel to repentance (Jer. 26:2,3).

2Ki 22:20 Therefore behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, neither shall your eyes see all the evil which I will bring on this place'. They brought back this message to the king-

There are times when God takes away the righteous from the evil of this life (Is. 57:1- probably alluding to what God did to Joash, 2 Kings 22:20 cp. 23:29). There are other Biblical instances where the wicked have long life and prosperity in this world. This is because the Bible presents the ultimate judgment and reward of human life and faith as being at the last day, and not right now.

This is a similar situation to the promise to Hezekiah and Ahab (1 Kings 21:29). It is as if God judged the entire weight of sin to be such that even Josiah's reformation could only delay and not remove the judgment for it. However, if the people had all repented in their hearts, rather than passively allowing a reformer like Josiah to remove the external evidence of idolatry, then surely the outcome could have been different. See on :31.

The reality was that Josiah died in battle, not in peace (2 Chron. 35:22-24). Yet he had been promised to be gathered to his grave in peace (2 Chron. 34:28). Here we have an example of God making a statement about the future which is conditional upon human behaviour. Thus He stated that Nineveh would be destroyed in 40 days; but it wasn't, because they repented. There is a gap between the pronouncement and

its fulfilment, and in that gap our behaviour can change the outcome. We too must waste so many potential futures.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 23

2Ki 23:1 The king sent, and they gathered to him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem-

Josiah's idea was to bring about a reformation of the ordinary people, as in :2 we read of the people small and great being gathered. So presumably his gathering of the leaders was in order for them to bring their people with them.

2Ki 23:2 The king went up to the house of Yahweh, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people, both small and great. He read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of Yahweh-

See on 2 Kings 22:2. Josiah's zealous reforms started with reading "the book of the covenant" (2 Kings 23:2), probably the list of curses which were to come for disobedience (2 Kings 22:19 = Lev. 26:31,32). In this sense Paul used the terror of possible condemnation to persuade men (2 Cor. 5:11). Interestingly, the very words which Jeremiah was tempted not to speak forth, so stern was their message of judgment to come, were what had the power to lead Israel to repentance (Jer. 26:2,3).

2 Kings has "prophets" for Chronicles "Levites". There were clearly prophets actively operating at this time. As noted on :3, Josiah saw the only way to change the threatened judgments as getting the ordinary people to repent in their hearts. Unlike Hezekiah, he was not satisfied with simply avoiding seeing judgment come in his days. Indeed he learned from Hezekiah's mistake in that matter. See on 2 Chron. 35:7.

2Ki 23:3 The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before Yahweh, to walk after Yahweh-

Maybe a reference to Dt. 10:12,13, which perhaps was in this scroll.

And to keep His commandments, His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to confirm the words of this covenant that were written in this book; and all the people stood to the covenant-

Josiah recognizes that Judah have broken covenant with God and must be judged appropriately. God was unwilling to ultimately avert the judgment upon the people because of their state of heart. And yet Josiah throws himself into trying to persuade the people to totally give themselves to covenant relationship. He realized that in the gap between the pronouncement of judgment, and it being carried out, there was the possibility of repentance and the judgment not being performed. His mentor Jeremiah had made this point in Jer. 18, and was also appealing to the people to change their hearts so that the threatened judgment wouldn't happen. This is how open God's purpose is, and Josiah and Jeremiah perceived that.

Josiah's actions here are one of a number of Old Testament examples of preaching the word after becoming aware of the depth of one's own sins. Consider Jonah preaching the second time, with the marks in his body after three days in the whale, admitting his rebellion against Yahweh, pleading with them to respond to His word. Reflect how when his head was wrapped around with seaweed, at the bottom of the sea at the absolute end of mortal life, he made a vow to God, which he then fulfilled, presumably in going back to preach to Nineveh (Jonah 2:9). His response to

having confessed his sins and daring to believe in God's forgiveness, turning again towards His temple even from underwater, was to resolve to preach to others if he was spared his life. And this he did, although as with so many of us, the pureness of his initial evangelical zeal soon flaked. Or consider Manasseh, 2 Chron. 33:16; Jehoshaphat, 2 Chron. 19:3 cp. 18:31; 19:2; Josiah, 2 Chron. 34:29,32; Nebuchadnezzar, Dan. 3:29; 4:2...

We note the specific reference in 2 Chronicles 34:32 to the people of Jerusalem. It seems that Josiah tried to gather together literally all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, all "found" there. And yet Jerusalem particularly was to suffer in the judgments to come, and Jeremiah's prophecies at this time tend to single out Jerusalem for particular judgment for the unspirituality of the population. So again we perceive that this was all the enthusiasm of Josiah; the people's hearts weren't affected. This is the trouble with mass meetings for "revival". Reformation is essentially personal and of the heart.

2Ki 23:4 The king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the threshold, to bring forth out of Yahweh's temple all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the Asherah, and for all the host of the sky; and he burned them outside of Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel-

Josiah discovered the book of the Law- and he then went on to do something about it in practice. Reflect through what he did:

Passover kept in Jerusalem (23:21-23) = Dt. 16:1-8; Removed asherahs (23:4,6,14) = Dt. 12:3; 16:21; Star worship removed (23:4,11) = Dt. 17:3; The 'high places' and cults removed (23:8-20) = Dt. 12; Child sacrifice ended (23:10) = Dt. 12:31; 18:10; The cultic stones / 'mazzeboth' removed (23:14) = Dt. 12:3; 16:22; Conjouring up the dead ended (23:24) = Dt. 18:11.

Do you notice from where in Deuteronomy he got those ideas? From chapters 12 - 18. My suggestion is that he maxed out on that part of the 'book of the law' which was read to him, and went and did it. The Lord in the wilderness was likewise motivated by Deuteronomy chapters 6 and 8.

In the first century, when people heard the Gospel, they were generally baptized immediately. This meant that the prison keeper was baptized in the middle of the night, amidst an earthquake... in essence, people heard the message, and responded immediately. We likewise heard of the Bible's teaching about baptism, and we did something concrete and actual- we got wet. We went under the water. But we must ask ourselves whether we are continuing to be responsive to the word of God which we become increasingly familiar with as we read daily. Our very familiarity with it can militate against a real response. When last did you read / understand something from Scripture, and then get up and *do something real, concrete and actual about it?*

2Ki 23:5 He put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places around Jerusalem; those also who burned incense to Baal, to the sun, the moon, to the planets and to all the host of the sky-

We notice here Judah's addiction to idolatry. Usually a nation was loyal just to one god, e.g. the sun god; but as Hosea puts it, Judah were like a sexually obsessed woman going after every man or god of the surrounding nations.

2Ki 23:6 He brought out the Asherah from the house of Yahweh, outside of

Jerusalem, to the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and beat it to dust, and cast its dust on the graves of the common people-

This may have been inspired by Hezekiah, who likewise destroyed idolatry in the Kidron and then called for the Passover to be celebrated (2 Chron. 30:14,15). We are to take inspiration from Biblical history as Josiah did.

2Ki 23:7 He broke down the houses of the sodomites that were in the house of Yahweh, where the women wove hangings for the Asherah-

These sodomites were associated with the idol shrines (1 Kings 14:23,24). They may well have been Gentiles from Phoenicia, hence they were expelled from the land rather than killed. They may well have been involved with homosexual practices, but the Hebrew *qadesh* means literally a devoted person.

