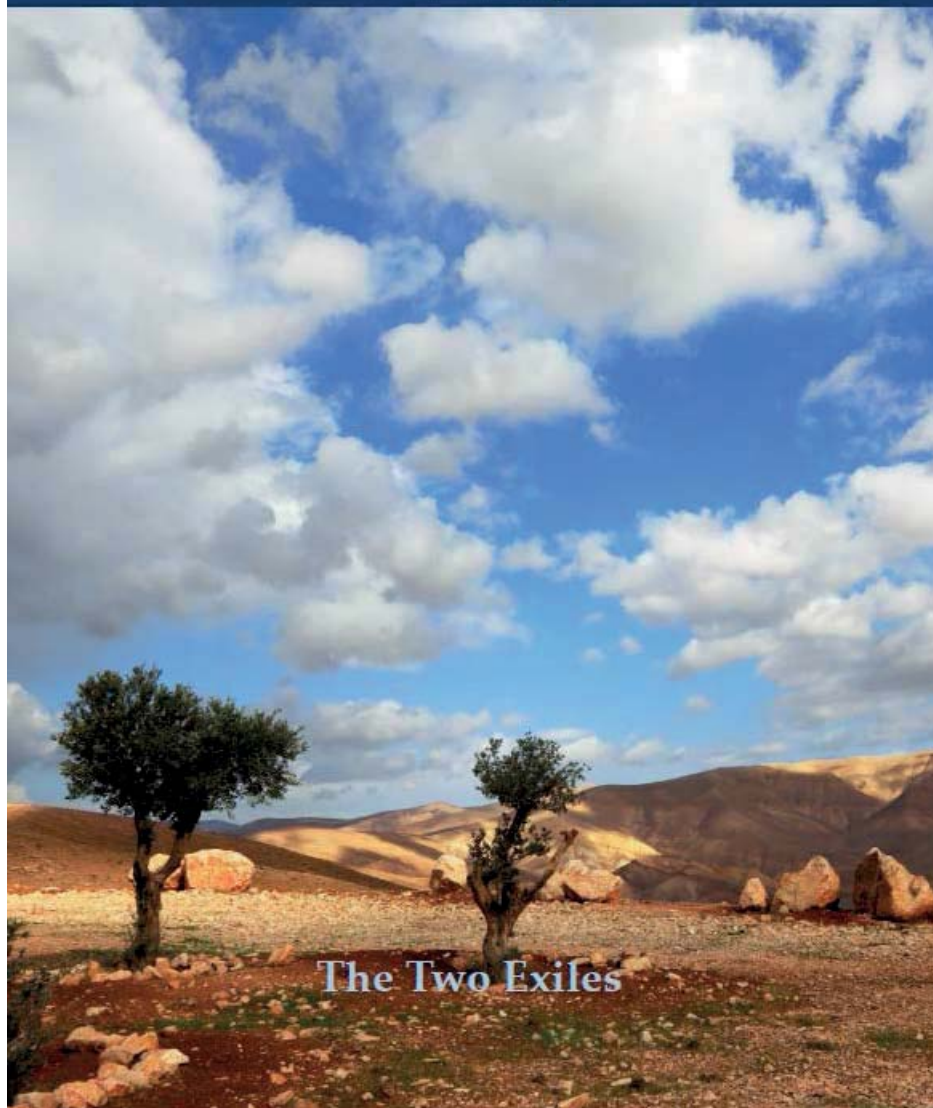


2 Kings Explained & Applied 12

Ger de Koning



The Two Exiles

2 Kings

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Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis
Exo	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deu	Deuteronomy
2Ko	2 Korinthiërs
Jos	Joshua
Jdg	Judges
Rth	Ruth
1Sam	First Samuel
2Sam	Second Samuel
1Kgs	First Kings
2Kgs	Second Kings
1Chr	First Chronicles
2Chr	Second Chronicles
Ezra	Ezra
Neh	Nehemiah
Est	Esther
Job	Job
Psa	Psalms
Pro	Proverbs
Ecc	Ecclesiastes
Song	Song of Songs
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Lam	Lamentations
Eze	Ezekiel
Dan	Daniël
Hos	Hosea
Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos
Oba	Obadiah
Jona	Jonah
Mic	Micah
Nah	Nahum
Hab	Habakkuk
Zep	Zephaniah
Hag	Haggai
Zec	Zechariah
Mal	Malachi

New Testament

Mt	Gospel of Matthew
Mk	Gospel of Mark
Lk	Gospel of Luke
Jn	Gospel of John
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Rom	Letter to the Romans
1Cor	First Letter to the Corinthians
2Cor	Second Letter to the Corinthians
Gal	Letter to the Galatians
Eph	Letter to the Ephesians
Phil	Letter to the Philippians
Col	Letter to the Colossians
1Thes	First Letter to the Thessalonians
2Thes	Second Letter to the Thessalonians
1Tim	First Letter to Timothy
2Tim	Second Letter to Timothy
Tit	Letter tot Titus
Phlm	Letter to Philemon
Heb	Letter of the Hebrews
Jam	Letter of James
1Pet	First Letter of Peter
2Pet	Second Letter of Peter
1Jn	First Letter of John
2Jn	Second Letter of John
3Jn	Third Letter of John
Jude	Letter of Jude
Rev	Revelation

Explanation of general format

PERSONAL PRONOUNS are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

BRACKETS [] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

SHARP BRACKETS < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS** * are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

ALL CAPS in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

The Second Book of the Kings

As noted in the introduction to the first book of the Kings, the first book of the Kings and the second book of the Kings in the Hebrew Old Testament are one book. That both books form one book is clear from the transition from the first book of the Kings to the second book of the Kings. The second book of the Kings begins with the mention of the death of Ahab, of which the author of the two books of the Kings reports in the last chapter of the first book of the Kings (1Kgs 22:29-40). However, with this the first book of the Kings does not close. There follows a short report of the kingship of Jehoshaphat over Judah, probably because of his relationship with Ahab and Ahab's son. After that some more announcements are made about Ahaziah, who succeeds his father Ahab as a king over Israel. That ends the first book of the Kings.

A plausible reason for a separation in the histories in one great book of Kings may be that it would otherwise should become too large a book. It is more difficult to give a plausible reason for making that separation as it has been done. As a possible reason it has been suggested that the separation was done the way it was done with the one great book of Samuel. 2 Samuel begins with the mention of the death of Saul and the second book of the Kings begins with the mention of the death of Ahab.

The description of the course of the histories in the second book of the Kings is done in a way that is somewhat comparable to the way in which the writer presents the course of the histories in the first book of the Kings to us. The first book of the Kings begins with the blessing and wisdom of Solomon and ends with the follies of the kings of the northern tribes kingdom. The history of the ten tribes realm begins with Jeroboam, the 'trend-setter' for all the succeeding kings of that realm, and ends with Ahab, the king who completely apostatized from God.

The beginning of the second book of the Kings is essentially a record of the grace of God by Elisha for an apostate nation. Despite this grace, the people slide completely away from God. The second book of the Kings ends with the deportation of the ten tribes by the king of Assyria and the deportation of the two tribes by the king of Babylon.

2 Kings 1

Verse 1 | Moab Rebels Against Israel

| *1 Now Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab.*

After the death of Ahab, Moab rebels against Israel. Moab is indebted, but uses the change of power to withdraw from the power of Ahab's successor. As a result, a large part of the income of the king of Israel is lost (2Kgs 3:4). The purpose of mentioning this fact is probably to indicate that God's discipline is also felt politically and economically. If a king of God's people turns away from God, it is also at the expense of his power over the enemies of God's people.

Verse 2 | Ahaziah Wants to Consult an Idol

| *2 And Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper chamber which [was] in Samaria, and became ill. So he sent messengers and said to them, "Go, inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I will recover from this sickness."*

The way Ahaziah follows (1Kgs 22:52-53) brings God's discipline upon him. He falls out of the window and has to keep the bed. The fact that Ahaziah falls down from his upper chamber is opposite the way that Elijah is going, a way that is going higher and higher. In this chapter Elijah sits on a mountain and in the next chapter he is taken up into heaven.

Often the sickbed is the place where a person is given the opportunity to reflect on his way, an opportunity which God likes to use to point people to Himself. With Ahaziah things are different. His sickbed makes it clear on whom he places his hope. He turns to "the god of Ekron". Ekron is a city of the Philistines.

Ahaziah sends messengers abroad, to the Philistines, to consult one of their gods, Baal-zebub, which means 'lord of the flies'. He resorts to the demons to ask them how his illness will go. Ahaziah does not even ask whether the idol wants to heal him. He wants to know how he is going to end up. He asks for a prediction of the future. This is in direct contradiction with what God has said in His Word; this behavior is an abomination to Him (Deu 18:10-12).

A lot of people are working today in Ahaziah's way to satisfy their curiosity about the future. They do not resort to God's Word, but seek salvation with soothsayers, horoscopes and other occult means. All these occult occupations are extremely dangerous. People who do this surrender to devilish powers.

Ahaziah's action is an enormous insult to the LORD. Ahaziah completely ignores God. One of the worst things a person can do to another is to ignore him completely. This insult is suffered by God from the side of the leader of His people.

Verses 3-4 | The Word of the LORD for Ahaziah

3 But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, "Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and say to them, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel [that] you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?'
4 Now therefore thus says the LORD, 'You shall not come down from the bed where you have gone up, but you shall surely die.'" Then Elijah departed.

The LORD sends both in His indignation and in His faithfulness Elijah to the messengers with a word for Ahaziah. This way Ahaziah gets an answer sooner than he expects. Elijah must tell Ahaziah how the LORD sees his future. The messengers must convey the message. That message is the penetrating question: "Is it because there is no God in Israel ...? That is the question that should bring Ahaziah to repentance.

The Lord also wants, through all kinds of events that happen to us, always point out that He is there. He wants us to know that we can go to Him with everything. This also means that we should not set our expectations on people or gods to know how things will go.

Isaiah also once spoke to the people in a way similar to what we hear here of Elijah (Isa 8:19-22). In the days of Isaiah, the people resorted to spiritistic mediums, instead of accepting the signs and messages that God gives. Whoever does not believe in the Word of God seeks advice and help from other sources.

The LORD reproaches the people for this by asking two questions. The answer to these questions is contained in the question: "Should not a people consult their God? [Should they consult] the dead on behalf of the living?"

(Isa 8:19). These are questions that correspond to the question that Ahaziah is asked. Instead of consulting the living God, the dead idols are consulted, but behind those dead idols are evil spirits (1Cor 10:19-20).

Verses 5-8 | Ahaziah Recognizes Elijah

5 When the messengers returned to him he said to them, "Why have you returned?" 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 say to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Is it because there is no God in Israel [that] you are sending 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.'"" 7 He said to them, "What kind of man was he who came up to meet you and spoke these words to you?" 8 They answered him, "[He was] a hairy man with a leather girdle bound about his loins." And he said, "It is Elijah the Tishbite."

The messengers report on what Elijah has told them. It seems that they are not even aware that they have met Elijah. They talk about "a man". Ahaziah then asks what he looked like. They can describe that man. From the description, Ahaziah draws the correct conclusion that it is Elijah. He did not forget Elijah.

Elijah's clothing makes him a unique apparition. His clothes characterize him. He has a service of simplicity and therefore of strength. The clothes he wears carry that message, as it were. He does not walk in soft clothes, like the distinguished people (Mt 11:8). John the baptist is also characterized by the simplicity of his clothing and the simplicity of his food (Mt 3:4).

Can people also see from our attitude and behavior that we are not part of a world lying "in [the power of] the evil one" (1Jn 5:19)? Can they see that within a Christianity where everything is determined by man's thinking, we do not allow ourselves to be carried away by this thinking? Can God use us to give a clear testimony of Him, that He is there?

Verses 9-16 | Ahaziah Wants to Capture Elijah

9 Then [the king] sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him, and behold, he was sitting on the top of the hill. And he said to him, "O man of God, the king says, 'Come down.'" 10 Elijah replied to the captain

of fifty, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. 11 So he again sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he said to him, "O man of God, thus says the king, 'Come down quickly.'" 12 Elijah replied to them, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. 13 So he again sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. When the third captain of fifty went up, he came and bowed down on his knees before Elijah, and begged him and said to him, "O man of God, please let my life and the lives of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your sight. 14 Behold fire came down from heaven and consumed the first two captains of fifty with their fifties; but now let my life be precious in your sight." 15 The angel of the LORD said to Elijah, "Go down with him; do not be afraid of him." So he arose and went down with him to the king. 16 Then he said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Because you have sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebul, 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.'"

Ahaziah no longer has to go to the god of Ekron. He now knows where he stands with his illness. His sickbed will be his deathbed. Instead of accepting this and bowing before God, Ahaziah wants to kill Elijah. He believes in idolatrous superstition that he would break the curse – for that is how he sees Elijah's announcement – if he eliminates Elijah. He only looks at the instrument and not at God. He sends a captain of fifty with his fifty to Elijah to bring him to him.

The captain finds Elijah, who sits lonely on top of the hill. Elijah sits there in peace and quiet. He is on a hilltop, the right place for a man of God. It speaks symbolically of his separation from a godless environment and of being close to God. The captain speaks to him as "man of God". In doing so, he acknowledges who Elijah is. However, he does not bow down for him, but orders him to go with him by command of the king to eliminate.

Like the third captain, he could have bowed down and approached Elijah with the respect that suited him toward Elijah as a man of God. However, this is not the case with him. The captain is a guilty man and so are his

men. They could all have listened to the message of the man of God and had to resist Ahaziah in his wicked mission.

Elijah's response to the command of the captain consists of fire that he lets come down from heaven. The two times Elijah lets come down fire from heaven are the last acts of his service among the people. It is characteristic of its entire service, which is a service of judgment. In a way his service on the Carmel was lived without result, because the national revival that seemed to come on the Carmel did not take place. Then there was also fire from heaven. But that fire came down to the innocent sacrifice. Now the fire comes on people of God's people, but a people who in their leader have completely surrendered themselves to the Baal.

