

2 Kings 9: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] 2 Kings chapter 9 Then Elisha the prophet called one of the sons of the prophets and said to him, Tie up your garments, and take this flask of oil in your hand, and go to Ramoth-Gilead.

And when you arrive, look there for Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi, and go in and have him rise from among his fellows, and lead him to an inner chamber. Then take the flask of oil, and pour it on his head, and say, Thus says the Lord, I anoint you king over Israel.

Then open the door and flee, do not linger. So the young man, the servant of the prophet, went to Ramoth-Gilead, and when he came, behold, the commanders of the army were in council, and he said, I have a word for you, O commander.

And Jehu said, To which of us all? And he said, To you, O commander. So he arose and went into the house, and the young man poured the oil on his head, saying to him, Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, I anoint you king over the people of the Lord, over Israel.

And you shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, so that I may avenge on Jezebel the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the Lord. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish, and I will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel.

[1 : 15] And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, like the house of Aasha the son of Ahijah. And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and none shall bury her.

Then he opened the door and fled. When Jehu came out to the servants of his master, they said to him, Is all well? Why did this mad fellow come to you? And he said to them, You know the fellow and his talk?

And they said, That is not true, tell us now. And he said, Thus and so he spoke to me, saying, Thus says the Lord, I anoint you king over Israel. Then in haste every man of them took his garment, and put it under him on the bare steps.

And they blew the trumpet, and proclaimed, Jehu is king. Thus Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi conspired against Joram. Now Joram with all Israel had been on guard at Ramoth-Gilead against Haziel king of Syria.

But king Joram had returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds that the Syrians had given him when he fought with Haziel king of Syria. So Jehu said, If this is your decision, then let no one slip out of the city to go and tell the news in Jezreel.

[2 : 23] Then Jehu mounted his chariot and went to Jezreel, for Joram lay there. And Ahaziah king of Judah had come down to visit Joram. Now the watchman was standing on the tower in Jezreel, and he saw the company of Jehu as he came and said, I see a company.

And Joram said, Take a horseman and send to meet them, and let them say, Is it peace? So a man on horseback went to meet him and said, Thus says the king, Is it peace?

And Jehu said, What do you have to do with peace? Turn around and ride behind me. And the watchman reported, saying, The messenger reached them, but he is not coming back. Then he sent out a second horseman, who came to them and said, Thus the king has said, Is it peace? And Jehu answered, What do you have to do with peace? Turn around and ride behind me. Again the watchman reported, He reached them, but he is not coming back. And the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi, for he drives furiously.

Joram said, Make ready. And they made ready his chariot. Then Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah set out, each in his chariot, and went to meet Jehu, and met him at the property of Naboth the Jezreelite.

[3 : 35] And when Joram saw Jehu, he said, Is it peace, Jehu? He answered, What peace can there be, so long as the whorings and the sorceries of your mother Jezebel are so many? Then

Joram reigned about and fled, saying to Ahaziah, Treachery, O Ahaziah.

And Jehu drew his bow with his full strength, and shot Joram between the shoulders, so that the arrow pierced his heart, and he sank in his chariot. Jehu said to Bidkar his aid, Take him up and throw him on the plot of ground belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite.

For remember, when you and I rode side by side behind Ahab his father, how the Lord made this pronouncement against him. As surely as I saw yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, declares the Lord, I will repay you on this plot of ground.

Now therefore, take him up and throw him on the plot of ground, in accordance with the word of the Lord. When Ahaziah the king of Judah saw this, he fled in the direction of Beth-hagan.

And Jehu pursued him and said, Shoot him also. And they shot him in the chariot at the ascent of Ger, which is by Iblam. And he fled to Megiddo and died there. His servants carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem and buried him in the tomb with his fathers in the city of David.

[4 : 50] In the eleventh year of Joram the son of Ahab, Ahaziah began to reign over Judah. When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it. And she painted her eyes and adorned her head and looked out of the window.

And as Jehu entered the gate, she said, Is it peace, you Zimri, murderer of your master? And he lifted up his face to the window and said, Who is on my side? Who?

Two or three of the eunuchs looked out at him. He said, Throw her down. So they threw her down, and some of her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses, and they trampled on her.

Then he went in and ate and drank. And he said, See now to this cursed woman and bury her, for she is a king's daughter. But when they went to bury her, they found no more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands.

When they came back and told him, he said, This is the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite. In the territory of Jezreel, the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel, and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say, This is Jezebel.

[5 : 58] At the beginning of 2 Kings chapter 9, we find Israel still engaged in battle at Ramoth-Gilead against the Syrians. Joram, or Jehoram of Israel, has been injured in battle and returned to Jezreel to recover.

However, the army remains at Ramoth-Gilead, which is where the story picks up now. In 1 Kings chapter 19, verses 15 to 18, after Elijah went to Mount Horeb, the Lord had spoken to him and had given him a mission.