2Ki 23:8 He brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah-

The priests had ostensibly offered only to Yahweh in the high places (2 Chron. 33:17), but those high places were destroyed and the priests who officiated there were removed to Jerusalem, but not allowed to come up to the altar (:9). Clearly they had mixed Yahweh worship with idolatry.

And defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba-

The limits of Judah.

And he broke down the high places of the gates that were at the entrance of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on a man's left hand at the gate of the city-

The open spaces by the city gates were where Manasseh and Amon had set up idol worship.

2Ki 23:9 Nevertheless the priests of the high places didn't come up to the altar of Yahweh in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread among their brothers-

See on :8. The priests who had previously been unfaithful at the high places were disciplined, but were allowed to eat of the sacrifices which the other priests could eat. For according to the law, those portions of food could not have leave in them. "Bread" may be used here for 'food'.

2Ki 23:10 He defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech-

This became Gehenna (Ge Hinnom) in the Lord's time, the rubbish dump and previous place of idolatry which was now despised. And it was used by Him as a symbol of the total destruction and shame of the rejected at the last day. It was as if they were seen by Him as being offered there to the idols they had worshipped during their lives.

2Ki 23:11 He took away the horses that the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entrance of the house of Yahweh, by the room of Nathan Melech the officer, who was in the court; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire-

The idea was that the sun god daily drove his chariot across the sky. As so often noted, the kings of Judah had not turned away from Yahweh completely, but mixed idolatry with Yahweh worship. This kind of syncretism is seen all around us, in practical and doctrinal terms; and it is the perennial temptation of God's people to mix the flesh and spirit.

2Ki 23:12 The king broke down the altars that were on the roof of the upper room of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of Yahweh-

This is a tacit recognition that Manasseh's repentance and apparent destruction of his idols had not been very thorough. Perhaps that is why Kings doesn't mention it. And Hezekiah's apparently radical reforms had not even removed the altars on the roof of his father's house. The reforms of the reformers were never really as radical as they might appear. See on :15.

And beat them down from there, and cast their dust into the brook Kidron-

This may have been inspired by Hezekiah, who likewise destroyed idolatry in the Kidron and then called for the Passover to be celebrated (2 Chron. 30:14,15). We are to take inspiration from Biblical history as Josiah did.

2Ki 23:13 The king defiled the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mountain of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon-
What a contrast with Ps. 125:2 "As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so Yahweh surrounds His people from this time forth and forever". The hills around Jerusalem are not huge mountains. They are small hills, and this is the picture of God's protection; not hugely visible, but there. But the mountains around Jerusalem became the "high places" of idolatry (1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 23:13; 2 Chron. 21:11); what should have been the symbols of Yahweh's protection became perverted. "The mount of corruption" appears to have been the mount of Olives.

The way Solomon built idol temples for his wives on mock temple mounts near Jerusalem was surely a studied statement that he saw himself as a hopeless apostate. Like the alcoholic or drug abuser, Solomon could analyze his problem in Ecclesiastes so accurately- and yet do nothing about it. This is the utter tragedy of all spiritual failure. Even politically, his marriages with all those Gentile women didn't seem to achieve him the support he desired from their home countries; Egypt gave refuge to Jeroboam, Solomon's main rival (1 Kings 11:40), even though he always acquiesced to his wives and even in his very old age he still didn't destroy the idol temples he built for them.

2Ki 23:14 He broke in pieces the pillars, and cut down the Asherim, and filled their places with the bones of men-

The idols were desecrated in the eyes of the worshippers by dead bodies being near them. And yet the sense that dead bodies brought defilement was itself from the law of Moses (Num. 19:14,15). We see here the confused conscience of the people, partly formed by their experience of Yahweh's principles, and partly blunted by the experience of idol worship. The idols were typically associated with fertility cults, and so to make the dead bones of their priests placed on their altars and pillars was a denial of all they stood for.

2Ki 23:15 Moreover the altar that was at Bethel, and the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, had made, even that altar and the high place he broke down; and he burned the high place and beat it to dust, and burned the Asherah-

We marvel that despite the reforms of Hezekiah and others, this altar and high place

remained in Israel. There was a kind of false temple complex still there (1 Kings 12:31). See on :12. The reforms of the reformers were never really as radical as they might appear. Although Bethel was in the area of the ten tribes, Josiah realized that it was their influence which had led Judah into such apostasy. He set an example for all time of having a sense of spiritual care even for brethren he was separated from; for they were still his brethren.

2Ki 23:16 As Josiah turned himself, he spied the tombs that were there in the mountain; and he sent, and took the bones out of the tombs and burned them on the altar and defiled it, according to the word of Yahweh which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these things-

We get the impression that Josiah may have been ignorant of the prophecy of 1 Kings 13:2, or had forgotten it (:17); and fulfilled this unconsciously. We have the impression that he just happened to notice tombs far away in the mountain side, and the idea thus came to his mind to take the bones from there and use them to desecrate the altar. This is how the Spirit works in our lives too. We "by chance" notice something, from the corner of our eye; turn left rather than right. But that was all of God's direct operation upon our hearts and eyes, to take His purpose further and, in this case, to fulfil His prophetic word.

2Ki 23:17 Then he said, What monument is that which I see? The men of the city told him, It is the tomb of the man of God, who came from Judah, and proclaimed these things that you have done against the altar of Bethel-

It seems that therefore, as noted on :16, he fulfilled those prophetic words unconsciously rather than consciously. For the man of God had prophesied of Josiah by name as doing this. But we are given to understand that he did not consciously try to fulfil it, and therefore we conclude he was either ignorant of the prophecy or had forgotten it; or perhaps didn't know all the details of it.

2Ki 23:18 He said, Let him be! Let no man move his bones. So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet who came out of Samaria-

Both prophets had been to some extent unfaithful to God's word, and yet in other aspects of their lives they had been faithful (1 Kings 13:31). And this is surely the position with all God's children. They were at least honoured at this point as having been faithful rather than unfaithful.

2Ki 23:19 All the houses also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke Yahweh to anger, Josiah took away, and did to them according to all the acts that he had done in Bethel-

God can be grieved [s.w. 'provoke to anger']. He has emotions, and His potential foreknowledge doesn't mean that these feelings are not legitimate. They are presented as occurring in human time, as responses to human behaviour. This is the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to human time-space limits, in order to fully enter relationship and experience with us. As He can limit His omnipotence, so God can limit His omniscience, in order to feel and respond along with us.

2Ki 23:20 He killed all the priests of the high places that were there, upon the altars, and burned men's bones on them; and he returned to Jerusalem-

We notice the contrast with how he treated the priests of the high places in Judah (:9), whom he allowed to live. Although for sure they were also apostate, or else they

would not have been demoted as they were. These priests in Israel however were not Levites. Perhaps he was made more aware of the prophecies of the man of God in 1 Kings 13:2, and therefore fulfilled them.

2Ki 23:21 The king commanded all the people saying, Keep the Passover to Yahweh your God, as it is written in this book of the covenant-

Josiah urged the people to keep this, despite having been told in 2 Chron. 34:25 that the people would indeed be judged for their sons. He had sought to change this by appealing for all the people to enter covenant with Yahweh from their hearts (2 Chron. 34:30). And he seeks to confirm this by holding a huge Passover, where he provided the people with the sacrifices.