Two of the disciples of the Lord Jesus also once want to let come down fire from heaven. They ask the Lord for permission to do so (Lk 9:54). However, it is not a good question. The Lord Jesus forbids them, for His service is not a service of judgment, but of grace (Lk 9:55-56a). It is, during His life on earth, not yet the day of revenge, it is not yet the time for the exercise of judgment. That time will come. In the future, men will appear who let fire come out of their mouths to consume their enemies (Rev 11:5).

Apparently Ahaziah doesn't mind that fifty-one people of his army have been killed by God's fire. He remains unrepentant. Once again he sends a captain with his fifty. This man acts in the spirit of his predecessor and his king. He also calls Elijah "man of God", but he also lacks the corresponding reverence due to the man of God. He orders Elijah to come with him even more strongly than his predecessor. In the words "come down quickly" it is said that he sees Elijah as a troublesome, opposing child. That 'child' has already said 'no' once, but he shouldn't dare to do it again with him.

The man has not let himself be warned by the judgment of his predecessor. The same judgment strikes him. As the captain has ordered more strongly, the description of the judgment is also stronger. Now there is not only talk of "fire came down from heaven" (verse 10), but of "the fire of God came down from heaven" (verse 12).

Ahaziah remains unrepentant even after the death of the second captain with his fifty. He sends a third captain with his fifty. This man shows a

different mind. We see him bowing down before Elijah on his knees out of due respect for the man of God. He acknowledges the justice of judgment over his two predecessors. He realizes that only grace can save him and his fifties and appeals to that. Elijah receives a word from the LORD to go with this captain and not let the fire come down on him and his fifty.

When Elijah comes to Ahaziah, he has nothing else to say to him on behalf of the LORD but what Ahaziah already knew by what Elijah said to the messengers. God does not change His thoughts about a man if that man does not change his thoughts about Him.

Verses 17-18 | Death of Ahaziah

17 So Ahaziah died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken. And because he had no son, Jehoram became king in his place in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. 18 Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah which he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel?

With Ahaziah, after all that has happened, there is no sign of repentance. He dies in his sins. Ahaziah dies “according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken”. It testifies of the truth that God does not change His word. It also bears witness to the faithfulness of Elijah who spoke this word and no other word. This is also an important indication for us: we only must speak God’s Word.

Because Ahaziah has no son, his brother Jehoram becomes king in his place.

2 Kings 2

Introduction

Before Elijah is taken up to heaven, he and Elisha make a trip to some of the most famous places in Israel. He travels from Gilgal to Bethel, then to Jericho, and finally to the Jordan. Elisha later will visit all these places (2Kgs 2:18; 4:38; 6:2).

These places are known from the ancient history of the people of God:

1. Gilgal is the place of circumcision, the starting point for the conquest of the promised land (Jos 4:19; 5:9; 10:43).
2. We already know Bethel from the book of Genesis. It is the place where God reveals Himself to the patriarch Jacob and where He gives him His unconditional promises of blessing; Bethel is the place where God wants to live – Bethel means “house of God” (Gen 28:11-19; 35:1-4,14-15).
3. In Jericho, the LORD reveals Himself to Joshua as the Prince of the LORD’s army, the Commander of His army (Jos 5:13-15). Jericho is the great stronghold that prevents the Israelites from entering the promised land, but that falls for the power of Israel’s God (Jos 6:20-21).
4. The Jordan is the river that prevents the Israelites from entering the land, however of which the water are cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, so that all Israel can cross over on dry land (Jos 3:1,14-17).

Unfortunately in the days of Elijah and Elisha it is no longer the case that these places only bear witness to the great deeds of God. They have become much more monuments of the sinfulness of the people, places of degeneration and idolatry. Jeroboam has introduced the calf service, which originates from Egypt, in Bethel and in Dan (1Kgs 12:28-29). The prophets Hoshea and Amos condemn the idolatry cult in Bethel, together with that in Gilgal (Hos 4:15; 9:15; 12:12; Amos 4:4; 5:5).

Jericho is not well known either. It is the city of the curse, which according to God’s command should not have been rebuilt. In the days of Ahab

this happened anyway, still by a resident of Bethel. This man had to pay for his transgression of the word of the LORD with the lives of two of his sons (Jos 6:26; 1Kgs 16:34). It is remarkable that precisely this fact of the rebuilding of Jericho forms the link between Ahab's iniquities – it concludes the enumeration thereof (1Kgs 16:34) – and Elijah's sudden appearance as a prophet of judgment (1Kgs 17:1). It is as if the rebuilding of Jericho has reached the height of iniquity and the judgment of the people and their wicked ruler has become unavoidable.

As he walks along these places, Elia says goodbye to his earthly career. He will have thought of all that God has done for Israel, but also of Israel's decay and apostasy from their privileged position. God takes him in His glory outside the promised land, after he has travelled through the Jordan with Elisha. It seems that God cannot give him this homage in the land that has departed so much from Him.

His accession cannot take place in Gilgal, or in Bethel, or in Jericho, or on the landside of the Jordan. Elijah has to move on and on, until God takes him away from the earth in the wilderness side of the Jordan. We would almost say that it is a variant of what happened to Enoch. From Enoch we read that he "walked with God, and he was no longer, for God took him away" (Gen 5:24; Heb 11:5). Elijah pleases God, as Enoch did, and God honors him by taking him up to heaven, as He did with Enoch.

However, this last journey of the prophet is also of great significance for Elisha, who accompanies him faithfully and does not want to leave his side. For Elisha this long trip is on the one hand a good opportunity to prepare for the departure of his master and on the other hand a good introduction to his own career. Here we see him walking next to his honored master, whose work he must continue. He is not only Elijah's companion, but also his successor. If his master is in heaven, he must continue his task below.

This is an important lesson for us as Christians, who are connected with a Lord in heaven. We serve a glorified Lord and may "represent" Him here on earth. We do this in the power of the Holy Spirit Whom He has given us from heaven. As the spirit of Elijah rested upon Elisha, Christ has given us His Spirit, that we may be readable letters of Him (2Cor 3:2-3).

But we also need the necessary preparation to serve Him in a dignified manner. We will have to walk by His hand and follow Him where He leads us. Although Elisha is tested here three times, he remains inseparably on the side of Elijah (2Kgs 2:2,4,6). Together they move on and even go on dry land through the Jordan, the dead river. "So they both went on" (verse 6; cf. Gen 22:6,8; Rth 1:19).

When we walk with the Lord, He leads us step by step, from one "stop-place" to another. We then will, like Elijah and Elisha, consider the situation of God's people. We, in turn, will be confronted with the deep decay, the corruption that has entered into the midst of what is now the people of God on earth, the confessing Christianity.

Verse 1 | Taken Up to Heaven and Leaving Gilgal

1 And it came about when the LORD was about to take up Elijah by a whirlwind to heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.

The emphasis is on Elijah's ascension. Elijah is thus also a picture of the Lord Jesus Himself and of the believers of the church who will also go to heaven. In Elijah we see the fact that the Lord Jesus passed through death and resurrection and took His place in heaven. In Elisha we see a picture of the Lord Jesus who, through the Spirit of God, maintains on earth today a testimony before God. Elijah is replaced by Elisha. Elijah is also a picture of John the baptist, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus and Elisha a picture of the Lord Jesus Who comes with blessing after John, as Elisha comes with blessing after Elijah.

The testimony on earth is given in the Spirit of Him Who has gone to heaven. This testimony is often forgotten, but faithful are allowed to see and show it again in days of decay. Elijah has left the apostate people behind him by his passage through the Jordan, but Elisha returns to do a service that starts from heaven, as it were. In order to be able to perform this service properly, Elisha receives education based on the four places he travels along with Elijah.

The days of Elijah's ascension are the starting point for this education. The education shows what God has done and what the people have subsequently done with it. In every service it is important to know how God

thinks about the things we meet and also to see how man has dealt with them.

The “whirlwind” and the “fire”— a chariot of fire and horses of fire – in which the LORD takes Elijah up to heaven (verses 1,11), are phenomena that are more common in Old Testament. We see them in a revelation or personal intervention of the LORD God (Exo 3:2; 24:17; 1Kgs 19:11-12; Job 38:1; 40:1; Psa 18:8; 50:3; 104:3-4; Isa 30:27; 66:15; Eze 1:4; Zec 9:14).

However, these are not just impressive natural phenomena, which, incidentally, fit in well with Elijah’s character as a prophet of judgment. Whirlwind’ and ‘fire’ also represent angelic powers (Heb 1:7). Therefore we can imagine the taking away of Elijah as follows: the LORD Himself comes as the Ruler of His heavenly armies, surrounded by His mighty angels (cf. 2Kgs 6:17), to take up His faithful warrior in heaven.

What a tribute to Elijah. God takes him away, as He once did with Enoch and as He will soon do with the living who remain until the coming of the Lord. God takes him away so that he will not see death, but will enter heaven in in the twinkling of an eye (cf. Gen 5:24; 1Cor 15:51-52; 1Thes 4:15-18; Heb 11:5).

In Elijah we see the Lord Jesus returning to heaven and in Elisha we see that the Lord Jesus came to earth in the Spirit to give testimony. The testimony is given in the Spirit of Him Who ascended to heaven. Both aspects express the essence of Christendom, which is

1. a glorified Man in heaven and
2. God the Holy Spirit on earth.

True service is only possible as far as we have received an impression of the glorified Man at the right hand of God. The impression we have of this will characterize our testimony.

Elisha has accompanied Elijah all the way. He did not start his service until after the ascension of Elijah. It is in picture the way of the remnant that is traveling with the Lord Jesus and testifying in the power of the Holy Spirit. The remnant presented in the disciples who are on earth with the Lord Jesus forms the core of the church.

It does not say that Elisha goes with Elijah, but that Elijah goes with Elisha. It is in fact Elisha's way, but Elijah goes with him give him Divine teaching. It is the teaching that is needed for servants of God.

At the beginning of the chapter we are immediately informed of what is going to happen to Elijah: he will be taken up to heaven. Thus we hear early in the Gospel to Luke that the Lord Jesus is going to Jerusalem because "the days were approaching for His ascension" (Lk 9:51). Over the cross, that is His departure about which Moses and Elijah speak with Him on the mountain of glorification (Lk 9:30-31), the Holy Spirit directs the eye to His ascension into heaven.

Gilgal is the first place of education. In Gilgal the people have been circumcised (Jos 5:7-9). Gilgal is also the place from which the people depart for the conquest of Canaan. This has a spiritual meaning for us. We participate in the circumcision of Christ, because we are united with Him in the judgment that has struck Him in our place on the cross (Col 2:11). That is our 'Gilgal', and from there we may take possession of our heavenly inheritance in Christ. Gilgal means 'rolled away'. Spiritually it is the application of the death of Christ to our flesh. In the death of the Lord Jesus, God 'rolled away' from us the reproach of the world.

We need to know the unchanging wickedness of our flesh. That is where every true service begins for the servant. Without the lesson of Gilgal, that is to say the deep awareness of the unchanging wickedness of our flesh and God's judgment about it, we cannot serve. That Gilgal has become a place of idolatry and corruption has something to tell us. If the lesson of Gilgal is forgotten, Gilgal becomes the place of the revelation of the flesh. What God calls evil is then praised.

Verses 2-3 | The Lesson of Bethel

2 *Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here please, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. 3 Then the sons of the prophets who [were at] Bethel came out to Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he said, "Yes, I know; be still."*

When Elijah wants to leave Gilgal to go to Bethel, he says to Elisha to stay where he is, because the LORD sends him to Bethel. He seems to say that the LORD's commission is for him personally and that this does not mean that Elisha necessarily has to go with him. With this he places Elisha for a personal choice. Elijah does this at every subsequent location.

With this remark Elijah tests, as it were, the motives of his companion to go with him, whether he does so for Elijah, or whether he also sees a personal assignment from the LORD in it. Elisha passes the test with flying colors every time. He wants to learn the lessons that are connected to each place, so that the better he can serve the people of God as a man of God. Every time he accompanies Elijah without expressing a single reservation. Elisha goes with Elijah as Ruth used to go with Naomi (Rth 1:19).

Bethel speaks of the unchanging faithfulness of God, "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29). God was faithful to Jacob, the ancestor of Israel. He wanted to dwell with His people and have His 'Bethel', that means 'house of God', with them. Likewise, God is faithful to His heavenly people, the church of the living God. He wants and will also have His 'Bethel' with us.

The church is built to an eternal dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph 2:22; Rev 21:2-3). God will also reach His glorious final goal with us. This can never be undone by our unfaithfulness and our failure. It is good and necessary that we should always realize this, although we will also have to bow our heads ashamed of so many things that have crept in and that are dishonors of God, such as heresy, materialism, idolatry and sinful practices.

But what is left of what God meant by Bethel? Elisha observes that in Bethel a false religion has been established around a golden calf. The religion of the flesh has supplanted and replaced the true service to God. People have made their own houses of worship, according to their own ideas and shapes. A servant must see that too.

The right understanding of what the house of God is, is also of immeasurable importance today in order to be able to do a service. Abraham learned the lesson. He set up his tent and altar by Bethel (Gen 12:8). Jacob knew that place too, he met God there (Gen 35:9-15). There God teaches

about His faithfulness to His promises. In the application for us it means that servants are formed in the church. First learn what Gilgal means, the judgment of the flesh, and then learn what Bethel means, the house of God to know God as the God of the house of God.

At Bethel are also sons of the prophets, or student prophets (1Sam 10:5b; 19:20). At the schools of prophets in Bethel, and also in Jericho (verse 5), the 'students' have been taught about the taking up of Elijah. The students think they should inform Elisha about this, without having a connection with Elijah themselves. They speak to Elisha about Elijah not as 'our' lord, but as 'your' lord. They also notice that Elisha teaches things they don't learn at their school. They don't go along the way that Elisha goes with Elijah, but stand at a distance. The student prophets tell Elisha nothing new. Despite the fact that he cannot boast of training at an approved institute, he is aware of what will happen to Elijah. Elisha has no education, he only has his calling.

The expression 'take away ... from over you' indicates that Elijah is above Elisha and teaches him. This is also literally the case when Elisha is at his feet and Elijah therefore is standing over his head. Elisha will soon have to do his job independently without the instructions of his master.

Verses 4-5 | The Lesson of Jericho

4 Elijah said to him, "Elisha, please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. 5 The sons of the prophets who [were] at Jericho approached Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; be still."

