

2 Kings 13: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Date: 24 October 2020

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[0 : 0 0] 2 Kings chapter 13 In the twenty-third year of Joash the son of Ahaziah king of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and he reigned seventeen years.

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin. He did not depart from them. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he gave them continually into the hand of Haziel king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-Hadad the son of Haziel.

Then Jehoahaz sought the favour of the Lord, and the Lord listened to him, for he saw the oppression of Israel, how the king of Syria oppressed them. Therefore the Lord gave Israel a saviour, so that they escaped from the hand of the Syrians, and the people of Israel lived in their homes as formerly.

Nevertheless they did not depart from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, which he made Israel to sin, but walked in them, and the Asherah also remained in Samaria. For there was not left to Jehoahaz an army of more than fifty horsemen, and ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen, for the king of Syria had destroyed them, and made them like dust at threshing.

Now the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz, and all that he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? So Jehoahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in Samaria, and Joash his son reigned in his place.

[1 : 2 2] In the thirty-seventh year of Joash king of Judah, Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz began to reign over Israel in Samaria, and he reigned sixteen years. He also did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin, but he walked in them. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash, and all that he did, and the might with which he fought against Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

So Joash slept with his fathers, and Jeroboam sat on his throne, and Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel. Now when Elisha had fallen sick with the illness of which he was to die, Joash king of Israel went down to him and wept before him, crying, My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen.

And Elisha said to him, Take a bow and arrows. So he took a bow and arrows. Then he said to the king of Israel, Draw the bow, and he drew it. And Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands, and he said, Open the window eastward.

And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The Lord's arrow of victory, the arrow of victory over Syria, for you shall fight the Syrians in Aphek until you have made an end of them.

[2 : 4 0] And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, Strike the ground with them. And he struck three times and stopped. Then the man of God was angry with him and said, You should have struck five or six times.

Then you would have struck down Syria until you had made an end of it. But now you will strike down Syria only three times. So Elisha died, and they buried him. Now bands of Moabites used to invade the land in the spring of the year.

And as a man was being buried, behold, a marauding band was seen. And the man was thrown into the grave of Elisha. And as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood on his feet.

Now Haziël, king of Syria, oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. But the Lord was gracious to them and had compassion on them. And he turned toward them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them.

Nor has he cast them from his presence until now. When Haziël, king of Syria, died, Ben-Hadad, his son, became king in his place. Then Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz, took again from Ben-Hadad, the son of Haziël, the cities that he had taken from Jehoahaz, his father, in war.

[3 : 48] Three times Jehoash defeated him and recovered the cities of Israel. After the Lord had judged the Umri dynasty and the idolatry and the wickedness of both the northern and southern kingdoms, we now find ourselves largely in the aftermath.

And in chapter 13, the nation of Israel sinks to its sorriest condition yet. The twenty-third year of Jehoash of Judah was the year that he addressed the failure to advance the repairs of the temple and the mismanagement of the priests.

It was also the year in which Jehoahaz, the son of Jehu, came to the throne of the northern kingdom of Israel. Jehu had received a promise from the Lord concerning his dynasty in chapter 10 verse 30.

And the Lord said to Jehu, Because you have done well in carrying out what 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.

Nevertheless, Jehoahaz walks in the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, like all the other kings of Israel. God had promised that he would judge his people Israel by means of Elisha, Haziël, and Jehu, and the failure of Jehu and his descendants to walk in the way of the Lord meant that the judgment would come from Haziël and Elisha.

[5 : 01] Haziël and Ben-Hadad his son ravaged the northern kingdom. Jehoahaz is left with only the smallest rump of an army, a mere fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand footmen.

But Jehoahaz sought the favor of the Lord, and the Lord took compassion upon him and upon Israel, and raised up a deliverer for them. This probably recalls for us the stories of the judges, where the people would lapse into idolatry, and would be ravaged by their enemies, only for them to call upon the name of the Lord, and some deliverer to be raised up.

Various suggestions of the identity of this deliverer have been suggested. Elisha, Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz, and even Adad-Nerari III of Assyria, who by attacking the Arameans gave Israel some relief from their assaults.

Jehoash, or Joash of Israel, succeeds his father Jehoahaz. Once again he follows in the way of Jeroboam. He also fights against the southern kingdom. If we pay attention to the numbers, it should be clear that many of the kings were co-regents for a period of time with their predecessors.

Jehoash is one example of this. Jehoahaz comes to the throne in the twenty-third year of Joash. He reigns for seventeen years, and then Jehoash of Israel, the son of Jehoahaz, becomes the king in the thirty-seventh year of Joash, king of Judah.

[6 : 17] There is clearly an overlap in their reigns of about two years or more. Elisha's ministry had begun back in 1 Kings chapter 19, during the reign of Ahab. His prophetic ministry had spanned almost fifty years, and included within it the reign of Ahab, Ahaziah, Jehoram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and now it was ending in the reign of Jehoash.

Jehoash of Israel, whose death we have just read about, went down to visit the dying Elisha and was distraught at his passing. Elisha represented the Lord's presence with his people, the Lord fighting for his people.

His response to the dying Elisha is, My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen. These are the same words that Elisha had used of the passing of Elijah back in chapter 2.

Chariots of the Lord had been associated with Elijah and Elisha. In chapter 2 and chapter 6, and then in chapter 7 as well, as the sound of the chariots had driven away the besieging Syrians.

The king rightly recognises Elisha as a father figure. Elisha is the prophetic leader of the people. The fact that he is going to depart in such a low point in the nation's history is of great concern for the king who faces serious threats on the borders.

[7 : 28] Who is going to fight for Israel now? In answer to such concerns, Elisha gives two signs to the worried king. For the first of the two signs, he is instructed to take a bow and some arrows, and drawing the bow to shoot it out of the window eastward.

Firing the arrow in the direction of Syria, with the prophet's hand upon his, the king has an assurance of his victory over them. He will fight against Syria and he will be victorious against them.

He will fight the Syrians in Aphek and he will make an end of them. The Aphek mentioned here is not the Aphek of 1 Samuel chapter 4, the battle of Aphek being the battle at which the Ark of the Covenant had been captured by the Philistines.

This Aphek is towards the south-east of Galilee. This first prophetic sign is followed by another. In the second he must take the arrows again, and then he is instructed to strike the ground with them.

But he only does so three times, and he stops. And Elisha is angry with him. Joash should have struck the ground five or six times. Perhaps the difference lay in the fact that now Elisha's hands were not accompanying his upon the bow.

[8 : 31] Joash would still win great victories over the Syrians, but they would not be as decisive as they could have been. Elisha died, was buried, and his body decomposed, leaving only his bones.

Sometime later a body was thrown into his grave, and the body came to life. This should not be seen merely as a random miracle. It is a sign that Elisha's power, his word, the way in which God was working through him, was still powerful within Israel.

Implicit in this miracle is a promise for life from death for those who are associated with the prophet. If they cling to the words of the prophets, there will be life from death even in the grave of exile.

The chapter ends with continued struggles against the Syrians. Haziel and his son Ben-Hadad continue to fight against Israel. However, God has mercy upon Israel. On account of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he does not cast his presence away from them, and he does not destroy them.

He also empowers Jehoash, according to the word of Elisha, to take back some of the lost territory, recapturing from Ben-Hadad some of the cities that his father had lost in war. This is a rare occasion in the story of Israel, where the covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is mentioned.

[9 : 41] A question to consider, what lessons may we learn from God's merciful dealings with an unfaithful Israel during this period of its history?