2Ki 23:22 Surely there was not kept such a Passover from the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah-

This Passover was unique both in terms of numbers of offerings, and in the strict obedience to all the legislation about it. We note the repeated treatment in 2 Chron. 35 of "the inhabitants of Jerusalem" as a separate group. And yet Jeremiah, who was the contemporary prophet, specifically criticizes this group above all as being so far from Yahweh in their hearts. And this was the critical dimension which was not addressed by all this ritualistic obedience.

2Ki 23:23 but in the eighteenth year of king Josiah was this Passover kept to Yahweh in Jerusalem-

We have no record of what Josiah did in the last 13 years of his reign, apart from the note we will have in 2 Chron. about how he died in disobedience to God's word. Perhaps this was the end point of a spiritual slip in that period. Tragically, so many of the kings started well and slipped at the end; truly a warning to us. We would rather hope to read that Judah continued to keep Passovers after this one, but there is no record of that. See on 2 Chron. 35:20.

2Ki 23:24 Moreover Josiah removed those who had familiar spirits, and the wizards, the teraphim, the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might confirm the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of Yahweh-

He was trying by all means to avoid the judgments for disobedience which were written in the book of the law read to him. But God had said that He would not change that judgment. Josiah would have been motivated by the example of Moses in seeking to still change the outcome. But the reforms of a king were not the same as the required change of heart of the people. Removing all visible signs of idolatry was not the same as transforming hearts; and God looks upon the heart, rather than the external state of religion amongst His people.

Hilkiah is well attested as the one who found the lost book of the law (2 Kings 22:8), helped in Josiah's reforms (2 Kings 22:14-20) and arranged the great Passover observance of 2 Chron. 35:1-19. But Hilkiah did all this despite being the son of a High Priest called Shallum (1 Chron. 6:12,13), whose name can mean 'bribe' (s.w. Mic. 7:3 about the corruption of the priesthood). Perhaps this was what he was known for. But his son / descendant rose above that bad background, as we can.

2Ki 23:25 Like him was there no king before him, who turned to Yahweh with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses;

neither after him arose there any like him-

As noted on :24, the point was that God was interested in the hearts of His individual people, and the spiritual zeal of one man could not alter that. Perhaps this is why Kings omits the account of Josiah's death in disobedience to God's word, which we find in Chronicles. The idea is that even this generally good man could not avert the judgment of others if their hearts were not with Him.

2Ki 23:26 Notwithstanding, Yahweh didn't turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger was kindled against Judah,

The fact that men such as Moses and Jeremiah (Jer. 18:20) turned away God's wrath without these things happening, or simply by prayer (Dan. 9:16) therefore means that God accepted the intercession of those men and counted their righteousness to those from whom His wrath turned away. We shouldn't assume that these righteous men merely waved away God's wrath. That wrath was real, and required immense pleading and personal dedication on their behalf. Thus we read that despite Josiah's righteousness, the wrath of God against Manasseh was still not turned away. Truly "wise men turn away wrath" (Prov. 29:8). And they evidently pointed forward to the work of the Lord Jesus- perhaps, like the sacrifices, those men only achieved what they did on account of the way they pointed forward to the Lord Jesus. He delivered us from God's coming wrath (1 Thess. 1:10)- the wrath of God is frequently spoken of in the New Testament as being poured out with devastating physical effects in the last days. All those not reconciled to God through the Lord Jesus are "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). The very existence of the law of God creates His wrath, because we break that law (Rom. 4:15). Romans has much to say about the wrath of God; and the letter begins with the reminder that we are all sinners, and the wrath of God will be revealed against all forms of sin (Rom. 1:18). It is only through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus that we are saved from this wrath and 'reconciled' to God (Rom. 5:8-10).

Because of all the provocation with which Manasseh had provoked Him-

There is a connection with Prov. 27:3 GNB, where the same Hebrew word is used: "A stone is heavy and sand is a burden; but a fool's provocation is heavier than both". This is a Hezekiah Proverb (see on Prov. 25:1); the "provocation" of his son Manasseh led to the huge burden of judgment upon Judah. Hezekiah's son clearly paid no attention to his father's proverbs.

2Ki 23:27 Yahweh said, I will remove Judah also out of My sight as I have removed Israel-

Jonah recognized "I am cast out of Your sight" (Jonah 2:4), the very language of condemnation used at his time (1 Kings 9:7; 2 Kings 17:20; 21:2; 23:27; Jer. 7:15).

And I will cast off this city which I have chosen, even Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, 'My name shall be there' -

Although it is true as it was with Saul that those who reject Yahweh's word are rejected (1 Sam. 15:23), God's grace is beyond such a simplistic picture. Israel were to despise / reject God's word (s.w. Lev. 26:15,43), "and yet for all that.. I will not reject them / cast they away" (Lev. 26:44 s.w.). Israel rejected Yahweh when they wanted Saul to be their king (s.w. 1 Sam. 8:7; 10:19), and yet He did not reject them immediately because of that. The relevance to the exiles was in that they were in captivity because they too had rejected God's word and therefore God had rejected them (2 Kings 17:15 cp. 2 Kings 17:20; 23:27), because they rejected His prophetic words, He rejected them (Jer. 6:19,30; Hos. 4:6), "and yet for all that.. I will not reject them / cast they away" (Lev. 26:44; Jer. 31:37 s.w.). For ultimately God has not

rejected / cast away His people (Is. 41:9; Jer. 33:26; Rom. 11:2). This is the mystery of grace, no matter how we may seek to explain it away by Biblical exposition and balancing Bible verses against each other.

2Ki 23:28 Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-

Not necessarily the same as the books of Chronicles we have in our Bibles.

2Ki 23:29 In his days Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. King Josiah went against him; and Pharaoh Necho killed him at Megiddo when he had seen him-

There are times when God takes away the righteous from the evil of this life (Is. 57:1- probably alluding to what God did to Joash, 2 Kings 22:20 cp. 23:29). There are other Biblical instances where the wicked have long life and prosperity in this world. This is because the Bible presents the ultimate judgment and reward of human life and faith as being at the last day, and not right now.

2Ki 23:30 His servants carried him in a chariot dead from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own tomb. The people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and anointed him, and made him king in his father's place-

2 Chron. 35:22 gives a different perspective (see on :25 for why this is):

"Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and didn't listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo". Going into battle disguised is exactly what Ahab did (2 Chron. 18:29), and was slain doing it- having also defied God's prophetic word to do so. Josiah totally failed to hear God's word at this point, both from the historical precedents and the explicit prophecy given to him. The valley of Megiddo, and mourning in it (2 Chron. 35:24), will have an equivalent in the latter days (Zech. 12:10). Josiah therefore seems to represent a disobedient Israel, who will be finally saved by grace as he was.

2Ki 23:31 Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to reign; and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah-

2 Kings 23:31 says that Jehoahaz was the son of Hamutal, whereas his brother Eliakim was the son of Zebudah (2 Kings 23:36). So we see that Josiah practiced polygamy- another indication that he was not such a stellar example of spirituality, despite his works of obedience to the Mosaic law; see on :30 and 2 Chron. 35:19,20. And the mothers of his sons are blamed in Ez. 19 for leading them into very bad behaviour, so these were not good women.

2Ki 23:32 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, according to all that his fathers had done-

It is possible that Josiah was spiritually sliding downwards in the last 13 years of his reign; see on :30 and 2 Chron. 35:19,20. So the formative years of his sons may not have been spent under a good parental influence, which would explain their weakness and apostasy.