Also in Bethel Elisha is tested to stay there. But he goes along to third place, Jericho. When they come at Jericho, Elisha should have seen ruins, for that is God's judgment he pronounced on that city. However, Jericho was rebuilt against God's command, and still by someone from Bethel (1Kgs 16:34). The power of the world, of which Jericho is a picture, still has great attraction for those who do not see the world as God sees it. The eyes must be open for it, because it seems as if Jericho is a flourishing city. In

the same way, Christianity seems to be a flourishing city, but faith sees that this is only a pretense. The power of godliness is denied there (2Tim 3:5a).

Also in Jericho is a school of prophet with student prophets who have a certain knowledge of future events. They also think they should inform Elisha about this. But is all. They don't go with Elisha. The truth they know has no effect on them.

They think they are telling something Elisha doesn't know yet. However, these truths are not primarily taught at theological colleges or bible schools, but by the Spirit of God. Pupil-prophets are at a distance. They are not idolaters, yet they do not know the true intentions of God.

Verses 6-8 | The Lesson of the Jordan

6 Then Elijah said to him, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." And he said, "As the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on. 7 Now fifty men of the sons of the prophets went and stood opposite [them] at a distance, while the two of them stood by the Jordan. 8 Elijah took his mantle and folded it together and struck the waters, and they were divided here and there, so that the two of them crossed over on dry ground.

Elijah is sent by the LORD to a different place each time and Elisha is again advised by Elijah not to go along. By saying this to him, Elijah puts Elisha to the test every time. Every time Elisha has to consider what he is doing and take his decision. He is not forced to go with Elijah. That he goes with him is his own choice. Happily Elisha has persisted until the end. He certainly did not regret that.

From Jericho the journey goes to the Jordan, to go through it outside God's land which has become an idolatrous land. They go through the Jordan, after Elijah has struck it with his mantle. The power of Elijah lies in his conduct, his walk – of which his mantle speaks – to the glory of God. After they have passed through the Jordan, Elijah can speak of blessing for Elisha. They are, as it were, outside the camp, like once Moses and Joshua (Exo 33:7-11). The blessing in connection with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus – of which the Jordan is a picture – lies outside the land.

Fifty student prophets did go along a part of the journey, but then still do not go through the Jordan. Thus the people gaze after Moses when he goes to the tent he has put up outside the camp, where Joshua is (Exo 33:8). Some Christians have an eye for what the different places represent, but who have no knowledge of having been died and risen with Christ. They do not enjoy the heavenly blessings that result from being placed in Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 1:3).

Verses 9-10 | Elisha's Question

9 When they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." 10 He said, "You have asked a hard thing. [Nevertheless], if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be [so]."

When they have come to the other side of the Jordan, Elijah says to Elisha he may make a wish. Elisha then asks for a double portion of the spirit of Elijah. With this he asks for something that belongs to the birthright (Deu 21:17). He badly needs this double portion as a confirmation of his service. Elisha desires Elijah's authority and strength to act as Elijah has acted. What Elisha wants and asks for is strength, so that he can be a true representative of Elijah when Elijah is absent. For us it is the power of the Holy Spirit to represent Christ, to live Him out (cf. Lk 24:49).

Elisha is aware that he is the successor of Elijah, his heir – much more so than the student prophets, who can be compared sometimes with nominal Christians, sometimes with ignorant believers. If we can call them heirs of Elijah at all, then Elisha is the 'firstborn son' who is entitled to a double portion of the inheritance. Elisha claims his birthright here, so to speak, after Elijah has given him the opportunity to make a wish just before his removal (verse 9a).

What is striking here is that Elisha does not wish to inherit wealth, honor or power, but a double portion of the spirit of Elijah. His request therefore resembles the plea of Solomon, who at the beginning of his task as king did not desire riches or power, but a wise and understanding heart to govern Israel (1Kgs 3:9,12). With this he shows that he has the right spiritual

attitude. The double portion is also reflected in his service: Elisha has performed about twice as many miracles as Elijah.

Elijah does not take it for granted that Elisha inherits a double portion of his spirit. He sees it as “a hard thing”, perhaps in the awareness that it is not a human being’s right and it is even impossible for a human being to communicate the Spirit of God to others. Elijah does not know whether Elisha’s wish can be fulfilled. Therefore he puts this matter in God’s hand with the following words: “If you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be [so]”. Elijah cannot give that double portion, but God can. He leaves to God what He will do.

Elijah makes the fulfillment of Elisha’s wish dependent on whether Elisha will be eyewitness of his rapture. The only question, then, is: Will Elisha focus his eye on Elijah? Will he accept the great challenge of Elijah going to heaven and simply keep his eye on him continuously when he goes?

It is the blessed reality to renounce oneself and everything and to see at Christ (Heb 12:2). When the eye renounces everything else and is only focused on Him, we find the power of the Holy Spirit in action. It’s that simple. Peter experienced this when he was walking on the water (Mt 14:29). Stephan also experienced it (Acts 7:56), as did Mo-six (Heb 11:27).

Verse 11 | Elijah Goes Up to Heaven

11 As they were going along and talking, behold, [there appeared] a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven.

The statement that they were “going along and talking” shows that they got to know each other’s thoughts and treated each other confidentially. Over the years a close relationship will have developed between the two men. A “the slave does not know what his master is doing” (Jn 15:15), but Elisha is well aware of what will happen to his “master” (verses 3,5). Elisha is also not at a distance like the student prophets (verse 7), who are not even mentioned as having personally spoken to Elijah that day (verses 3,5). He therefore emphatically calls Elijah “my father” when he says: “My father, my father! (verse 12).

We can learn a practical lesson from the way Elijah and Elisha treat each other. This is an example of how older and younger believers could and should interact with each other. Although Elisha's faithfulness is put to the test by his older companion, we also see here the harmonious union of an older servant of the Lord with a younger servant of the Lord. Elijah is the spiritual father of Elisha (verse 12), as Paul was of Timothy, whom he calls his "child" (1Tim 1:2; 2Tim 1:2). In this way young men of God are prepared for the task that awaits them.

So the condition is that Elisha is an eyewitness to the ascension of Elijah and that then his eyes will be opened by God Himself for the miracle that will take place. And indeed Elisha is allowed to see the taking away of his master and thus to look into the invisible world (verses 11-12; cf. 2Kgs 6:17). He sees how God sends a chariot from heaven, "a chariot of fire and horses of fire", to take Elijah – the faithful and lonely warrior for God's glory on earth – in His glory. Thus we also know that the Lord Jesus was taken up into heaven "while they were looking on" (Acts 1:9) and "sat down at the right hand of God" (Mk 16:19).

Verse 12 | Reaction of Elisha

12 Elisha saw [it] and cried out, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" And he saw Elijah no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

After rapture, Elijah's service ends and Elisha's service begins. After his calling, Elisha first stayed for a while in the shade, in the school of exercise of God. The task of Elisha begins with the question of a double portion, the question of the birthright. He is given this, because the condition was met that he would see Elijah go to heaven. It says emphatically here: "Elisha saw [it]".

Elisha calls Elijah "my father" and "the chariot of Israel and its horsemen". In doing so he says that he is the spiritual child of Elijah and that he sees in Elijah the whole power of the army of Israel concentrated. The spiritual power of God's people rests in times of decay, in the last days, not with the masses, but is present in the individual who is a man of God, man or woman. The Lord Jesus is in everything the true Man of God, the true Israel. He

went to heaven. Who, in His power, bear now witness before God in the midst of an apostate Christianity?

Elisha “saw Elijah no more”, just as we no longer see the Lord Jesus on earth. The Lord Jesus is now at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Paul also did not know Him any more according to the flesh (2Cor 5:16). Like Elisha, the (spiritual) Christian walks through the Spirit of the glorified Lord (Gal 5:25). Elisha is a picture of Christ coming to His people in the Spirit. The Lord Jesus said that after His going away He would come to His disciples: “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (Jn 14:18). This is happened when the Holy Spirit came to earth (Jn 14:16-17).

Then Elisha tears his clothes into two pieces. He is the man of grace, but he can only be because he radically deals with the old. We have already seen this when, after his calling by Elijah, he leaves his oxen and slaughters a pair of oxen and cooks their flesh on the wood of the yoke of the oxen (1Kgs 19:20-21). The tearing of his clothes means that Elisha put on side the old in order to put on the new (2Cor 5:17).

Verses 13-14 | Elijah’s Mantle

13 He also took up the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and returned and stood by the bank of the Jordan. 14 He took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him and struck the waters and said, “Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” And when he also had struck the waters, they were divided here and there; and Elisha crossed over.

Elijah could not take his mantle to heaven. Thus the Lord Jesus could not continue in heaven the service He had done on earth. He has surrendered it in the hands of His servants. That service would be greater, just as the service of Elisha is also greater than that of Elijah (cf. Jn 14:12). This service however does happen in the characteristics of the one who went to heaven. This also applies to us as servants who do the work of the Lord on earth. Our service should bear the features of Him Who is in heaven.

Elisha takes up the mantle. With this he actually steps into the service of the LORD instead of Elijah. He takes up, so to speak, the challenge of his calling to fulfill the service associated with it. With the taken up mantle he stands near the Jordan. He has previously been there with Elijah. Now

he is alone. Each servant can be pointed by another servant to the starting point of the service: the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The moment comes when he must stand alone there and realize that his service is only meaningful if it is connected to what the Jordan speaks of: a dead, risen and glorified Lord in heaven. The servant must always remain aware of this.

The mantle of Elijah has the same function in this history as the staff of Moses with his passage through the Red Sea (Exo 14:16) and the ark of the covenant on his entry into Canaan (Jos 3:13). Both with the staff and the ark and the mantle, the water must give way to the power of the God of Israel, who creates a path for those who belong to Him.

Elisha calls here the name of the LORD with the words “where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?” He knows that the miracle that divided the waters when he went through them together with Elijah (verse 8), did not occur by the power of Elijah. If he wants the waters to divide again, it is not by his own strength, but again by the mighty working of their God. In His power, these men of God could go a way that a man by nature cannot go.

Elisha does not compare with Elijah, but calls upon the LORD, the God of Elijah. That God has not changed. Elisha calls upon the God who was with Elijah, that that God may be with him. God also wants to support us with His power in the service we may do for Him. The God Who has given men of God strength will also give us strength.

Verses 15-18 | The Sons of the Prophets

15 Now when the sons of the prophets who [were] at Jericho opposite [him] saw him, they said, “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.” And they came to meet him and bowed themselves to the ground before him. 16 They said to him, “Behold now, there are with your servants fifty strong men, please let them go and search for your master; perhaps the Spirit of the LORD has taken him up and cast him on some mountain or into some valley.” And he said, “You shall not send.” 17 But when they urged him until he was ashamed, he said, “Send.” They sent therefore fifty men; and they searched three days but did not find him. 18 They returned to him while he was staying at Jericho; and he said to them, “Did I not say to you, ‘Do not go’?”

There is a great contrast between Elisha and the student prophets from Jericho, who in everything that has happened have remained at a distance and therefore have not been eyewitnesses to the ascension of Elijah (verses 7,15). The student prophets, both in Bethel and in Jericho (verses 3,5), are well informed about the impending event –perhaps by a prophetic revelation of which Elisha has also been informed. However, they did not see with illuminated eyes, like Elisha, how Elijah was triumphantly led to heaven. Only Elisha has had eyes opened for the rapture of Elijah.

However, the student prophets see something else. They notice with Elisha the consequences of what he has seen. The ascension of Elijah radiates, as it were, from him. Such a testimony will also radiate from us when people see in us the Spirit of the Lord Jesus. That will be if they through our actions will be reminded of Him (Acts 4:13). This Spirit does not rest on the student prophets of Jericho. They also did not see Elijah go to heaven. Christians who have no knowledge of a glorified Lord cannot show much of His Spirit, that Spirit Who bears witness of Him.

The student prophets feel that Elisha, so to speak, is spiritually above them. But they don't get any further. They do not ask why it is that the spirit of Elijah rests on him, and even less is there the desire to receive that same Spirit. Instead they do as Obadiah did before Elijah and bow down before him (1Kgs 18:7). They also reason exactly like Obadiah, who was afraid that the Spirit of LORD would suddenly move Elijah to another environment (1Kgs 18:12). They believe that the Spirit may have taken Elijah "up and cast him on some mountain or into some valley".

When they ask to search for Elijah, they show that their horizon is limited to the earth. They do not take into account a real taken up to heaven. In the same way there are people in our days who are characterized on the one hand by religious confusion and on the other hand by open idolatry. There are many well-intentioned confessors, who belong to the "prophets of the LORD" (1Kgs 18:13), but still think of earthly things. Unfortunately they have – at least in the practice of Christian life – no eye for a heavenly Christ (Phil 3:19-20; Col 3:1-4).

Elisha answers the question of the student prophets with a clear 'no'. Because they want to search anyway, he finally agrees. Their search shows

that they have not understood the truth of the ascension of Elijah. The action by fifty men of the student prophets of Jericho is both superfluous and in vain. Elijah is not found, just as Enoch in his days “was not found because God took him up” (Heb 11:5). It is possible that after the taking up of Enoch a futile search for him was organized; the words ‘he was not found’ may indicate this. When they return without any result, Elisha gently points out their unbelief to them.

Verses 19-22 | The Water of Jericho

19 Then the men of the city said to Elisha, “Behold now, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord sees; but the water is bad and the land is unfruitful.” 20 He said, “Bring me a new jar, and put salt in it.” So they brought [it] to him. 21 He went out to the spring of water and threw salt in it and said, “Thus says the LORD, ‘I have purified these waters; there shall not be from there death or unfruitfulness any longer.’” 22 So the waters have been purified to this day, according to the word of Elisha which he spoke.

Before we look more into detail to the miracles of Elisha, first a general remark about these miracles. When we see all the miracles in which Elisha is involved, there is a remarkable order to be discovered. The striking of the water of the Jordan is the first miracle of Elisha. His last miracle takes place when he has already died and lies in the grave. If a dead man is thrown into his grave, the dead man becomes alive (2Kgs 13:21). There is a similarity between the two miracles. They both have to do with death and resurrection. The Jordan is a picture of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the dead man thrown into the tomb of Elisha, becomes alive by the touch of Elisha’s bones. This is why his first and his last miracle belong together.