And the Lord said to him, Go return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you arrive you shall anoint Hazei to be king over Syria, and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-Meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place.

And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazei shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal.

And every mouth that has not kissed him. However, surprisingly, after anointing Elisha as his successor at the end of the chapter, nothing more happened. It had seemed for a moment as if Israel was about to face its great reckoning, but it didn't materialise.

[7 : 12] Elijah ascended into heaven in 2 Kings chapter 2. Elisha took his place and went around mostly healing, delivering, and performing miracles. The forgetful reader of the books of Kings will probably have forgotten 1 Kings chapter 19 already at this point, and the more attentive might have puzzled about what was going on.

The prophetic commission had not been abandoned though. It awaited the proper time. The remnant had to be formed first through the ministry of Elisha before the time for judgement came. In 2 Kings chapter 8, Hazei had been anointed king of Syria, and at the end of the chapter was causing trouble on the northern border of the Transjordan in Ramoth-Gilead.

Ramoth-Gilead was the same place where Jehoshaphat and Ahab had fought unsuccessfully in 1 Kings chapter 22. Ahab had been fatally wounded in that battle, and had died in a manner that fulfilled the prophecy that Elijah had given in the preceding chapter, after Ahab's sin in killing Naboth and taking his vineyard.

In verses 34 to 38, But a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the scale armour and the breastplate. Therefore he said to the driver of his chariot, Turn around and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded.

And the battle continued that day, and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Syrians, until at evening he died. And the blood of the wound flowed into the bottom of the chariot, and about sunset a cry went through the army, every man to his city, and every man to his country.

[8 : 39] So the king died, and was brought to Samaria. And they buried the king in Samaria, and they washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood, and the prostitutes washed themselves in it, according to the word of the Lord that he had spoken.

The preceding chapter should have given us a sense of *déjà vu*, once again a battle with the Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead, once again an alliance of the king of Israel and the king of Judah, once again the Lord turning the conflict against his people, once again the Israelite king wounded by the Syrians in battle, then the wounded king returned to Jezreel.

At this point, we should have a sense of where the story is going. In Elijah's prophecy to Ahab in Naboth's vineyard, the Lord had pronounced judgment upon Ahab and upon his house. In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick up your own blood.

The dogs had licked up the blood of Ahab in chapter 22, but not in Jezreel, where Naboth had been killed. And there was more to the prophecy. In chapter 21, verses 21-24, Behold, I will bring disaster upon you, I will utterly burn you up, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha, the son of Ahijah, for the anger to which you have provoked me. And because you have made Israel to sin, and of Jezebel the Lord also said, The dogs shall eat Jezebel within the walls of Jezreel.

[10 : 08] Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city, the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the open country, the birds of the heavens shall eat. Ahaziah, the son of Ahab, had died shortly afterwards in 2 Kings chapter 1, with his brother Jehoram, or Joram, becoming king in his place.

Now, eight chapters later, we are finally going to see the prophecy come to pass. Beyond anointing Elisha as his successor, setting the ball in motion, Elijah had not personally fulfilled any of the further elements of his vocation.

In the previous chapter, Elisha had anointed Haziel. In chapter 9, Elisha commissions another prophet to do the anointing. Perhaps his presence in Ramoth-Gilead as a famous prophet would have drawn unwanted attention to his mission, compromising it.

The young man of the sons of the prophets was commissioned to anoint Jehu secretly, taking him into an inner chamber in order to do so. Jehu is seemingly the only king in Israel to have been anointed in such a manner.

Peter Lightheart notes that anointing by a prophet or priest is not that common in the books of the kings, and that only three main kings are anointed, Solomon, Joash, and Jehu.

[11 : 17] Jehu is the only anointed king of Israel. Like the two other figures, he might be seen as one who foreshadows the advent of the Messiah. Solomon builds the temple, Jehu cleanses the temple, and Joash will reform the temple.

However, Jehu also recalls the figure of Saul in some unsettling ways. Jehu is anointed as a minister of the Lord's vengeance upon the house of Ahab. Former dynasties, such as Jeroboam's and Baasha's, had been cut off, but they had been cut off in the Lord's providential judgment by the conspiracies of Baasha and Zimri, respectively.

Neither of these two figures was anointed by the Lord for the task. The Lord did not merely anoint Jehu as king. He also commissioned him to strike down Ahab's house, promising to make Ahab's house, the dynasty of the Omrides, like the dynasties of Jeroboam and Baasha that had preceded it, and Jezebel, Ahab's queen, who still lived, would suffer a gruesome fate.

This would avenge the blood of the prophets that Ahab and Jezebel had slain upon Ahab's house. The anointing of Jehu occurred secretly, behind closed doors, with Jehu and the prophet alone, and once Jehu had been anointed, the prophet fled.