2Ki 23:33 Pharaoh Necho put him in bonds at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and put the land to a tribute of one hundred talents of

silver and a talent of gold-

He was "deposed at Jerusalem" (2 Chron. 36:3) but put in bonds at Riblah (2 Kings 23:33), which was on the Orontes river on the road from Babylon to Palestine. This was the same place where Nebuchadnezzar was based during the destruction of Jerusalem, and where the captives were brought to him for judgment (2 Kings 25:20,21). The parallel is to show how Judah were intended to learn from their sufferings at the hands of the Egyptians and to repent. But they didn't, and so the situation repeated with the Babylonians.

2Ki 23:34 Pharaoh Necho made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in the place of Josiah his father, and changed his name to Jehoiakim; but he took Jehoahaz away; and he came to Egypt, and died there-

"Eliakim" means "God will raise", alluding to their hope that 2 Sam. 7:12 would be fulfilled in him; and "Jehoiakim" means the same, only "Yah will raise". Perhaps the king made Eliakim swear by his God Jehovah, that he would be subservient to him. But it could be that the "Jeh" prefix meant something different to the Egyptians, and was effectively a sign of subservience to them; it may even refer to an Egyptian god. But see on :36. Joahaz died in Egypt as prophesied in Jer. 22:12. Shallum in Jer. 22 is the same as Jehoahaz. Perhaps he is called Shallum because that word means 'The one marked out for judgment'. I explain on Ez. 4:6 that potentially, the captivity of Judah need only have lasted for 40 days or years, but this period was extended, just as it could have been reduced. But Jehoahaz was not going to experience this, he had precluded any reduction in his captivity period because of his impenitence at that time. Jer. 22:11,12 imply that the false prophets were claiming that his exile was going to be very short lived and he would return to establish a Messianic kingdom, thus twisting the prophecies of the restoration which Jeremiah may have already given, along with those of Isaiah which were already extant.

2Ki 23:35 Jehoiakim gave silver and the gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give the money according to the commandment of Pharaoh. He exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, of each one according to his taxation, to give it to Pharaoh Necho-

Jehoiakim raised the tribute for the Babylonians by imposing a poll tax on the people. And he succeeded in raising the money. Yet such a tax ought to have been paid to the temple, but Jehoiakim hadn't bothered doing that.

2Ki 23:36 Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zebidah the daughter of Pedaiiah of Rumah-

The change from Eliakim to Jehoiakim (:34) is so similar that perhaps the change was just symbolic, to show Pharaoh's power over him; or maybe Jehoiakim was another name he already went under, or a name he himself suggested as an alternative.

2Ki 23:37 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, according to all that his fathers had done-

Jer. 22:13-18 gives an example of the sins of Jehoiakim- he built an opulent home for himself and refused to pay the labourers for their work. He also murdered the prophet Urijah who spoke against him (Jer. 26:20-23), and burnt the scroll of God's words and persecuted Jeremiah (Jer. 36).

2 KINGS CHAPTER 24

2Ki 24:1 In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years, then rebelled against him-

2 Chron. 36:6 adds: "Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon". It may not have been Nebuchadnezzar in person. "To carry him to Babylon" means that was the intention, but it may not have happened. Jer. 22:18,19 says he was to be thrown out onto the garbage tip outside Jerusalem like a dead donkey. 2 Kings says that bands of the Babylonians attacked him at this time, and he may have been slain at this time.

2Ki 24:2 Yahweh sent against him bands of the Chaldeans, the Syrians, Moabites and of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of Yahweh, which He spoke by His servants the prophets-

Dt. 11:17 had said that God's people would "perish [s.w. "destroy"] quickly from off the good land". But by grace, that didn't happen "quickly" at all. They were finally destroyed from off it (2 Kings 24:2 and often), but God did not bring that about quickly but after much patient pleading through the prophets. This is one of so many examples of where God simply did not punish His people to the extent He said He would; simply because of His grace and love toward them.

2Ki 24:3 Surely at the commandment of Yahweh came this on Judah, to remove them out of His sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did-

We can't be brethren in Christ who have no effect on the rest of the body. We all have an influence on others. Our behaviour, however passive, has a powerful effect on our brethren. We are all members of one body. Job pointed out that the words of another can assuage grief in a way that ones' own self-talk simply cannot (Job 16:5,6). On the contrary, a whole community can be cursed for the sake of one man's sin, even if he later repents (2 Kings 24:3,4). The fact we can be guilty of causing others to stumble means that we can limit God's gracious plan for them. However, it is also true that God would not punish innocent people on the basis of guilt by association with a sinner. So we conclude that the "sins of Manasseh" were practiced from the heart by the people, and that was the basis of their condemnation.

2Ki 24:4 and also for the innocent blood that he shed; for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, which Yahweh would not pardon-

"Would not pardon" quotes from Dt. 29:20, about the false teacher who is a root that bears gall, influencing others to idolatry: "Whose heart turns away this day from Yahweh our God, to go to serve the gods of those nations; lest there should be among you a root that bears gall and wormwood, who, when he hears the words of this curse blesses himself in his heart saying I shall have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart, to destroy the moist with the dry.

Yahweh will not pardon him, but then the anger of Yahweh and His jealousy will smoke against that man, and all the curse that is written in this book shall lie on him, and Yahweh will blot out his name from under the sky" (Dt. 29:18-20).

To presumptuously think that promised judgment will not come, to have a stubborn heart, is what God will not pardon. And this was the case with Jehoiakim.

2Ki 24:5 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and all that he did, aren't they written

in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?-

Not necessarily the same as the books of Chronicles we have in our Bibles.

2Ki 24:6 So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers; and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place-

The description of death as sleeping with fathers is clear evidence that death is seen as a sleep, unconsciousness, and not as the start of an immortal soul going to heaven or 'hell'. Good and bad, David and Solomon, are gathered together in death. The division between them will only therefore come at the resurrection of the dead, and the granting of immortality at the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus.

2Ki 24:7 The king of Egypt didn't come again out of his land any more; for the king of Babylon had taken, from the brook of Egypt to the river Euphrates, all that pertained to the king of Egypt-

This is mentioned to demonstrate the utter folly of later trusting in Egypt and breaking oaths to Babylon through alliances with Egypt. Egypt was weak, the world is weak, the arm of flesh is weak- and yet God's people always are tempted to trust in it.

2Ki 24:8 Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign; and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. His mother's name was Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem-

Three months and ten days (2 Chron. 36:9) becomes "three months" (2 Kings 24:8). Sometimes the Biblical record is vague, other times exact. This reflects how God is not seeking to cover His back against critics. He is of an altogether higher nature than that. There are times when the Spirit uses very approximate numbers rather than exact ("about the space of four hundred and fifty years", Acts 13:20 cp. 1 Kings 6:1). The reference to "seventy" in Judges 9:56 also doesn't seem exact. Seven and a half years (2 Sam. 2:11) becomes "seven years" (1 Kings 2:11). And 1 Kings 7:23 gives the circumference of the laver as "thirty cubits", although it was ten cubits broad. Taking 'pi' to be 3.14, it is apparent that the circumference would have been 31.4 cubits; but the Spirit says, summing up, "thirty".

"Nehushta" is a form of Nehushtan, 'the copper thing', a hint that his mother was an idolater.