Several miracles in between seem to belong together two by two. In any case, there is a connection between the following six miracles. Thus, in the two miracles that now come to our attention first, the water of Jericho and the bears from the forest, we can see miracles that are related to nature, where one miracle is blessing and the other miracle is judgment. The next two miracles are about what is empty and is filled by the LORD: empty trenches and empty vessels are filled with water (the Word) and oil (Spir-

it) respectively. The following two miracles have to do with life from the dead.

The first revelation of grace in the service of Elisha takes place in Jericho, the city of the curse (Jos 6:26). What man has built up seems pleasant. The situation of the city is pleasant. But it remains the place of the curse, a place which, as we have already seen, has been rebuilt in rebellion toward God (1Kgs 16:34). Death reigns there and causes death. The men of the city go with their need to the man of God. With the words "behold now" they point out the situation to him to observe it with his own eyes. In this way they involve him in their situation.

Then Elisha acts. The prophet of grace comes to the place of death. He does not come to judge, but to give life. That is the hallmark of our time. God's patience still postpones judgment (2Pet 3:9b). God wants to give life, but does so on His own terms. It is only possible to escape death through the man of God, that is now the Lord Jesus.

Elisha says that a new jar with salt in it needs to be created. When God starts working in a place of the curse, He does so through something new and not through something that has already been used and is old. This symbolically represents that God does not restore the old nature, but makes a new beginning. He does not connect something new to something that is old (Mt 9:16). The salt speaks of "the salt of the covenant" of God with His people (Lev 2:13). Salt is preservative and spoilage. That is how it is with God's covenant that holds against everything. God keeps it in Christ, Who is the new Man. Only in Him is everything protective and perverse, in Him are all the promises of God yes and amen (2Cor 1:20). In Him we are a new shovel ping (2Cor 5:17).

The salt is thrown into the spring of Jericho. In the history of Christianity we see how the influence of Christianity has brought life and prevented corruption. We see this also in the lives of converted people. Its influence on the world around it is life. That is what the Lord Jesus means when He tells His disciples and tells us: "You are the salt of the earth" (Mt 5:13a).

Unfortunately, it must also be added that "the salt has become tasteless" (Mt 5:13b). Now we see how in Christianity the salt loses its strength. All Christian values and norms derived from the Bible are increasingly disap-

pearing from society and legislation. In the midst of increasing decay, the command of God for the faithful disciple, the man (man or woman) of God is, to show in marriage and family how He intended it. The Christian who does this has “salt in himself” (Mk 9:50b) and will speak words of grace that are “seasoned with salt” (Col 4:6).

Such a person is a true blessing to his surroundings and glorifies God in his life. He is a source that is healthy. Everyone with whom he comes into contact with will experience the healthy influence of it. The life of such a person does not give rise to death or unfruitfulness, but life. This is the result of acting “according to the word of Elisha which he spoke”. The word of the man of God is nothing but the word of God. We have nothing but the Word. If we speak according to the Word of God, there will be healthy spiritual growth.

We see in this event that Elisha brings grace and blessing to a place of judgment like Jericho. In the next chapters we will see that Elisha brings blessing for what in picture represents the future faithful remnant (2Kings 4) and that he has blessing for the nations (2Kings 5). Like the Lord Jesus, Elisha uses his power for the benefit of others and not for himself.

Verses 23-25 | Judgment on Mocking Boys

23 Then he went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up by the way, young lads came out from the city and mocked him and said to him, “Go up, you baldhead; go up, you baldhead!” 24 When he looked behind him and saw them, he cursed them in the name of the LORD. Then two female bears came out of the woods and tore up forty-two lads of their number. 25 He went from there to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.

There is in the service of Elisha not only grace. Three times he has also judged: here about mocking boys, about Gehazi (2Kgs 5:21-27) and about the officer of the king (2Kgs 7:1-2,17-20). After the Jordan and Jericho, the city of curse, Elisha sets off for Bethel, which means ‘house of God’. At the place of the curse blessing is brought. In connection with the house of God, judgment is brought.

Elisha goes on his way to Bethel, but he doesn’t get there. After his meeting with and judgment over the mocking boys he goes to Carmel. These boys

from Bethel have no respect for a servant of God. Such young people will not grow spiritually, but die. If young people have no respect for those who do God's work, the bears will do their tearing work with them. We may ask ourselves what kind of young people the local church produces where we are. The local church can be seen as a reflection of the house of God.

These "young lads" are not innocent little children. We have to estimate them so around fifteen years. They know what they say. What they say proves their contempt for the truth. Their appreciation of the truth is according to what became Bethel: the place where the golden calf stands and the Baal is worshipped. Thus Bethel has become a place where God has no place left.

"Baldhead" is a swearword and a judgment. It speaks of uncleanness (cf. Lev 13:40-44). By calling to Elisha to "go up" they mock the ascension of Elijah. They scold Elisha, they don't want him and they want him to leave. They can be compared to the mockers of the end time in which we live (2Pet 3:3-4). The ascension of the Lord Jesus has been abolished. There is no belief in His ascension and even less in His return to earth.

Elisha pronounces judgment. He does so "in the Name of the LORD". Thus will come the judgment of the unbelieving mockers. The young people from the Christian families, so to speak from 'Bethel', will be torn apart by ferocious and cruel female bears. David is compared to a bear who is robbed of young (2Sam 17:8; Pro 17:12; Hos 13:8). These female bears are tearing animals for boys who have no respect for life, for something that comes from God.

After this event Elisha goes to Carmel. On Carmel, Elijah's service has reached a climax. There, Elisha will have thought about Elijah's service. Then he goes to Samaria, where the king of Israel, Jehoram, lives.

2 Kings 3

Verses 1-3 | Jehoram King Over Israel

1 Now Jehoram the son of Ahab became king over Israel at Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years. 2 He did evil in the sight of the LORD, though not like his father and his mother; for he put away the [sacred] pillar of Baal which his father had made. 3 Nevertheless, he clung to the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin; he did not depart from them.

Jehoram became king after the death of his brother Ahaziah who was childless. Though he does what is evil in the sight of the LORD, he still puts away an abomination that his father has made. This does not go unnoticed by the LORD.

Although his wickedness was less bad than that of his parents, he “clung to the sins of Jeroboam. His perseverance in sin is underlined by the remark at the end of the verse: “He did not depart from them.” He remains an unbeliever.

Verses 4-5 | Moab Rebels

4 Now Mesha king of Moab was a sheep breeder, and used to pay the king of Israel 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams. 5 But when Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel.

The Moabites are great cattle farmers and have been subject to the kings of Israel for many years. This allows them to pay a large tribute. The death of Ahab is the reason for Mesha, king of Moab, to withdraw from the power of Israel (2Kgs 1:1).

Moab is a picture of (the lusts of) the flesh. He submits, but only for a short time and then rebels. That is always what the flesh does. Our flesh does not subject itself to God (Rom 8:7). It always desires wealth, power, prestige, pleasure. When the flesh comes to assert itself, we are losers.

Israel loses a lot when Moab rebels. These animals and their wool are blessings that God gives. If these blessings are enjoyed apart from God, they serve the flesh. If they are sanctified for God, they can be used to the glory of God. When Moab, the flesh, asserts itself, the lambs, the rams and the wool, the sacrifices, are lost for the service to God. In spiritual application, this means that the resemblance to the Lord Jesus (lambs) and the devotion that is beneficial to others (rams' wool) disappear. Wool also speaks of being cleansed of sins (Isa 1:18b).

Verses 6-8 | Jehoshaphat Is Willing to Help Jehoram

6 And King Jehoram went out of Samaria at that time and mustered all Israel. 7 Then he went and sent [word] to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, "The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go with me to fight against Moab?" And he said, "I will go up; I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses." 8 He said, "Which way shall we go up?" And he answered, "The way of the wilderness of Edom."

The loss of income due to the Moab rebellion leads Jehoram to mobilize an army. He wants to subject the Moabites to himself again. He also appeals to Jehoshaphat to go to battle with him. Josafat responds supportive to this request. In the same way, he also responded earlier to a request from Ahab to go along with him. He promises his cooperation with the same words he also spoke to Ahab (1Kgs 22:4).

Jehoshaphat seems not to have learned anything from what he experienced with Ahab. Believers learn difficultly from their experiences. Abraham and Isaac also made the same mistake twice. We are only surprised if we know ourselves badly.

Jehoram asks which way they shall go up. The not-spiritual believer Josafat advises to take a detour along the south side of Moab to attack him from that side. This also obliges the king of Edom, who at that time was subject to Jehoshaphat, to participate.

The answer to subject this rebellious king to the authority of the king of Israel again is not in the united armies of these three kings. In application this means that the flesh cannot be controlled by the flesh. That is a useless

and damaging waste of time. They must learn to call to God. This is where they will be brought to.

Verses 9-12 | Elisha Is Consulted

9 So the king of Israel went with the king of Judah and the king of Edom; and they made a circuit of seven days' journey, and there was no water for the army or for the cattle that followed them. 10 Then the king of Israel said, "Alas! For the LORD has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab." 11 But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not a prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of the LORD by him?" And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, "Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who used to pour water on the hands of Elijah." 12 Jehoshaphat said, "The word of the LORD is with him." So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

The three kings set off together. Then something happens that they haven't taken into account at all: after seven days there is a lack of water. If a believer goes out with unbelievers, this can only lead to a lack. On such a way God cannot give a blessing.

Jehoram reproaches the LORD about this. He never takes God into account, but if things go wrong, he blames God. That's how many people are today. Without water it is impossible to overcome Moab, the flesh. This is the situation in which the greater part of Christianity finds itself. They try to subject all kinds of expressions of the flesh that cause destruction. Without the water of God's Word, however, that is impossible.

Then it turns out that Jehoshaphat is a believer and thus distinguishes himself from Jehoram. He asks for a prophet of the LORD. Not Jehoram gives the answer, but one of his servants, one of the common people. Jehoram himself apparently does not know of the presence of a prophet of the LORD. The servant refers to Elisha who apparently has been gone with the army. The LORD will have made it clear to Elisha to join in.

Jehoshaphat knows him and knows that the word of the LORD is with him. The three kings go to him. Elisha hasn't been a target of kings, like Elijah. It is more so that their fate depends on him and that they come to him.

We see that here. Elisha is not called upon to appear before those men. It is the other way around. The great men of the earth go to the man of God.

Verses 13-19 | Elisha's Counsel

13 Now Elisha said to the king of Israel, "What do I have to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and to the prophets of your mother." And the king of Israel said to him, "No, for the LORD has called these three kings [together] to give them into the hand of Moab." 14 Elisha said, "As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look at you nor see you. 15 But now bring me a minstrel." And it came about, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him. 16 He said, "Thus says the LORD, 'Make this valley full of trenches.' 17 For thus says the LORD, 'You shall not see wind nor shall you see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, so that you shall drink, both you and your cattle and your beasts. 18 This is but a slight thing in the sight of the LORD; He will also give the Moabites into your hand. 19 Then you shall strike every fortified city and every choice city, and fell every good tree and stop all springs of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones.'"

Elisha is a man without fear. Without any respect for the high company he says to the king of Israel that he has nothing to do with him. There is no spiritual connection. He even says sarcastic that Jehoram should go to the prophets of his parents. Jehoram's answer is what he said earlier that the situation he is in, has been worked out by the LORD.

Elisha says once more and now more strongly that he doesn't want to have anything to do with Jehoram. The man remains wicked. The acknowledgement that the LORD has brought about the situation has not led him to repentance. All he wants is to get out of this miserable situation, nothing more. It is because Jehoshaphat is in this company that Elisha doesn't turn around and leaves. It seems, however, that he is so indignant by Jehoram's attitude and also by that of Jehoshaphat, that his mind must first come to rest. For this he needs melodious, soothing music.

Spiritual minded believers are not able to speak a word of the Lord in all circumstances. Sometimes such unrest may have arisen in the mind that it is necessary to come to rest first. There must be harmony in a situation of disharmony. This rest can sometimes be obtained by a melodious in-

strument. Christ is the heavenly harp player Who rest peace to troubled minds. Christ is the keynote to which every need in our lives can be at-tuned, so that the need can be borne and there is the prospect of a solution.

While the music sounds, Elisha comes to rest and the LORD's hand can come over him. Then he starts to speak and says what needs to be done. In the valley, a picture of the place of humility, trenches must be dug so that the trenches can be filled with water. Digging trenches so that they can be filled with water while there is drought speaks of faith. Digging speaks of taking away earth. Dirt that prevents water from entering the trenches must be removed.

Everything that can prevent water from flowing must be removed. In pic-ture this means that room must be made for the Word of God, of which water is a picture (Eph 5:26: Jn 15:3). The water is also a picture of the Holy Spirit (Jn 7:37-39). Room for the Word of God also means room for the Spirit. Word and Spirit always work together.

When trenches have been dug, they can be filled with water to save the kings and their armies and cattle. The more trenches, the more water. In that way they will be able to defeat Moab. What a lot of 'earth' sometimes needs to be removed from our lives and the local church before the living water of the Word can flow into our lives and the local churches.

The digging does not fill the trenches with water. All we can do is make room for the water. By a miracle of the LORD, by the faith with which the trenches are dug, these trenches shall be filled with water. There are no ac-companying, impressive signs, but when obstacles are removed, the way is cleared for the blessing of God. He will miraculously fill our lives, if they are lived in humility, with His presence.

The filling of the trenches with water is seen as a matter that is "a slight thing in the sight of the LORD" (verse 18). The grace of God goes even further. He will give Moab into their hand. If our lives are lived in the power of God's Word and God's Spirit, the result will be that the flesh is overcome. The victory will be total. God does not do half a job.