When Jehu left the inner room and came out to the other commanders of the army, they asked him what the prophet had come to him for. Jehu initially tried to dismiss the issue, speaking of the prophet as if he were a madman.

[12 : 41] However, the other commanders knew that something more was going on and they pressed him on the matter. He then revealed to them the message that he had been given, and they immediately rushed to confirm the message that he would be the king.

As in the triumphal entry in the gospels, the men removed their garments and placed them in front of him on the steps and blew the trumpet, declaring him to be the king. This is not the regular form of an announcement that would accompany a typical king in the line of succession.

It is the sort of statement that comes with a coup. Jehu instructed his men to prevent anyone from leaving Ramoth-Gilead to warn the king in Jezreel. He wants to strike Joram and Jezebel when they are unprepared.

Jehu mounts his chariot, leads a great company behind him and races towards Jezreel. A tense scene is set up as we alternate between this approaching army and the watchman on the tower of Jezreel.

He sees the company approaching, informs the king and the king sends out a horseman to meet them. The messenger comes to Jehu and Jehu tells him that he has nothing to do with peace as a servant of Jehoram.

[13 : 43] He instructs the man to join him. A second horseman is sent out and the same thing happens. The watchman then recognizes the approaching man as Jehu, the son of Nimshi. He is driving furiously or madly, a related word to the way that the prophet is described earlier on as a madman.

The mad zeal of the prophet has been communicated to Jehu, the commander, and now he is coming to avenge the blood of the Lord's prophets upon the house of Ahab. Jehu. Jehu readies his chariot and with him comes Ahaziah, the king of Judah.

Now that the approaching man has been recognized as Jehu, Jehu likely presumes that he comes with a message that he can only deliver to Jehu in person. So to get the message as soon as possible, he goes out to meet him.

He asks the same question, is it peace? Jehu's answer makes clear that there will be no peace. It is the sins of Jezebel that he particularly emphasizes. Not only had she slain the Lord's prophets, she had also led the people in idolatry.

They meet Jehu at an ominous location, in the property of Naboth the Jezreelite, the very place where the blood of Ahab was going to be spilled. Jehu at this point draws his bow and shoots Joram between the shoulders.

[14 : 54] Joram will die in much the same way as his father Ahab. Jehu at this point declares that this is the fulfillment of the message of the Lord through Elijah the Tishbite. This was the judgment that had been foretold.

The blood of Ahab in his son is being shed at this particular place. We also learn here that it was not just the blood of Naboth that was slain, but also the blood of his sons. Naboth and his sons were killed and now Ahab and his sons will be killed in vengeance.

Joram's body is thrown upon the plot of land and Ahaziah is then pursued also. Ahaziah, we must remember, is also a descendant of Ahab. He is the nephew of Jehoram, the son of Jehoram's sister Athaliah, who is the daughter of Ahab.

This is a judgment coming upon both of the nations, both Israel and Judah. They become mirror images of each other. They both walk in the ways of the kings of Israel, in the ways of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and they both die together as a result.

Hearing that Jehu is approaching and knowing his intentions, Jezebel paints her eyes and adorns her head. If she's going to die, she's going to die like a queen. She looks out of the window and as Jehu approaches, she refers to him as Zimri, murderer of your master.

[16 : 04] Zimri brought down the dynasty of Baasha, but his coup was short-lived and ill-fated. After seven days, he committed suicide within his palace. By associating Jehu with Zimri, Jezebel is suggesting that his coup will be equally unsuccessful, and perhaps also that the Amrudes will get the supremacy again, just as they first gained the throne of Israel in the unrest introduced after Zimri killed Elah.

Jezebel's son, Ahaziah, had died in consequence of falling through a lattice in an upper room, and now Jezebel dies as she is thrown through a window by three eunuchs. The horses trample on her and her blood is spattered on the wall and on the horses, and then Jehu goes in and eats and drinks.

Lightheart suggests the possibility of some sort of sacrificial illusion here. The eating and drinking is a fellowship meal that can result after the blood of Ahab's house has been shed and it has been sprinkled like sacrificial blood on the walls to purge the sins of the house of Israel.

The spattering of the blood of the woman against the wall might also remind us of the use of the expression whoever pisses against the wall in the case of men who are doomed to judgment. Lyssa Rae Beal suggests that the spattering of the woman's blood may be the female counterpart.

After they have eaten and drunk, they go outside to see if they can bury the body. Jezebel was the daughter of a Sidonian king and the wife of a king of Israel, so she should be accorded a proper burial.

[17:27] However, according to the word of the Lord, the body had been consumed almost entirely by the dogs. This fulfilled the judgment prophecy of Elijah concerning the punishment for the killing of Naboth.

The gruesome account of Jezebel's demise is concluded with the statement that her corpse will be as dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel. This might be a play upon her name with the concluding three consonants relating to a word for dung.

A question to consider, reading the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, what comparisons and contrasts can we see with the story of Jehu?