We note that he was judged as a sinner at eighteen years old, for what he did over a 70 day period. We sometimes tend to excuse ourselves on the basis of only being products of our background. But eighteen year old Jehoiachin reigned a mere three months and ten days: and God's comment was that "he did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh". We could, of course, make the excuse that his surroundings, his immediate family, his peers... were all idolatrous. But Yahweh evidently didn't see this as any real excuse: he, at sweet eight years old, "did that which was evil" and was punished accordingly. Not only does this give an unusual insight into God's view of responsibility; but it shows that God expects even a young person to break away from background influences when they are evil. Chronicles says he was eight when he became king, not 18. Kings also gives "three months" rather than "three months and ten days", and it has been suggested that the "ten" has been misplaced by a copyist, explaining why 18 has been miscopied as 8.

2Ki 24:9 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, according to all that his father had done-

See on :8. Jehoiachin is Jeconiah of 1 Chron. 3:16 who is Coniah in Jer. 22:14, and

Jehoiachin in 2 Chron. 36:8,9. A reminder that people carried multiple names, explaining some of the apparent contradictions in the genealogies. Ez. 19 says that he was effectively made king by his ambitious mother, whose hope was to be the glorious queen mother, teaching her sons to be ambitious, aggressive lions to that end.

2Ki 24:10 At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up to Jerusalem, and the city was besieged-

These servants were his senior military officers with their armies, as opposed to the marauding bands of :2.

2Ki 24:11 Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to the city while his servants were besieging it-

This recalls how David came to Rabbah after it had been besieged for some time, so that he would have the honour of witnessing the surrender and taking the glory for the victory.

2Ki 24:12 and Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, his mother, his servants, his princes and his officers; and the king of Babylon took him prisoner-

His mother is mentioned because according to Ez. 19, she was the one driving him to independence from Babylon because she was so bent on having the glory of being queen mother for herself.

In the eighth year of his reign-

That is, of Nebuchadnezzar.

2Ki 24:13 He carried out from there all the treasures of the house of Yahweh and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold, which Solomon king of Israel had made in Yahweh's temple-

Some had already been taken at the time of Jehoiakim (2 Chron. 36:7). The various stages of the exiles and taking away of the vessels were surely because God was desperately hoping that there would be repentance in response to each stage. But there was not.

As Yahweh had said-

Thus fulfilling 2 Kings 20:17; Jer. 15:13; 17:3.

2Ki 24:14 He carried away all Jerusalem, all the princes and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths; none remained, except the poorest sort of the people of the land-

It was to these captives that Jeremiah wrote his letter of Jer. 29:1-23. Jeremiah explained that actually these who went into captivity in Babylon could become "good figs" if they repented there (Jer. 24).

2Ki 24:15 He carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon; and the king's mother, the king's wives, his officers and the chief men of the land, he carried into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon-

Ezekiel went into captivity at this time (Ez. 1:2,3), so it seems he was a priest of some standing, or from a senior family.

2Ki 24:16 All the men of might, even seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the

smiths one thousand, all of them strong and apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon-

Although it was the wealthier who were taken into captivity and those who "had nothing" and posed no threat who were left (Jer. 39:10), it seems from Jer. 24:1-10 that these were the "good figs", the spiritually stronger than the "bad figs" who remained. So we see that spirituality and poverty do not always go together, for poverty so easily distracts from spiritual focus. And although it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom, some do.

2Ki 24:17 The king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's father's brother, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah-

Nebuchadnezzar changed the name Mattaniah, 'gift of Yah', to "Zedekiah", 'Yah is right / just'. Perhaps even Nebuchadnezzar perceived that Yahweh was judging Judah justly. But "Zedekiah" is also "Yahweh our righteousness", but his birth name was Mattaniah (2 Kings 24:17). We wonder if this was a pre existing name given him by Josiah, and that Josiah named him this in keeping with his vision of reestablishing the Kingdom of God, based around a united Israel and Judah centered around worshipping Yahweh. For this is the term associated with king of the restored kingdom in Jer. 23:6; 33:16; 51:10. But he again was a case of wasted potential.

2Ki 24:18 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah-

Hamutal his mother is severely criticized in Ez. 19 as an ambitious, aggressive and scheming mother lion who set up her young lion sons for destruction by wanting them to be kings. Instead they needed to heed Jeremiah's message and humble themselves before Babylon, realizing they had sinned, rather than trying to break away from Babylon to achieve the independent kingship their mother was so obsessed with.

2Ki 24:19 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, according to all that Jehoiakim had done-

2 Chron. 36:12 explains more: "He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh his God; he didn't humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking the words of Yahweh". The prophets "spoke from the mouth of Yahweh" Himself; and yet the people scoffed at them (2 Chron. 36:12,16 RV). The power of inspiration was and is so great; and to not heed God's word is therefore a personal affront to Him. And those words have been recorded. When we read His word, we hear His voice. 1 Kings 13:21 speaks of us hearing "the *mouth* of God". Jeremiah spoke "from the mouth of the Lord". His word brings Him that near to us, if we will perceive it for what it is. Jeremiah's appeals for Zedekiah to submit to Babylon were repeated so often (Jer. 21:1-7; 34:8-22; 37:1-10,17; 38:17-23).

And yet we wonder whether Zedekiah may have finally repented. For Ez. 21:14 speaks of Zedekiah as "the deadly wounded", likewise "You, deadly wounded wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day has come" (Ez. 21:25). The intention was that Zedekiah would die by the sword, but in fact he didn't. He was blinded, but died peacefully in prison (Jer. 52:11). The wound that ought to have been unto death was in fact not unto death- because God wanted him to be moved by His grace to repent. And the change of judgment upon him would suggest to me that he did repent. See on 2 Kings 25:7.

The implication is that he was intended to have learnt from the fate of Jehoiakim his half brother, but instead he acted just the same. God also brings people into our lives so that we might learn from their life path and destiny. We never specifically read of Zedekiah worshipping idols, and he hardly comes over as the worst of Judah's kings, but his "evil" was in the weakness of character which he displayed when faced with God's demand for him to submit to Nebuchadnezzar.

2Ki 24:20 For through the anger of Yahweh, it happened in Jerusalem and Judah, until He had cast them out from His presence-

Zedekiah's rebellion was purely of his own device. But he is described here as rebelling "through the anger of Yahweh"; God intended to pour out His wrath, and so His hand was in the rebellion of Zedekiah, using that man's freewill decisions although through Jeremiah pleading with him not to go that way. We marvel at the perfect balance and intimate involvement in the psychology and decision making of people.

That Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon-

2 Chron. 36:13 adds that "He also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God; but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart against turning to Yahweh". Turning to Yahweh with a soft heart therefore involved his accepting that Judah had sinned, and therefore their servitude to Babylon was the appropriate punishment. But egged on by his mother (see on 2 Chron. 36:11), Zedekiah broke his oath to Nebuchadnezzar, which he had made in the name of Yahweh. He thus despised the Name. The parable of Ez. 17:12-20 clearly condemns him for doing this (also Ez. 21:25). Ez. 17:14 explains the intention of God in all this: "That the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping his covenant it might stand". The idea may be that it was God's plan that through keeping the covenant, the royal family and leadership would be humbled, and this would bring about God's favourite paradox- the brought down could then be exalted, "that... it might stand". See on Ez. 17:24. But they refused to repent, to be humbled, to be ashamed, and instead sought to wriggle out of the covenant by making agreements with Egypt to attack the Babylonian forces, liberate Jerusalem and perhaps later themselves from Babylon itself. Yet all these things had been explicitly promised to Judah; God would do all these things, if they repented. But instead of doing so, they sought by all manner of desperate means to bring about this liberation in the strength of Egypt. This is so typical of human behaviour. It is for us to learn the lesson.