Verses 20-27 | Moab Slaughtered

20 It happened in the morning about the time of offering the sacrifice, that be-hold, water came by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water. 21

Now all the Moabites heard that the kings had come up to fight against them. And all who were able to put on armor and older were summoned and stood on the border. 22 They rose early in the morning, and the sun shone on the water, and the Moabites saw the water opposite [them] as red as blood. 23 Then they said, "This is blood; the kings have surely fought together, and they have slain one another. Now therefore, Moab, to the spoil!" 24 But when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites arose and struck the Moabites, so that they fled before them; and they went forward into the land, slaughtering the Moabites. 25 Thus they destroyed the cities; and each one threw a stone on every piece of good land and filled it. So they stopped all the springs of water and felled all the good trees, until in Kir-hareseth [only] they left its stones; however, the slingers went about [it] and struck it. 26 When the king of Moab saw that the battle was too fierce for him, he took with him 700 men who drew swords, to break through to the king of Edom; but they could not. 27 Then he took his oldest son who was to reign in his place, and offered him as a burnt offering on the wall. And there came great wrath against Israel, and they departed from him and returned to their own land.

The water begins to flow around the time that the morning grain offering is brought in Jerusalem. All blessings that God allows to flow are always based on the value that the Lord Jesus, of Whom the grain offering speaks, has for Him, and connected with Him. All things in the world are counted accordingly.

The Moabites only see what the Israelites do. They have no idea what is really happening. That can only be perceived by faith. The Moabites believe that the Israelites are getting ready to attack. That is why they are mobilizing all those who can fight, even if it is a little bit. They do not realize that this will make them beaten all the more profoundly. When they get up in the morning, they see the color of the water as the color of blood. They draw the wrong conclusion from this and think that they will achieve an easy victory and a lot of booty.

The waters that mean life for the three kings mean death for the Moabites. Thus the Passover in Egypt was a feast for Israel, but for the Egyptians it meant the judgment. In the same way, during the exodus from Egypt the cloud was light for Israel, but darkness for the Egyptians. The world and

the flesh know nothing of the things of God (1Cor 2:14). What is refreshment for God's people is death for the world.

The Moabites have exposed themselves and have become inattentive. When they discover what is really going on, it is too late. For them there is no escape from defeat. The Israelites do with Moab and his fields, water sources and trees according to the word of Elisha in verse 19. Through the refreshment of the water they can destroy Moab's power sources. The offspring of the flesh, which comes forth from the flesh, also dies. The only way to get the flesh down is through the Word of God-applied by the Spirit of God.

The king of Moab still tries to break through to reach the Edomites and possibly with them to form an alliance. However, he does not succeed in breaking through. He even comes into such need that he sacrifices his successor to the throne, perhaps a young man, to his god Chemosh. Perhaps he could be softened by this sacrifice in order to offer a solution.

The great wrath it causes against Israel comes from the LORD. The cause of this is the Israelites' desire for revenge, which is so great that Mesha comes to this atrocity. They have forgotten that the LORD has proven mercy to them. They take revenge in a disproportionate way and thereby present the God of His people as an unmerciful God. This false representation of God cannot go unpunished. How His wrath is expressed is not mentioned. However, it becomes clear to the people that they no longer must stay in Moab and return to their own country.

2 Kings 4

Introduction

There is much 'death' in this chapter: a student prophet (verse 1); the husband of the Shunammite, in his dead body (verse 14); the son of the Shunammite (verse 20); death in the pot (verse 40). There is also a lot of life in this chapter, because death is always followed by life. Not death has the last word, but life.

Verse 1 | A Widow Comes to Elisha

1 Now a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD; and the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves."

The history of the widow's oil and the history of the three kings in the previous chapter are both about debtors. Mesha had to pay tribute and the woman also has to pay a debt. The difference is that the king of Moab could pay, but did not want, while the woman wants, but she can't, because she is poor.

The previous history is about three people, three kings, namely the king of Israel, Jehoram, the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, and the king of Edom. This history is also about three people, namely the widow and her two sons. There is despair in both histories. The kings threaten to die due to lack of water and therefore appeal to the man of God. Then Elisha appears and helps. The woman calls on him and he comes and helps. Both histories end with a son. In the first one a son is killed, in the second there is life for two sons.

In the first history the man of God orders to dig trenches, empty trenches. This required a lot of hard work. In the second the woman has to collect empty vessels. This also requires hard work. In both histories what is empty is filled, but with a different content. The trenches are filled with water, the vessels are filled with oil.

Water is a picture of the Word of God. This is how it is applied in the previous chapter. However, water is also a symbol of the Spirit of God, just like oil. Water and oil as a picture of the Holy Spirit we see in the “streams of living water” (Jn 7:39) and in the “an anointing from the Holy One” (1Jn 2:20). Water and oil represent different aspects of the work of the Spirit. How the Spirit works we see for example in the Gospel of Luke where we meet people filled with the Spirit: John, Elizabeth, Zacharias, Simeon (cf. Eph 5:18b).

A widow comes with her need to Elisha for a solution of her need. She reminds Elisha to her husband as someone he knew. She testifies of him that he knew him as faithful and obedient to the Word of God. His wife and children followed him in it. The man feared God.

A widow is a needy person (cf. Jam 1:27a), someone who is dependent on the LORD. The woman tells him her situation. Elisha does not contest the creditor’s right. In the person of the woman it is about a believer who is in miserable circumstances. She is a picture of a believer under the law. The law leads the spiritual life to slavery.

This is about the righteousness of the flesh, the claims of the law, the slavery of the flesh. The sons are threatened to be made slaves. In Acts 15 we read about an attempt to subject the believers to the law and how the apostles react to it (Acts 15:1-31; see also the letter to the Galatians). The law is opposed to the freedom of the Spirit.

Verses 2-4 | Counsel of Elisha

2 Elisha said to her, “What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?” And she said, “Your maidservant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil.” 3 Then he said, “Go, borrow vessels at large for yourself from all your neighbors, [even] empty vessels; do not get a few. 4 And you shall go in and shut the door behind you and your sons, and pour out into all these vessels, and you shall set aside what is full.”

The woman is poor, but she still has a jar of oil. She thinks it’s nothing, but if she brings this to the man of God, she can satisfy the creditor’s claim. Through the Spirit, from Him speaks the oil, the believer can meet the requirement of the law (Rom 8:4). And the woman can live by “what re-

mains". She doesn't know all this yet, but we see it in the course of this history.

There is still a nice lesson to be learned from the jar of oil that the woman possesses. It is not much, but she brings it to the man of God so that the little bit of oil becomes a large stream of oil. It is the same for us. If we go to the Lord with what we have, He will use it for our blessing. We see such a thing with the staff of Moses (Exo 4:2), with the widow in Zarephath (1Kgs 17:12-14) and with the boy with the five loaves and two fish (Mk 6:38). So each of us has a jar of oil. The jar is a picture of our body and the oil represents the Holy Spirit. We have enough through the Spirit Who dwells within us to fulfill all the claims of the law (Rom 8:4). Through the Spirit God can do great things.

Elisha asks the woman for her cooperation. What he asks, appeals to her faith in what the man of God says. She will experience that the LORD gives blessing when faith is present. The woman is urged to think of others. At first she is only occupied with herself. Now Elisha says, as it were: 'Look at the need around you and you forget yourself. The Lord Jesus says to His disciples: "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest" (Jn 4:35b). We have that here. The woman starts to get interest for her surroundings. In the execution of her assignment she engages her sons.

To do what the man of God says, she must go inside and close the door behind her. Who is discouraged can pray in the inner room. In prayer, the 'neighbors', in whom we can see unbelieving family members and colleagues, for example, can be brought inside. That will be a blessing for all for whom we pray. What the Lord gives in faith are not scenes for the public, but takes place in faith in the inner room (cf. Mt 6:6). The result is seen in public.

Verses 5-7 | The Miracle of the Oil

5 So she went from him and shut the door behind her and her sons; they were bringing [the vessels] to her and she poured. 6 When the vessels were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another vessel." And he said to her, "There is not one vessel more." And the oil stopped. 7 Then she came and told the man of

God. And he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt, and you [and] your sons can live on the rest."

The vessels have all been different in size, shape and use. They are all equal in one thing: they are all empty. You can't get anything out of an empty vessel, you can only do something in it. This is the way in which the sinner can come to God. Every sinner is different, but if he is empty of himself, God can fill him with His Spirit.

As long as vessels are added, the oil continues to flow. Similarly, every request of Abraham concerning Sodom is answered by the LORD (Gen 18:23-32). On the other hand, it is also a serious word. The grace of God continues to flow until the last vessel is filled, until the last sinner has converted to be added to the church. After that the flowing stops and it is no longer possible to convert.

The flowing stops when there is no more vessel. We must have the courage to ask a lot. It shall be done to you according to our faith (Mt 9:29). Much faith, much blessing. The woman always has enough oil to fill all the vessels. When there are no vessels left, it is the end of the slavery of the flesh. It is not about a big or small gift, but about using the little oil we have. It is the Spirit Who is given to each of us through whom we can pray – not for our own sake, but – for others. Forgetting ourselves and thinking about others is a basic principle of being a Christian (Phil 2:4-5,25-26). People are interested in things, God is interested in people. Faith will join God in this.

The woman is also a picture of the faithful remnant in the end time. The Spirit will be poured out on the remnant and also on all who will enter the kingdom of peace. All flesh (all vessels) will be filled with God's Spirit (Joel 2:28a).

The oil is sold to spread blessing elsewhere. The proceeds are used to pay the debt. The surplus is sufficient for the rest of her life to show the fruit of the Spirit. When the man of God says that she and her sons "can live on the rest", he means life in the full sense of the word. He wants them to rejoice in life as a gift from God.

For us, it means a life lived in the power of the Spirit with an eye on the Lord Jesus in glory. This allows us to enjoy the victories that result from His work on the cross and His glorification in heaven.

Verses 8-11 | A Room for Elisha

8 Now there came a day when Elisha passed over to Shunem, where there was a prominent woman, and she persuaded him to eat food. And so it was, as often as he passed by, he turned in there to eat food. 9 She said to her husband, "Behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God passing by us continually. 10 Please, let us make a little walled upper chamber and let us set a bed for him there, and a table and a chair and a lampstand; and it shall be, when he comes to us, [that] he can turn in there." 11 One day he came there and turned in to the upper chamber and rested.

If we let the Holy Spirit work, if we "live on the rest" (verse 7), it means that we learn to know the power of the resurrection. We see that in this history. "Live on the rest" means living on the riches of the Spirit. We see that in the Shunammite. The poor widow of verse 1 has become a prominent or rich woman, a woman of stature. However, she lacks something and that is a son. There is love, there are maternal feelings, but there is nobody to whom she can express those feelings. Now the lesson is taught that the spiritual riches can be enjoyed on the basis of death and resurrection.

The woman has the heart in the right place and is hospitable. Elisha likes to make use of her hospitality. Elijah was the man of loneliness. Elisha is a man of company. It is a blessing for Elisha to have a house where he is welcome in the deadly climate of godless Israel. Thus the Lord Jesus has a house on earth in Bethany where He is welcome and in Mary a woman who understands Him.

Several people play a role in this history, all different, and from all these people we can learn:

1. The *mother* has care for people, for Elisha and her son. In the church are people who care for others.
2. Elisha is the *teacher*, the man with the Word of God.
3. Gehazi is the *servant*.
4. We can see the *boy* as a picture of young people in the church.
5. The *father*, a man who does not take responsibility, represents the carnal believer, the man of outward faith.

The woman has spiritual discernment. She has discovered that Elisha is a man of God and that he is holy. That also says something about the walk, the behavior of Elisha. He lives a life devoted to God. That is why she grants him a separate room. She no longer wants him as a visitor, but as a continuous guest. Thus it is a desire of Christ that we should not have Him as a Visitor of our heart and life, but as a constantly present Guest.

She talks to her husband about her plan, with which she acknowledges him as her head. The woman lets make a separate room on the roof, with a sober interior. She doesn't overload him with all sorts of benefits. Therefore, so to speak, Elisha will not be tempted to go to this house because of the abundance he gets there all the time.

The small upper chamber is a type of faith exercises of the church, which is presented by a house. In the inventory we can also see a spiritual meaning:

1. A "bed" speaks of rest. Christ gives rest. The sound doctrine gives rest.
2. A "table" speaks of fellowship.
3. A "chair" is to sit and study, to receive education and also to pass on teaching.
4. The "candlestick" speaks of education by the Holy Spirit and the spreading of light.

Verses 12-17 | Elisha Promises the Woman a Son

12 Then he said to Gehazi his servant, "Call this Shunammite." And when he had called her, she stood before him. 13 He said to him, "Say now to her, 'Behold, you have been careful for us with all this care; what can I do for you? Would you be spoken for to the king or to the captain of the army?'" And she answered, "I live among my own people." 14 So he said, "What then is to be done for her?" And Gehazi answered, "Truly she has no son and her husband is old." 15 He said, "Call her." When he had called her, she stood in the doorway. 16 Then he said, "At this season next year you will embrace a son." And she said, "No, my lord, O man of God, do not lie to your maidservant." 17 The woman conceived and bore a son at that season the next year, as Elisha had said to her.

Elisha wants to express his gratitude for what the woman does for him. To this end, he has the means and influence at higher authorities. When he suggests to her that to use these resources and influence for her benefit, she rejects that offer, with the motive: "I live among my own people. The woman also has with all her beautiful qualities that she is contented. She is content to live among her own people, who are God's people. With her is present the rare combination of godliness and contentment (1Tim 6:6).

Elisha asks his servant what she lacks. Gehazi appears to know her hidden wish. He also knows that this wish can no longer be fulfilled humanly. He informs Elisha of this. The reaction of Elisha is beautiful. He acknowledges the appropriateness of what Gehazi has noted. He uses the information of his servant who later proves to be a bad servant. Bad people sometimes have a good insight into situations in which even a man of God apparently has no insight. He commands Gehazi to call the woman. Gehazi obeys and the woman comes.

Elisha knows God's thoughts. He promises her that in a year's time she will embrace a son (cf. Gen 18:14). The woman cannot believe it, but the word of the man of God comes true. The boy is born by the word of God from the mouth of the man of God. It is an act of God. Isaac, Samson, Samuel, and John were all born through God's intervention.

Verses 18-20 | The Death of the Son

18 When the child was grown, the day came that he went out to his father to the reapers. 19 He said to his father, "My head, my head." And he said to his servant, "Carry him to his mother." 20 When he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her lap until noon, and [then] died.