Ez. 17:15 commented: "Shall he who does such things escape? Shall he break the covenant, and yet escape?". This is the language of Judah breaking covenant with God, just used in Ez. 16:59. God had designed the covenant between Zedekiah and the Babylonians, for the spiritual growth and repentance of the Jews. To break it was therefore to effectively break covenant with God. Or we could instead perceive that covenant breaking with God is reflected in covenant breaking with men. Our attitude to God becomes our attitude to men. Hence Ez. 17:19 specifically states: "Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: As I live, surely My oath that he has despised, and My covenant that he has broken, I will even bring it on his own head". Judah were light hearted in their attitude to everything; they "gave the hand" in covenant (Ez. 17:18) in order just to get "bread" (Lam. 5:6). They were in need, and instead of turning to God in repentance, they madly made promises of total loyalty to various peoples and their gods. It is this light hearted, not serious attitude, seeking for the immediate for the total sacrifice of principle, which dominates our age today.

2 KINGS CHAPTER 25

2Ki 25:1 It happened in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and encamped against it; and they built forts against it around it-

These forts had been portrayed and 'built' by Ezekiel when he drew them upon a tile in an acted parable (Ez. 4:1-3). Had the earlier exiles in Babylon repented, then this would not have happened. Likewise if Zedekiah had repented, it would not have happened. We see here how God doesn't just let things happen in a disinterested way, allowing natural forces to take their course. What happened was so avoidable; Zedekiah's weakness could have been cancelled out, as it were, by the repentance of the exiles with Ezekiel. And their refusal to repent could have been cancelled out by Zedekiah's repentance. Or if both of these elements failed, had the wealthy rulers of Jerusalem really let their slaves go free and not re-enslaved them, the siege could have been lifted. And there were other such factors and potential possibilities. Stubborn, proud refusal to bow our heads in repentance precludes so much from happening, and allows so much judgment to come which could have been averted.

2Ki 25:2 So the city was captured, by the eleventh year of king Zedekiah-

Literally, was entered. But "I will not enter into the city" (Hos. 11:9). But the enemies of Israel, manifesting God's judgments, did enter into the city. The Hebrew words for "enter" and "city" occur together in several passages describing this (2 Kings 25:2; Jer. 32:24,29; 44:2; 52:5; Dan. 9:26; Joel 2:9). The promise that they would not was surely uttered in emotional passion; or at best it was conditional. Jer. 39:1,2 allows us to conclude that the city was besieged for exactly 18 months.

2Ki 25:3 On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was severe in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land-

Jeremiah had earlier prophesied that many would die from famine and plague during the siege. It was by special grace that Jeremiah in prison was given bread right up to the day that Jerusalem fell.

2Ki 25:4 Then a breach was made in the city-

The Babylonians made a breach in the wall to the north, from where the cherubim had left and would return. But Zedekiah tried to escape by digging a hole in the southern wall (Ez. 12:12). He did to the city what the Babylonians did. This "breach" is the same word used for the breaking up of things at the time of the flood (Gen. 6:11), a well established foretaste of the destruction of Jerusalem by the flood waters of the Babylonians, albeit with the promise of a new creation coming as a result of it.

And all the men of war fled by night-

Jer. 52:7 says that they "went out by night". "Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30), Cain "'went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Even in this life, those who leave the ecclesia 'go out' after the pattern of Judas, who also went out at night, condemning themselves in advance of the judgment by their attitude to the ecclesia (1 Jn. 2:19 cp. Acts 15:24).

The unrighteous flee from God now, as they will then (Hos. 7:13). Zedekiah's experience of condemnation is presented as typical of every man condemned at the last day.

By the way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the king's garden (now the Chaldeans were against the city around it)-

It seems Zedekiah had taken refuge in the temple. From there, he saw the princes of Babylon who had breached the northern wall and were now at the temple gate (Jer. 39:3). And so they fled by "the king's garden", which was his own private entrance to the temple, and then came to the double walls of the southern perimeter of the city. Zedekiah himself dug through those walls, the strongest point of his defence and human strength (Ez. 12:12). He was being taught that all human defence, and the physical temple, was not going to save him.

And the king went by the way of the Arabah-

The chalky depression into which the river Jordan ran.

2Ki 25:5 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook him in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him-

The allusion is to how an Israel who broke covenant with their God would surely be overtaken by curses and judgment (Dt. 28:15). As his pursuers closed the distance between them and him, with him unable to gather more speed nor find a suitable place to run, now completely alone and without his bodyguards, he was a living exemplification of how Divine judgment will catch up with every man. He would then have dearly wished he had had the humility to listen to Jeremiah's pleas for repentance and submission. And he there was and is the exemplification of every man condemned before God.

The grace of Jesus framed the parable of the man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho in terms of Zedekiah's flight from Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:4); a man who had repeatedly spurned the offers God made to him through Jeremiah, and who was attacked on that road by the Babylonians (cp. the robbers). Yet the parable shows that Christ will graciously save even a man like that; for according to the parable, Zedekiah represents every one of us.

2Ki 25:6 Then they took the king, and carried him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment on him-

Zedekiah fled, was overtaken, wept (Ez. 7:27), judgment was given upon him (Jer. 52:9), he was punished in the presence of the king (Jer. 52:10), cast into prison (Jer. 52:11 cp. Mt. 5:25). He had his judgment in this life; and perhaps he may yet therefore be saved in the last day, seeing he apparently repented (see on :7; 2 Kings 24:19).

2Ki 25:7 They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in fetters, and carried him to Babylon-

We wonder why Zedekiah was spared but his sons were not. I will suggest on 2 Kings 24:19 that he later repented, even though he refused to repent and humble himself before God's word when he ought to have done. His sons presumably were foreknown that they would not repent, and so they were slain. Perhaps seeing their deaths made Zedekiah realize that they were dying because he had not repented when he ought to have done; for it was his lack of repentance earlier which, he was told, would bring about the death of women and children. We may just possibly have some window here onto the terrible problem of the death of children.

Jer. 52:11 says that he was imprisoned, LXX "in the mill", as if he was in hard labour, now blinded, exactly like Samson (Jud. 16:21), and as the young men were made to (Lam. 5:13). And the similarities continued, in that it seems Zedekiah likewise did finally repent. Jer. 21:7; 27:13 had prophesied that Zedekiah would be slain by the sword of Nebuchadnezzar when Jerusalem fell. But Zedekiah wasn't slain by Nebuchadnezzar, but rather died in captivity. Perhaps he repented; or God chose to work out another path of judgment with Zedekiah which would achieve more glory for Him and His objectives than simply having him slain by the sword. The statement in Jer. 21:7 that Nebuchadnezzar would not show him "pity nor have mercy" and not spare him was therefore not fulfilled; because he was reflecting the God who had also said He would not spare or pity, but yet He did. I explained on Jer. 34:5 that Zedekiah died "in peace", peace with God, and the threatened judgments upon him weren't completely carried out- presumably because he did finally repent. If we are to finally repent, then let us repent now before suffering comes upon us to elicit that repentance.

The intensity of Samson's repentance was quite something. It must have inspired Manasseh (2 Chron. 33:11), who like Samson was bound (Jud. 16:21) and humbled (Jud. 16:5,16,19 AVmg.)- and then repented with a like intensity. And Zedekiah went through the same basic experience, of capture by his enemies, having his eyes put out, his capture attributed to false gods; and he likewise repented (2 Kings 25:7).

2Ki 25:8 Now in the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month, which was the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, to Jerusalem-

Jer. 52:12 says "in the tenth day of the month". It could be that he arrived on the seventh day, and burnt the houses and temple (:9) on the tenth day. I suggested on Jer. 52:1 that the Kings record was as it were copied and pasted into the appendix to Jeremiah which we have in Jer. 52, so we could have here a simple error in copying.

2Ki 25:9 He burnt the house of Yahweh and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, even every great house, burnt he with fire-

Jeremiah earlier criticized the building of these great houses on the walls of Jerusalem- for they were built on the back of abusing the poor for material and labour. They were finally torn down by the Babylonians, but even before that, the owners themselves broke them down and the materials were used to shore up the breaches in the city walls (Jer. 33:4). Likewise there are foretastes of judgment ahead of time in the lives of all God's people.

Jerusalem was threatened with the eternal fire of God's anger, due to the sins of Israel: "Then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched" (Jer. 17:27). Jerusalem being the prophesied capital of the future Kingdom (Is. 2:2-4; Ps. 48:2), God did not mean us to read this literally. The houses of the great men in Jerusalem were burnt down with fire (2 Kings 25:9), but that fire did not continue eternally. Fire represents the anger/punishment of God against sin, but His anger is not eternal (Jer. 3:12). Fire turns what it burns to dust; and we know that the ultimate wages of sin is death, a turning back to dust. This perhaps is why fire is used as a figure for punishment for sin.

2Ki 25:10 All the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down the walls around Jerusalem-

We note in the prophecies of Jer. 50 and Jer. 51 a special emphasis upon the breaking

down of the walls of Babylon because of what they had done to Jerusalem, i.e. breaking down her walls. But we also observed on Jer. 51:44 that when the Medes took Babylon, the walls weren't broken down, and in fact they were only broken down bit by bit over the course of many years. So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future. Vengeance or "recompense" was not fully taken by God upon Babylon for what they did to Israel because Israel had not repented, recognizing that actually those judgments had been rightfully deserved by their gross sins.

2Ki 25:11 Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive the residue of the people who were left in the city, and those who fell away, who fell to the king of Babylon, and the remainder of the multitude of the people-

Or as AVmg. "residue of the artificers" or workmen. I suggested elsewhere that these may have been those skilled in building the defences; or it could refer to those who were the makers of idols. See on Jer. 10:18.

2Ki 25:12 But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to work the vineyards and fields-

This was probably the majority of the population. The Babylonians, unlike the Assyrians, didn't practice mass deportations. They removed the leadership of subjected peoples, and appointed locals as the leaders under their control. This is what they did to Judah, taking the royal family and priesthood into captivity, and establishing Gedaliah as puppet governor (Jer. 40: 7; 2 Kings 25:2) along with some local Jewish "elders" (Lam. 5:12), with Mizpeh rather than Jerusalem as the capital. Ezra 9:7 is clear that it was "our kings and our priests [who] have been delivered" into captivity. The Babylonians saw no economic purpose in bringing masses of unskilled peasant farmers into captivity in their cities. It's been estimated that at least 90% of Judah were peasant farmers; and these, the impoverished masses, were left in the land and not deported (Jer. 52:16; 2 Kings 25:12). See on Ez. 11:15. The Babylonian policy regarding deportation and management of conquered lands is described in N.P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) and D.L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer Stone, 1989). God did not therefore scatter all the people quite as He intended. There is archaeological evidence for continued agricultural activity in the land after the deportations. And Jer. 41:5 seems to speak of men coming to the Jerusalem temple from Shechem and Shiloh, in the ten tribe area, in order to offer grain offerings at the site of the temple. Presumably the altar had been destroyed, hence no animal sacrifices are mentioned. It has been suggested that the book of Lamentations was written as part of a temple ritual or at least material to be recited at the site of the temple. See on Jer. 12:4; 13:19.

2Ki 25:13 The Chaldeans broke up the pillars of brass that were in the house of Yahweh and the bases and the bronze sea that were in the house of Yahweh, and carried the brass pieces to Babylon-

The breaking in pieces was likely for ease of transportation. But it also symbolized the ending of the temple system. Israel had broken the covenant, and the only way back to God was to be through repentantly accepting His new covenant, as explained on Jer. 31.

2Ki 25:14 They took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the spoons, and all the vessels of brass with which they ministered-

These things were kept in Babylon and then sent back with the exiles, by the special decree of Cyrus. The new covenant offered to Israel at the time in Jer. 31 was not a repeat of the law of Moses, but it did include similar rituals. The worship system of Ez. 40-48 was command more than prediction, and it utilized these vessels.

2Ki 25:15 The captain of the guard took away the fire pans, the basins, whatever was of gold, and of silver-

We get the impression that an orderly inventory was kept, with the vessels divided up according to their metal. David's obsession with building the temple which God never wanted was so great, that he calculated the exact weight of gold for each vessel (1 Chron. 28:14). Even though this was not specified in the commands for building the tabernacle. 1 Kings 7:47 implies Solomon tried to calculate the total weight of all the vessels once they had been made, but the inventory was so huge that he left off. Yet so many vessels were not required by the tabernacle service. This was a completely different, grandiose religious system of David's own device; and in the end, all these vessels of mere religion were taken off into captivity (2 Kings 25:14-16 emphasizes this).

2Ki 25:16 The two pillars, the one sea and the bases which Solomon had made for the house of Yahweh, the brass of all these things was without weight-

Although as noted on :17, the gold and silver was apparently weighed, and the bronze pillars measured.

2Ki 25:17 The height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits, and a capital of brass was on it; and the height of the capital was three cubits, with network and pomegranates on the capital around it, all of brass, similarly the second pillar with its network-

The capitals were placed on the tops of the pillars (as in 1 Kings 7:16). "Tops" is "heads", and the Hebrew for "capitals" suggests "crown". The height of the capitals is given as three cubits in 2 Kings 25:17, but five cubits in 2 Chron. 3:15. The difference would be whether the crowns ["capitals"] were measured to the peak of the highest spike of the crown, or the top of the rim of the crown. But the idea is that everywhere in his house, Solomon had been glorifying his own kingship; forgetting that it was by grace, and conditional upon his obedience.

2Ki 25:18 The captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest-
An ancestor of Ezra (Ezra 7:1).

And Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the threshold-

The Zephaniah of Jer. 21:1 who refused to heed God's word and was associated with persecuting Jeremiah for speaking it (Jer. 29:25,29).

2Ki 25:19 and out of the city he took an officer who was set over the men of war; and five men of those who saw the king's face, who were found in the city; and the scribe, the captain of the army, who mustered the people of the land; and sixty men of the people of the land, who were found in the city-

Seven men in Jer. 52:25. 'The seven who saw the king's face' was likely a technical term for his immediate courtiers or politburo, although they may have only numbered five men. The sixty men were surely not arbitrarily chosen, but were likely the priests in the temple "in the midst of the city", perhaps those whom Ezekiel had seen offering incense to the sun god in the temple precincts.