When the boy has grown up, he goes out, to his father and to the reapers. His stay on the field caused him a headache. It is not a common headache, but an unbearable pain. He goes with his pain to his father. His father, however, does not have interest in the boy. All the father does is order a servant to bring his son to his wife.

In the church there are those who have no interest in youth. They quickly deduce something and give commands to others. He is an old man (verse 14) and a man of traditions (verse 23). There is no life in him. His wife

doesn't seem to trust him either. We can deduce this from the rest of history.

The mother is not only "prominent" with regard to material possessions, she is not only materially a rich woman, she is also rich in spiritual insight. She has discernment and sees things for which her husband is blind. She takes her son "on her lap". Do we take our children on our lap, do we pray for them? While she has her son on her lap, he dies. This causes deep exercises in the woman. The mercies and gifts of God are not without a deep trial for faith.

Verses 21-28 | The Woman Brings Her Need to Elisha

21 She went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut [the door] behind him and went out. 22 Then 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 return." 23 He said, "Why will you go to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath." And she said, "[It will be] well." 24 Then she saddled a donkey and said to her servant, "Drive and go forward; do not slow down the pace for me unless I tell you." 25 So she went and came to the man of God to Mount Carmel. When the man of God saw her at a distance, he said to Gehazi his servant, "Behold, there is the Shunammite. 26 Please run now to meet her and say to her, 'Is it well with you? Is it well with your husband? Is it well with the child?'" And she answered, "It is well." 27 When she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught hold of his feet. And Gehazi came near to push her away; but the man of God said, "Let her alone, for her soul is troubled within her; and the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me." 28 Then she said, "Did I ask for a son from my lord? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me?'"

The death of her child does not make the woman desperate. She takes him to the bed of the man of God, which thereby becomes a deathbed. This is the most beautiful place in the house. She closes the door. It is like with our children being baptized. In their baptism they are identified with the death of the Lord Jesus (Rom 6:3).

The death of her child does not make her passive, but active. She does not reconcile herself to the fact that her child has died, but she wants to go to the man of God who promised her this child. Before she goes, she tells her

husband that she is going to the man of God. Her husband is not following her. He only asks a question and also establishes that there is no reason to go to the man of God. He feels no need and thinks only in terms of religion.

The man represents people who can only think of God in connection with special days and fulfilling religious obligations. He is someone with an orthodox belief without life. The woman cannot share her grief with her husband. At his request, she informed him that it is “well”. She knows that she will find no understanding with him for her grief and for the path of faith she takes therein.

Then she goes on her way to the man of God. She does not do this at a quiet pace, but in a hurry. The child has died. For him this urgency is not necessary. Her need is great and also her confidence in the help of the man of God. That’s why she hurries. When Elisha recognizes her from afar, he sends his servant Gehazi to her to ask her if she, her husband and her child are well. The woman answered Gehazi’s questions politely, but was not satisfied with the servant. She also says to him that it is “well”, because she knows that even he can’t understand her if she tells him her need. She also knows he wouldn’t be able to help her. Her faith is only content with the man of God.

The woman overcomes two obstacles for faith. The first obstacle consists of the religious obligations of the natural man we see in her husband. The second obstacle is the behavior of Gehazi. In Gehazi we see someone who presents himself as the protector of what he sees as appropriate behavior towards the man of God, missing the faith of the man of God. Both obstacles are expressions of orthodoxy without life.

When the woman is at Elisha, she throws herself at his feet and seizes them. Then Gehazi does what the disciples did when they rebuked those who brought children to the Lord Jesus (Mt 19:13-14). It is easier to expel people from incomprehension than to gauge hearts full of grief. Just as the Lord Jesus stood up for the children, Elisha stands up for the woman.

But he is not like the Lord Jesus Who knew everything. Elisha also had to learn a lesson. A man of God is always in the school of God. Someone who brings the Word of God does not always have all the answers. After his acknowledgment that he does not know what the woman is concerned

about, the woman speaks. She does not say outright that her son has died, but expresses her shocked confidence.

Verses 29-31 | Elisha Sends Gehazi

29 Then he said to Gehazi, "Gird up your loins and take my staff in your hand, and go your way; if you meet any man, do not salute him, and if anyone salutes you, do not answer him; and lay my staff on the lad's face." 30 The mother of the lad said, "As the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." And he arose and followed her. 31 Then Gehazi passed on before them and laid the staff on the lad's face, but there was no sound or response. So he returned to meet him and told him, "The lad has not awakened."

Elisha sends Gehazi with his staff to bring back the boy to life again. He also instructs him not to let himself be held up by a salutation along the way. An oriental salutation is an extensive affair and would cause long delays. Apparently, Elisha has to learn even more. He also has to learn that his staff only has meaning when it is in *his* hand, the hand of the man of God.

The woman is also not content with a staff in the hand of the servant. She is in faith with the LORD who lives and with His prophet who is connected with the living LORD and thus lives also himself. She seeks life. With this she persuades Elisha to go with her and follow her on her way to her child.

Gehazi does everything that has been said to him, but there is no result. It goes with Gehazi as it has gone with the disciples who could not heal a lunatic boy (Mk 9:18b). The reason for this is that in his heart there is a desire for earthly riches, as the end of the next chapter shows. That excludes personal strength of faith. With him everything is outwardly as it should be, but inwardly there is a denial of the power of faith (2Tim 3:5a).

Verses 32-37 | Elisha Raises the Boy

32 When Elisha came into the house, behold the lad was dead and laid on his bed. 33 So he entered and shut the door behind them both and prayed to the LORD. 34 And he went up and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth and his eyes on his eyes and his hands on his hands, and he stretched himself on him; and the flesh of the child became warm. 35 Then he returned

and walked in the house once back and forth, and went up and stretched himself on him; and the lad sneezed seven times and the lad opened his eyes. 36 He called Gehazi and said, "Call this Shunammite." So he called her. And when she came in to him, he said, "Take up your son." 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.

Here speaks the simplicity of the approach of the man of God and his dependence on the LORD. He does not seek publicity, but the LORD. The man of God identifies himself with the dead boy. He makes himself one with his words ("mouth"), with his insights ("eyes") and with his actions ("hands"). That makes the boy warm. His life returns in him.

Elisha also walks in the house "once back and forth". The application has been made, that he did so to see if somewhere in the house there was a possible reason for the death of the boy. We too must regularly walk "back and forth" in our homes to see if things have come into our families that are spiritually damaging to our children and can even make them averse to faith. Let us pray that the Lord opens our eyes to these things and that we radically remove them out of the house.

For the third time the woman is called. Now she gets her son back by resurrection (Heb 11:35a). Her first reaction is worship of the LORD. Then she takes up her boy. She gets him back from the dead in the resurrection. She now owns her son in resurrection life.

Verses 38-41 | Death Removed From the Pot

38 When Elisha returned to Gilgal, [there was] a famine in the land. As the sons of the prophets were sitting before him, he said to his servant, "Put on the large pot and boil stew for the sons of the prophets." 39 Then one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine and gathered from it his lap full of wild gourds, and came and sliced them into the pot of stew, for they did not know [what they were]. 40 So they poured [it] out for the men to eat. And as they were eating of the stew, they cried out and said, "O man of God, there is death in the pot." And they were unable to eat. 41 But he said, "Now bring meal." He threw it into the pot and said, "Pour [it] out for the people that they may eat." Then there was no harm in the pot.

In this history we learn to appreciate what valuable food is by first experiencing what is worthless, yes, life-threatening food. There is famine in the land, but Elisha tells his servant to put a large pot on the fire. In this time of scarcity, the man of God wants to prepare a feast meal. He wants to feed the student prophets with good food.

One of the student prophets goes to the field to get ingredients for the stew. He comes back with his lap full of wild gourds. He slices the gourds (which means he sees how they look inside) and puts them in the stew pot. It may have been watched by others, for it says that “they did not know [what they were]”. Together they are responsible for an ill-considered addition to what the man of God has already done in the pot.

What is happening here illustrates the danger for which Paul warns in his letter to the Colossians. The Colossians do not want to replace the Lord Jesus with something else, but they want to add something to it. They want to add human philosophy to all the treasures of wisdom that are their part in Christ. Doing something like this means death in the pot.

The result is that where life should be, death is present. The personal contribution is not innocent, but turns out to be deadly. The spiritual downfall is the result of what we want more than God gives us. Paul is the man of God who puts the large pot before the Colossians, but of which healthy food is spoiled by what the Colossians add to it.

The man of God knows how to remove death from the pot: by adding something to it that overcomes death. The gourds cannot be removed, but something can be added that eliminates the danger. Meal must be added. This represents in picture the introducing of the Lord Jesus into the lives of believers. That makes death give way and makes life visible.

Verses 42-44 | Multiplication of the Loaves

42 Now a man came from Baal-shalishah, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley and fresh ears of grain in his sack. And he said, “Give [them] to the people that they may eat.” 43 His attendant said, “What, will I set this before a hundred men?” But he said, “Give [them] to the people that they may eat, for thus says the LORD, ‘They shall eat and have

[some] left over.” 44 So he set [it] before them, and they ate and had [some] left over, according to the word of the LORD.

A man comes to Elisha with “bread of the first fruits”. According to what the law says about ‘first fruits’, the man would have brought these loaves to the priests in Jerusalem (Deu 18:4-5). By bringing them to Elisha, the man acknowledges Elisha as the true representative of God in the land. He does not want to bring these first fruits to priests who have defiled themselves by mixing the worship of the LORD with the worship of the Baal.

This man is possibly one of the faithful among the general apostacy, one of the 7,000 who did not bend their knees before the Baal (1Kgs 19:18). Thus we still encounter people from Baal-shalishah today, people who do not go with the apostate Christianity, but instead serve the Lord faithfully and bring their gifts to Him.

The loaves are barley loaves. That reminds us of the Lord Jesus as the bread of life. The feeding of Lord Jesus of about 5,000 men is done with “five barley loaves and two fish” (Jn 6:9). Isn’t it telling that in John 6 further on, in connection with the food, He speaks extensively about Himself as the “bread of life”? Because these are “first fruits”, we can link them to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. These breads speak of the Lord Jesus in the resurrection. He is the fruit of the heavenly land. In the picture this man sets his mind on “the things above” (Col 3:1). With that he comes to the man of God. Thus we may go to the Lord Jesus with all we have seen and enjoyed of Him.

The loaves are given to Elisha. However, he does not use them for himself, but to feed others with them. He shares the loaves with those who are with him to listen to him. They also are invigorated and strengthened by them. Elisha knows the value of them. The twenty loaves of bread seem to be too little to feed a hundred men, but in a miraculous way it becomes more than enough. This does not happen because Elisha adds salt or flour to it or by stretching himself over it – we saw this in earlier miracles – but by speaking the word of the LORD. As a result, the loaves are sufficient for all those who are with him to eat from it. By the man of God it becomes enough and even have some left over.

If we start distributing what we first brought to the Lord Jesus, we will never get short. All are satiated and have so much that they can distribute to others. This is what we also see in the multiplication of the loaves by the Lord Jesus (Mt 14:20-21; 15:37-38).

2 Kings 5

Introduction

The history of Elisha is not so much characterized by many words, but more by actions. But also those actions – which are pictures with a meaning, they express something – speak a clear language. This is also the case in this history. In 2 Kings 4 we see the prophet among the people of God. The lessons there are for the believers for their spiritual growth.

In 2 Kings 5 the prophet goes to work outside the people of God, for he is the prophet of grace, and grace is not limited to Israel (Lk 4:27). There are many lepers in Israel at that time, as the Lord Jesus says. That is a shocking picture of the uncleanness and corruption of the people. No one of the people is cleansed of his leprosy, because no one appeals to God's grace. Without any claim, the pagan Naaman is cleansed and healed. Only God can do that. His grace extends to those who are outside His people.

Verse 1 | The Great Naaman

1 Now Naaman, captain of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man with his master, and highly respected, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man was also a valiant warrior, [but he was] a leper.

Naaman is a great man in the world. Moreover, the LORD has involvement with him. He has achieved victories which the LORD has given him. God is already busy with this man. However, he has a big problem. In all his distinction, prestige and riches he is leprous. No matter how great a person is in the eyes of other people, in the eyes of God he is leprous, sinful.

We see here that God governs the whole world. He is not only the God of Israel. He has a special connection with Israel, but that does not mean that He has nothing to do with the nations. Although since the flood He has let the nations go on their own ways (Acts 14:16) and has no direct involvement with them, He is the One Who has the course of all world events in His hand and directs them. He leads everything to His goal.

Verses 2-3 | A Little Girl

2 Now the Arameans had gone out in bands and had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel; and she waited on Naaman's wife. 3 She said to her mistress, "I wish that my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy."

Verse 2 forms a great contrast with Verse 1. In verse 1 we see the great world, in verse 2 the circumstances of the life of a little girl. Naaman is "highly respected", the girl is "a little girl". The whole story of this chapter is 'made' by this little girl, whose name we don't even know. But God has a plan with the life of this girl. He wants to use her for the healing of Naaman. So he uses everything for His purpose, also the wrong deeds of people, like robbing this girl.

The great man depends on a little girl for his curing. She does not seek revenge, but wants to do good. She does something very simple. She does not give a sermon, but refers to the man of God. This way we can take people to meetings where God's Word is brought or to people who bring God's Word. She has not experienced that Elisha has cured a leper, but she has faith and she knows that there is a man of God. How many times a child's finger has pointed an adult the right direction.

The girl must have experienced a lot. It will happen to you that you will be taken as booty by hostile men. Maybe she has seen her parents killed. She was taken away, without a chance to ever return home. Everything that is of value to a child is only a memory for her. Such a memory can be a torment in a situation like hers. All her dreams about a bright future have been shattered. She is the slave of the wife of the general of the hostile country. What she has experienced is all able to embitter her.

She could have watched the leper Naaman with an intense sense of gloating. With intense satisfaction she could observe this evildoer, the destroyer of her life, die a slow death. However, this is not the case with her. She seems to come from a God-fearing family, a 'remnant' family. She knows the prophet Elisha and knows that God's power works through the prophet. Instead of seeking revenge, she is seeking the welfare of her master and, through his wife, she points out to him the man of God in Israel.

Here we see the special guidance of God. Often, people are brought into God's kingdom by the laborious efforts of others, by what others have to suffer. We know that from countries where the believers are persecuted. How many suffering believers have already been an eternal blessing to those who persecuted them. In this history, without this girl there would have been no healing of his body and salvation of his soul for Naaman.

We also see here how in God's government the greatness of international politics and the smallness of personal circumstances unite. We see that today. God rules through consultation in parliaments and ministries, where the strategy to be pursued is discussed. God also rules by everyday inconspicuous encounters, a phone call, a visit. God is above all and let everything cooperate in fulfilling His counsel.

Verses 4-7 | Help Question to the King of Israel

4 Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "Thus and thus spoke the girl who is from the land of Israel." 5 Then the king of Aram said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." He departed and took with him ten talents of silver and six thousand [shekels] of gold and ten changes of clothes. 6 He brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, "And now as this letter comes to you, behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to you, that you may cure him of his leprosy." 7 When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man is sending [word] to me to cure a man of his leprosy? But consider now, and see how he is seeking a quarrel against me."

Naaman's wife believes what the girl says. This means that this girl has always done her job faithfully and has proven to be reliable in everything. She hasn't been sloppy in her work. She must have been an exemplary slave. Without having to be exhorted to do so, she has complied with the Scripture: "[Urge] bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect" (Tit 2:9-10). Maybe she has told us about her home situation. Anyway, Naaman's wife tells her husband that there is someone in Israel who can cure him.

Naaman also believes what the girl said. But he does not act upon it. He goes to his own king. He needs his influence, he thinks. It was also difficult for him to go to a hostile people on his own as a general. He also needs his consent.

His lord wants to work for the curing of his army commander. He does so in his own way, without any there being any faith. Diplomatic, the king of Aram, or Syria, writes to the king of Israel if he wants to cure his general. Perhaps he assumes that the man about whom he hears such good news, must be at the court of the king, in his service as his private healer.

He also gives his general a huge gift along. In Elisha he sees no more than a healer from whom you can buy healing. It will appear that this is not the case. Many people think that you can do something for the forgiveness of sins. The heinous indulgence that the roman-catholic church, inspired by the devil, has come up with is an example of this. In this way, the king of Syria seems to want to give the king of Israel the honor of healing.

This type of diplomacy, however, does not benefit anything and is even counterproductive. The king of Israel feels attacked. Theoretically he knows God. He calls out whether he would be God to be able to cure the leper, for indeed only God can cure leprosy (cf. Gen 30:2). In practice, however, he does not take God into account at all. He only thinks about his own position. He can only think on a political level. He who, like no other as leader of God's people, must show that there is a God who can cure, sees only horizontally. He and his people bear the Name of God, but do not count with Him. Is this not the case in most of today's Christianity?

The king does not think of Elisha, although the prophet lives close to him. Many spiritual leaders today also do not point to the Lord Jesus because they only think about their own position. They too have no answer to the questions of life.

Verses 8-10 | Elisha Lets Naaman Come to Him

8 It happened when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, that he sent [word] to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Now let him come to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel." 9 So Naaman came with his horses and his chariots and stood at the

doorway of the house of Elisha. 10 Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and [you will] be clean."

While the king may be walking back and forth in his room and discussing with his ministers how to deal with this crisis, there is a message from Elisha. Elisha has heard of the king's reaction and is indignant. He commands the king to send Naaman to him, so that at least Naaman will know that there is a prophet who reveals the words of God.

It will have been a remarkable display. The whole distinguished company, the whole impressive parade, leaves the king's palace and parks in front of the prophet's humble home. Then a messenger from Elisha comes out to bring Naaman the good news how he can be cured.

Elisha herself does not come out, not even to greet Naaman. He doesn't want to meet Naaman's splendor with an eyes-eye view and remains so unmoved by the brilliance of the world. Naaman's greatness tells him nothing more, but Naaman's leprosy so much more. Nor does Elisha want to put herself in the foreground. Only his word is important and that can also convey a messenger.

Verses 11-12 | Naaman's Response

11 But Naaman was furious and went away and said, "Behold, I thought, 'He will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.' 12 Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage.

Naaman is very upset about this treatment. How does Elisha dare to treat him like this! As a great man, he wants to be treated with respect, even when it comes to his curing, which he cannot work on himself. He also wants to pay for it. He is doubly offended: he is not treated in the way he wants and he must also do something that he considers to be below his dignity.

The words "behold, I thought" indicate that Naaman has his own ideas about his healing. Elisha had to come out and perform a fitting ritual to

heal him. But Elisha treats him like a leper and Naaman doesn't want that. Naaman has written the script for his healing and whether the prophet wants to do it that way. That's all. He expects from this miracle worker a spectacle, a dazzling show.

How often do we already have an idea of how God should solve our problem? And if it does not go according to our expectations, are we not disappointed in God? We not only want God's blessings, but we also want to indicate how He should give them to us. Thus we want to make the sovereign God our 'messenger boy'. Or we see God as a dispenser: throw in a prayer and you can take out your desired article.

Naaman has two problems: his leprosy and his pride. He must first be freed from his pride and then be cleansed of his leprosy. Naaman has his arguments for not simply doing what the prophet has said. Why the Jordan? Why that way? Why not in another river? He knows rivers that are bigger and cleaner.

But he does not know the difference between these rivers and the Jordan. What makes the Jordan different from any other river is that the Jordan speaks of death, but then as undergone by the Lord Jesus. Only there you can find salvation. In other rivers, which also speak of death, the result is destruction without curing. Those rivers do not help.

Naaman gets angry because he has not yet surrendered to grace. He has yet to learn that. Naaman must learn to see himself as a corrupt Syrian (cf. Deu 26:5). The Israelite must also learn this. Religious flesh wants to be caressed, but it must be judged.

What Naaman, in the picture, must learn is that salvation can only be found in the foolishness of the cross. Paul preached this foolishness in Corinth (1Cor 1:22-25), where the believers also thought so highly of themselves. Many people – and sometimes also believers! – do not like the humiliation that the gospel means, they do not like the simplicity of the gospel, nor the narrow way of the gospel. It may seem foolishness to put your trust in Someone Who died on a slanderous cross, the paragon of weakness and misery, but it is the only way to be saved. He is the salvation or it is to be lost forever.

Verses 13-14 | Naaman Becomes Clean

13 Then his servants came near and spoke to him and said, "My father, had the prophet told you [to do some] great thing, would you not have done [it]? How much more [then], when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" 14 So he went down and dipped [himself] seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child and he was clean.

Naaman gets a number of people on his way who show him the way to his salvation. First there is his wife's maid. She points him through his wife to the prophet. The second person is the messenger of Elisha. He brings him the Word of the prophet. The third time they are his servants. It is now a personal contact, servants who talk to him to do what has been said to him. It is about using the means proposed to him. It is the aftercare, the watering of the message.

The servants have a good relationship with Naaman. There appears to be confidentiality between them. They persuade him with simple arguments. They remind him of the simplicity of what is required of him. That appears to be the big obstacle at the same time. The servants help him get over it.

At the insistence of his servants, Naaman abdicates all dignity. He humiliates himself before the eyes of his subordinates. The great man becomes a little boy. By becoming a little child he gets a new life that resembles that of a little boy. Not only humiliation is needed, faith is also needed. He must not dip himself in the Jordan five or six times, but seven times (cf. Jos 6:2-4). All his money and his king's intercession are of no avail. It comes down to obedience to faith.

Verses 15-16 | Naaman Wants to Reward Elisha

15 When he returned to the man of God with all his company, and came and stood before him, he said, "Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; so please take a present from your servant now." 16 But he said, "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will take nothing." And he urged him to take [it], but he refused.

Without pomp and ceremony Naaman returns to Elisha and stands in front of him. Naaman has changed completely. This can be seen in his attitude.

No fewer than five times in verses 15-18 he speaks to Elisha about himself as “your servant. That is a huge change compared to the arrogant attitude he first had. He has also changed in his confession. He confesses the God of Israel as the only God on earth. How much will Elisha have liked that the whole people of God would have confessed this from the heart! In any case, it did not occur to king Ahaziah to confess that (2Kgs 1:3,6,16).

Naaman would like to thank Elisha. He wants to give a gift to show his gratitude and no longer to buy his curing. This is due to a lack of knowledge. Elisha refuses that gift. He wants to avoid Naaman making a payment for his curing. Elisha has sometimes accepted gifts. A servant must learn to accept gifts, but he must also learn to refuse them. When preaching the gospel, it must be avoided.

Verses 17-19 | Naaman Returns Home

17 Naaman said, “If not, please let your servant at least be given two mules’ load of earth; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD. 18 In this matter may the LORD 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, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter.” 19 He said to him, “Go in peace.” So he departed from him some distance.

Then Naaman asks for a favor. He wants to take some earth from God’s land to his own country to offer the LORD sacrifices. By this he will also remember that he is one with the people of God and in the spirit together with them worship the only God Who deserves worship.

We should not criticize Naaman’s actions. Elisha doesn’t do that either. We can see Naaman as a newly converted person, someone who has yet to grow in his faith. Then a lot of patience is needed. He is not yet a mature believer. In addition, he also has obligations that he cannot shirk.

The fact that Naaman says all this in this way testifies of a sensitive conscience. He experiences the tension between exclusive adherence to the God of Israel and what is expected of him in connection with his work.

And that worries him. It was to be hoped that the conscience of the Bethel visiting and Baal kissing Israelites would speak as it is with these heathen. The LORD has not only cured Naaman from his leprosy, but also made him a faithful and God-fearing worshipper. He has literally “turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God” (1Thes 1:9). Not only has he lost his leprosy in the Jordan, he has also lost his paganism there. This is evident from the change in his attitude and his confession.

Elisha’s reaction to what Naaman says is not that he is going to give a sermon. He lets him go in peace, convinced that Naaman will do well. The LORD will lead him on. Thus the eunuch also goes his way in peace and joy after Philip has preached the gospel to him and has baptized him (Acts 8:39).

Verses 20-24 | The Greed of Gehazi

20 But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, thought, “Behold, my master has spared this Naaman the Aramean, by not receiving from his hands what he brought. As the LORD lives, I will run after him and take something from him.” 21 So Gehazi pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw one running after him, he came down from the chariot to meet him and said, “Is all well?” 22 He said, “All is well. My master has sent me, saying, ‘Behold, just 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 clothes.’” 23 Naaman said, “Be pleased to take two talents.” And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags with two changes of clothes and gave them to two of his servants; and they carried [them] before him. 24 When he came to the hill, he took them from their hand and deposited them in the house, and he sent the men away, and they departed.

Gehazi is a picture of the state of Israel opposite the heathen who received grace. The hatred that the Lord Jesus receives when He refers to the cursing of Naaman is not so much the fact of Naaman’s curing as the fact that Naaman is cured apart from Israel (Lk 4:27-29). Grace shown to unreligious people evokes the hatred of religious people who claim grace as a right.

There is a big difference between the converted pagan Naaman and the depraved Israelite Gehazi. Naaman learned from Elisha that God is a God of grace. That is why Elisha refused his gifts. Elisha wanted Naaman to be impressed by the LORD, the God of Israel, as a God of grace. God cannot be bribed or manipulated with anything a person can give or do.

What Gehazi does must be seen in this light. By his behavior he makes the giving God a questioning or even demanding God. He is guided in his behavior by greed. Despite having experienced so much with the man of God, his heart has not changed. Under all the wonders of grace, his heart has remained cold. It is with him as with Judas. He is caught by the money.

When he sees that Elisha does not accept anything from Naaman, it is shocking for him. What a missed opportunity to become rich in what he considers to be a legal way! It cannot be true that Naaman leaves with all his treasures, without getting a part of them. After all, Naaman has offered it. He devises a trick to get some of Naaman's wealth.

In the way he speaks about Naaman ("this Naaman the Aramean"), there is something of contempt. Lust for money is a terrible thing among the people of God. Whoever is caught in greed is blind to the value of the person. In his boldness Gehazi even dares to link the name of the LORD to his greed. Using the words "the LORD lives" he takes the decision to run after Naaman.

Except that he uses the name of the LORD vainly (Exo 20:7), he uses deceit. When he reaches Naaman, he hangs up the story that the prophet has changed his mind. Elisha has been visited. In a single sentence, Gehazi destroys everything Elisha wanted to learn Naaman in verse 16. With what he says, Gehazi blames Elisha, the man of God, as if he were still claiming a reward. The lie he uses corrupts also God's grace. He has a price tag on the grace of God. He presents God as a 'claimant', a God Who takes and is therefore no different from all the idols of the nations. This explains why his punishment is so severe.

Gehazi gets what he asks for and even more. Naaman gives him the enormous amount of two talent silver and also the two changes of clothes. Cunningly Gehazi has his wealth brought to a place where he can hide it himself. However, he does not take into account that he is dealing with

Someone for Whom all things are naked and opened and Who has a prophet to whom He can communicate what He sees.

We can apply Gehazi's actions to much of what is happening in Christianity today. Paul speaks about this in the letter to the Galatians. There are people who claim that the death of the Lord Jesus is not enough to be saved. In their opinion, there is another thing that needs to be added, namely the keeping of certain requirements of the law, such as circumcision. The 'Jesus-Plus Movement' has found its entrance with the Galatians. But everything that is 'plus' obscures grace. This applies to the law, baptism, the doctrine of the church. All we add to Christ as a condition of being a Christian and being accepted as such is an obscuration of grace.

Verses 25-27 | Gehazi Is Discovered and Becomes Leprous

25 But he went in and stood before his master. And Elisha said to him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" And he said, "Your servant went nowhere." 26 Then he said to him, "Did not my heart go [with you], when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Is it a time to receive money and to receive clothes and olive groves and vineyards and sheep and oxen and male and female servants? 27 Therefore, the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever." So he went out from his presence a leper [as white] as snow.

When Gehazi is back with Elisha, he pretends that nothing has happened. He takes up his useable place again, ready to serve his lord. With his question, Elisha gives Gehazi the opportunity to come up with his evil himself. He does not take this opportunity, but persists in the lie.