2Ki 25:20 Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them, and brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah-

They were obviously seen as representative of the civil and religious leadership of Judah. It was deemed that they needed to be killed so that there was no leadership left; but this then makes it all the more amazing that Zedekiah was not killed as God had said he would be. It would seem that he was the logical one to die. We recall how when the Medes took Babylon, there was little bloodshed but king Belshazzar was slain. All this was to highlight to Zedekiah the amazing grace of his survival, and it seemed he did respond in repentance (see on :7).

2Ki 25:21 The king of Babylon struck them, and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was carried away captive out of his land-

See on :20. I noted on :12 that perhaps the majority of Judah remained in the land. For most of the population were the poor masses. But the exile and destruction of the leadership is seen as "Judah" being carried away captive. But perhaps the phrase is used in order to connect with the description of the ten tribe kingdom being carried away captive out of his land (Am. 7:11,17; 2 Kings 17:23). It was as if to put a final end to Judah's supposition that was somehow morally better than Israel. They shared an identical judgment.

Jehoahaz had been "deposed at Jerusalem" by Pharaoh Neco (2 Chron. 36:3) but put in bonds by him at Riblah (2 Kings 23:33), which was on the Orontes river on the road from Babylon to Palestine. This was the same place where Nebuchadnezzar was based during the destruction of Jerusalem, and where the captives were brought to him for judgment (2 Kings 25:20,21). The parallel is to show how Judah were intended to learn from their sufferings at the hands of the Egyptians and to repent. But they didn't, and so the situation repeated with the Babylonians.

2Ki 25:22 As for the people who were left in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, even over them he made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, governor-

I suggested on :12 that the numbers remaining in the land were relatively large. Ahikam, Gedaliah's father, had saved Jeremiah's life (Jer. 26:24). Jeremiah initially lived with Gedaliah once he became governor (Jer. 40:6).

2Ki 25:23 Now when all the captains of the bands of soldiers, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor, they came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, even Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah the son of the Maacathite, they and their men-

Ishmael was later to murder Gedaliah, considering that he was the rightful king of Judah. It seems he had taken refuge with Baalis king of the Ammonites during the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 40:14).

2Ki 25:24 Gedaliah swore to them and to their men and said to them, Don't be afraid because of the servants of the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you-

Gedaliah was advocating the earlier appeal of Jeremiah; if the people accepted they had sinned and willingly accepted the judgment for it, servitude of their enemies, then

all would be well for them. They were not to fear the Babylonians; “because of the servants of the Chaldeans”, referring to the various Babylonian garrisons now stationed throughout the land. "Amend" in the earlier appeals for repentance (e.g. Jer. 7:5) is the word here translated 'to do well to'. If they amended their ways, God would amend or change His plans of judgment. Here we behold the openness of God, His deep sensitivity to human repentance and change.

2Ki 25:25 But it happened in the seventh month-

Three months after the capture and two after the burning of the city.

That Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal seed, came with ten men and struck Gedaliah so that he died, and the Jews and the Chaldeans that were with him at Mizpah-

Ishmael was from the royal family, and therefore assumed that he ought to be the rightful ruler of Judah rather than Gedaliah, who was but a willing puppet of Babylon. But it was not then the time to restore the Kingdom and throne of David, and certainly not in the form of someone as deceitful as Ishmael. Ishmael clearly disbelieved the prophecies concerning the ending of the royal family. Perhaps Gedaliah's willing naivety about Ishmael in Jer. 40:16 was because he could not entertain any plan to slay a member of the royal family, remembering David's attitude to Saul.

They failed to accept that Nebuchadnezzar was Yahweh's servant, doing His will, and therefore the appointment of Gedaliah was also sanctioned by God. Perhaps their game plan was that Baalis of Ammon would take over Judah, and Ishmael would be made the ruler (Jer. 40:14). People will commit murder and any manner of sin for the sake of dreams of power. If Ishmael truly wished to do the best for Judah by becoming their ruler, he surely would not have killed his fellow Jews. But he did so because he was working for the king of Ammon and was following his agenda, in hope of personal benefit and power thereby.

2Ki 25:26 All the people, both small and great, and the captains of the forces, arose and came to Egypt; for they were afraid of the Chaldeans-

They ought not to have even thought of going into Egypt, but should have trusted Yahweh's further grace to be shown to them, despite the foolish provocation of the Babylonians by Ishmael; see on Jer. 42:2,12. Jeremiah was to assure them that in fact God's grace would continue to them through the grace of Nebuchadnezzar; he would not take revenge by slaying all Judah as they feared (Jer. 42:12). Fear is so often based upon lack of faith; and such fear can become gripping and all consuming. This fear of certain revenge proving unfounded, by God's grace, is what Jacob learnt after his sons pillaged Shechem. The surrounding tribes did not attack and destroy him, as he had thought would inevitably follow. The people went to Egypt, despite Jeremiah pleading with them to believe God's grace and remain in His land. He warned them that if they went to Egypt, they would go there to their condemnation. But they insisted on going there.

2Ki 25:27 It happened in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, that Evilmerodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah out of prison-

Lifting up the head out of prison recalls Joseph (Gen. 40:13,20); for the similarities with Joseph, see on :29.

2Ki 25:28 He spoke kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings who were with him in Babylon-

There is no reason given for this amazing grace toward Jehoiachin, who would have been considered the legitimate king of Judah. The lack of explanation is perhaps to simply highlight that it was indeed pure grace. He may well have repented, but that is not mentioned. We get the impression that God pitied His people in their well deserved captivity- simply because He so loved them.

2Ki 25:29 and changed his prison garments. Jehoiachin ate bread before him continually all the days of his life-

See on :30. The change of garments by the king would have recalled the experience of Joseph in Gen. 41:14. But Jehoiachin had not had the spirituality of Joseph, and he would have reflected upon that truth; and thereby perceived yet more the huge grace being shown him. We too may experience blessings which we are totally unworthy of, just so that we bow our heads in marvel at God's grace.

2Ki 25:30 For his allowance, there was a continual allowance given him of the king, every day a portion, all the days of his life-

Reflect how Daniel refused to eat the food sent to him from the King of Babylon; but God arranged for this very thing to be sent to Jehoiachin as a sign of His recognition of his repentance (Jer. 52:34)! God saw that Jehoiachin wasn't on Daniel's level, and yet He worked with him on his lower level.

Ezekiel had prophesied that those who survived the famine and invasion of Judah would go into captivity, "and I will draw out a sword after them" (Ez. 5:2,12). We would expect from this that the exiles would be persecuted and slain in captivity, and this surely was God's intended judgment. But in Esther we find the exiles in prosperity, in positions of power, and respected by their captors; and Jeremiah concludes his long prophecy with the information that Jehoiachin, Judah's exiled King, was exalted "above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon" and he was given special favour and honour by the King of Babylon (Jer. 52:31-34). I can only understand these things as pure grace. God showed tenderness and favour to His people in captivity, far above what He had intended or what they deserved. And He does the same with us- He gives us so much more than we deserve. And yet most of Judah abused that grace; they were so taken up with the good life God gave them in captivity that they chose to remain there and not participate in the restoration. And we so easily can end up abusing His grace likewise.