The man of God then says how he followed Gehazi in his heart and saw in the spirit what happened when Gehazi reached Naaman. He has seen that Naaman has welcomed Gehazi and given him everything he asked for. Elisha does not speak about the literal gifts Naaman gave, but about what Gehazi intended to buy with them all. He knew the unbridled greed of his servant.

This is how the Lord Jesus knew Judas' greed for money. Yet He has endured Judas, just as Elisha has endured Gehazi. He did not prevent Gehazi from acting, just as the Lord Jesus did not prevent Judas from acting. God leaves man in his full responsibility.

Elisha asks if it was the right time to take all this stuff from Naaman. It was not the right time and because it was not the right time for it, Gehazi had stolen it. We must learn to look at the clock of God. Taking advantage of God's time is, for example, that we already want to have political influence or even government power, while we are not given that. Reigning with Christ still comes (1Cor 4:8; 6:2-3).

We do not read that Elisha instructs Gehazi to return the money and goods to Naaman. He has taken the money from Naaman and he can keep it. But he also gets the leprosy of Naaman.

2 Kings 6

Introduction

Elisha is a man of God. This is reflected in each section of this chapter. He is the man of grace, although the aspect of judgment is not lacking. With Elijah, that is the other way round. This grace is not the result of a revolution in the people. It is a grace that God grants, when the condition of the people is dark. In this chapter and the following we see three examples of this.

Verses 1-3 | A New Place to Live

1 Now the sons of the prophets said to Elisha, "Behold now, the place before you where we are living is too limited for us. 2 Please let us go to the Jordan and each of us take from there a beam, and let us make a place there for ourselves where we may live." So he said, "Go." 3 Then one said, "Please be willing to go with your servants." And he answered, "I shall go."

Here we meet again the student prophets about whom we read a few times in 2 Kings 2. They are united in schools dating back to the time of Samuel. They are faithful men, whom we can see as a remnant among the people of God. They have learned lessons from 2 Kings 2. At first they have no illuminated eyes, nor have they seen Elijah's ascension, even though they do have knowledge of the fact that he was taken up to heaven. Meanwhile they have seen who Elisha is, how the spirit of Elijah rests on him. They have seen some of his miracles.

Elisha is with them, possible to give them further education. Then they come to him with a wish. They want to build a new home, because a larger space is needed to live together. This will be due to an increase in the number of student prophets. The man of God is a point of attraction for those who want to know more about the LORD.

We can apply this to a local church. If there is a man of God in a place, there will be increase. In a man of God the Lord Jesus becomes visible. Wherever He becomes visible, those who seek Him will also want to be there. A man of God is not one above the local church, but is part of it. He is the power

of the church. But if decisions are made, he will not make them as an individual. Decisions are taken by the entire church. Often a certain decision is made following his advice. He shows the way.

The student prophets propose to go to the Jordan. The Jordan is the river through which the Israelites had to pass to get into the promised land. For us, the Jordan is a picture of the death and the resurrection and the glorification of the Lord Jesus, through which we have entered the heavenly places, the heavenly land. God has “seated us with Him in the heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6). That they propose to go to the Jordan can therefore be seen from a spiritual point of view as a proof of their spiritual growth. First they saw the Jordan from afar (2Kgs 2:7), they remained at a distance from it, but now they want to live there.

The proposal is that each of them will get a beam from the Jordan to build a new place to live together. They each have a personal share in the construction. Each of them makes a contribution to the best of their ability. So it is with building God’s house. For its construction, the Lord has given each of His own responsibilities. We all contribute to the construction of the church, each with his or her own gift. However, it is important to build with good materials.

If Elisha agrees to the request, the student prophets don’t immediately get on their way. They want Elisha to go with them. That is a good thing. Not only do they go on his way at his direction, they also want to ensure his presence on that way. Elisha not only shows the way, but is also with them the way he shows. The Spirit does the same with us. He indicates the way we should go and accompanies us on that way. We may walk through the Spirit (Gal 5:25). Not only do we need the Lord to show us the right way, we also need Him on the way itself.

Verses 4-7 | The Accident and the Miracle

4 So he went with them; and when they came to the Jordan, they cut down trees. 5 But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water; and he cried out and said, “Alas, my master! For it was borrowed.” 6 Then the man of God said, “Where did it fall?” And when he showed him the place, he cut off a stick and threw [it] in there, and made the iron float. 7 He said, “Take it up for yourself.” So he put out his hand and took it.

At the Jordan they go to work. While they are busy, an accident happens. When someone is cutting down a beam with an axe, the axe head fell into the water. He loses control of his tools. Fortunately the axe does not hit anyone (cf. Deu 19:5), but it does disappear into the water of the Jordan. The man has lost his tool. As he sees the iron disappear into the water, he cries out: "Alas, my master! For it was borrowed."

Elisha must have been close to him, because the man addresses his cry of fear to the man of God. That is also the right address. Humanly we would say: 'What a luck that they asked Elisha to come along.' Elisha informs where the iron has fallen into the water. When the man has designated him the place, Elisha cuts off a stick and throws it to that place. The stick functions as a magnet, because the iron is made float. Elisha doesn't take the iron out of the water herself, but tells the man to take it up for himself. Elisha does the miracle, the man must do what he can do himself.

The story as such shows how much the man of God is involved in an apparently small event, but which means a personal drama for someone. This history stands between two events that are of international magnitude. God's attention goes out to the big and the small. He has interference with the peoples and with the individual.

The man's need is that he has lost something that is not his. He borrowed the axe, because he himself has none. From his panic because of the loss we can perhaps deduce that he had no money to buy one. The outcome that Elisha offers also points to this. The prophet does no miracles without reason. If there is a real need, then we can count on God's gracious and wonderful help.

Spiritually speaking, there is also something to learn. Here we see the Jordan as the river that, as it were, swallows up the tool of a student prophet, but also has to return it. When we think again of what the Jordan is a picture of – the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus – we learn that all our strength has been destroyed in the death of the Lord Jesus. We also learn that we have risen in a new life and that we may work in the power of the Holy Spirit on God's house with the means He has for us.

The means we are given to serve the Lord are borrowed means. These are the gifts that have been made available to us. These gifts are no guarantee

that the work will be done properly. We must learn that what we are and have can only be properly used if we receive it from the hands of the man of God (the Lord Jesus) who gets it from the Jordan (the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus).

Moses is also a man of God who once threw a wood into the water. In that case it is to make undrinkable water drinkable, so that the people can drink it (Exo 15:25a). Elisha does the same for a few. In the wood we can see a picture of the cross of the Lord Jesus. Paul brings “the wood”, the cross of Christ, into the church in Corinth (1Cor 2:1-5). Because the Corinthians misuse their gifts to their own glory, Paul reminds them of the foolishness of the cross. In the light of the cross the self-importance disappears and the Spirit is given the space to work what is to God’s glory.

The man has to take up his tool himself. Now the house is being built with a tool that came from the Jordan. The power of the stream is overcome by a piece of wood, so that what was hopelessly lost, is saved from it and can be used useful.

Verses 8-10 | Elisha Warns the King of Israel

8 Now the king of Aram was warring against Israel; and he counseled with his servants saying, “In such and such a place shall be my camp.” 9 The man of God sent [word] to the king of Israel saying, “Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Arameans are coming down there.” 10 The king of Israel sent to the place about which the man of God had told him; thus he warned him, so that he guarded himself there, more than once or twice.

God’s Spirit tells us the secret deliberations of the king of Aram, or Syria. The king may decide what he wants, but nothing is hidden from God. The Spirit communicates to Elisha what the king of Syria is up to. The man of God sends messengers to the king of Israel (possibly Jehoram) to warn him of the enemy’s plans. He does not do it for Jehoram (cf. 2Kgs 3:13-14), but for the poor people and even more as a sign for the king of Syria. It is a sign of God’s omnipotence for this king.

The man of God has a prophetic view. The king of Israel is so wise to listen to Elisha’s advice. This is repeated several times. It also shows that no one can do any harm to God’s people if their Protector does not allow it.

Verses 11-14 | Command to Capture Elisha

11 Now the heart of the king of Aram was enraged over this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you tell me which of us is for the king of Israel?" 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." 13 So he said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and take him." And it was told him, saying, "Behold, he is in Dothan." 14 He sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city.

The king of Aram, or Syria, gets severely frustrated by the fact that his plans are always known. There is nothing more frustrating for a culprit than the fact that all his well thought-out plans are known to others and his intention fails time and time again. The king calls his servants together and wants to know who the traitor is. As it happens more often, someone from the common people knows the answer. We are not told how he knows it, as we are told so much in this history without any explanatory information.

If the 'traitor' is known, the king commands the arrest of Elisha. He has no doubt that with the arrest of Elisha he has indeed caught the culprit. He sends a huge army to Elisha. He has heard something of the power of this man and does not want to underestimate it. It shows how afraid the king is of the man of God. At the same time, he underestimates God's power by turning an army, however large, towards Elisha.

In the invisible world, the powers of darkness are also working in a common effort to eliminate every believer who is a man of God's will. There are spiritual powers that are out to stop us in our work for the Lord. The devil does not under-estimate us. He is full of interest in us. He is not interested in slacking Christians, but in working Christians.

Verses 15-20 | Open and Closed Eyes

15 Now when the attendant of the man of God had risen early and gone out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was circling the city. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?" 16 So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

17 Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." And the LORD opened the servant's eyes and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 18 When they came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD and said, "Strike this people with blindness, I pray." So He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. 19 Then Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, nor is this the city; follow me and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." And he brought them to Samaria. 20 When they had come into Samaria, Elisha said, "O LORD, open the eyes of these [men], that they may see." So the LORD opened their eyes and they saw; and behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.

The servant of Elisha is impressed by the power of the enemy. That's because he can't see well. He gets scared because he doesn't see the unseen. He looks only with his natural eyes and counts only with visible powers.

Elisha sees well. He does not need to pray if his own eyes will be opened. What we see with our eyes is no more reliable than what we see with the eyes of our heart. Thus the Lord Jesus sees the many angels at His disposal when a multitude of people comes to capture Him (Mt 26:53). Faith knows: "The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, And rescues them" (Psa 34:7). Jacob also sees a host of angels when he is on his way to meet Esau (Gen 32:1-2).

On the prayer of Elisha the eyes of the servant open. The servant sees what Elisha saw when Elijah went to heaven (2Kgs 2:11). The power of God who brought Elijah to heaven is at our disposal against the enemy. It is the power that lifts us above the earthly stage of threat and danger and brings us in the spirit in the area of complete security, inaccessible and therefore untouchable to the enemy.

When the enemies come towards him, Elisha prays a new prayer, now not to open eyes, but to close eyes (cf. Gen 19:11). This is a physical blindness, a literal blindness. The result of the Lord Jesus' service is spiritual blindness. He has come to make spiritually blind people seeing and those who believe to see, to make blind. This is not a literal blindness, but a blindness of insight, of understanding the situation.

The men walk with open eyes, but blind to where they are, after Elisha. In this way he brings the enemy into the lion's den. This does not result in

their destruction, but in a proof of unprecedented grace. When they are in the middle of Samaria, Elisha prays again, now again to open eyes. Then the enemies become aware of their position. They discover the power of Elisha.

Verses 21-23 | Grace for Enemies

21 Then the king of Israel when he saw them, said to Elisha, "My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?" 22 He answered, "You shall not kill [them]. Would you kill those 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." 23 So he prepared a great feast for them; and when they had eaten and drunk he sent them away, and they went to their master. And the marauding bands of Arameans did not come again into the land of Israel.

Who also has open eyes is the king of Israel. Only he knows nothing of grace. That proves that he is seeing blind. This is clear from his question to Elisha whether he will be allowed to kill these enemies. Elisha's answer is sober. He tells the king that he would not have killed them anyway if he had made them prisoners of war. Elisha does not even allow the king to allow the prisoners to simply return to their master. He orders him to do good to his enemies by setting bread and water before them. The LORD first protects the king of Israel and Elisha against the king of Syria, and now He protects the Syrians against the king of Israel.

By this action on the head of the enemy 'burning coals' are heaped (Rom 12:20; Pro 25:21-22). The word of the Lord Jesus is acted upon: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies" (Mt 5:43-44a). After the enemies are done well, they may return to their master. The consequence of the grace shown is that they (for the time being) do not return to the land of Israel to wage war against it.

Verses 24-30 | Famine in Samaria

24 Now it came about after this, that Ben-hadad king of Aram gathered all his army and went up and besieged Samaria. 25 There was a great famine in Samaria; and behold, they besieged it, until a donkey's head was sold for eighty

[shekels] of silver, and a fourth of a kab of dove's dung for five [shekels] of silver. 26 As the king of Israel was passing by on the wall a woman cried out to him, saying, "Help, my lord, O king!" 27 He said, "If the LORD does not help you, from where shall I help you? From the threshing floor, or from the wine press?" 28 And the king said to her, "What is the matter with you?" And she answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give your son that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.' 29 So we boiled my son and ate him; and I said to her on the next day, 'Give your son, that we may eat him'; but she has hidden her son." 30 When the king heard the words of the woman, he tore his clothes—now he was passing by on the wall—and the people looked, and behold, he had sackcloth beneath on his body.

A proof of mercy can quickly be forgotten. We see that when the king of Aram, or Syria, takes up arms again, goes up against Samaria and besieges the city. The siege is long and causes a great famine. The enemy has forgotten that in this city he himself has received a gracious treatment. A merciless siege takes place because he has forgotten what grace has been bestowed upon him (Mt 18:21-35). It becomes the cause of yet another great proof of grace by the service of Elisha and now for the people of God. It will be its last public service.

Food is becoming so scarce and hunger so great that an enormous price is being asked for unclean food. Only the richest can buy something. Instead of taking refuge in the LORD with confession and repentance for their unfaithfulness, the LORD is blamed for the misery.

This is made clear when a woman cries to the king. There is no question of crying to God. The king is bitter and slides the blame on the LORD. The LORD does not help and through this he cannot help. He does not realize that he owes the misery to himself. He asks the woman what she wants. Then it turns out that she wants him to speak justice. It is a question that recalls the first case law of Solomon (1Kgs 3:16-28). However, the cause for the judiciary here is a much greater depravity. It shows the depth of the misery caused by the unfaithfulness of the people.

While the rich may still be able to buy something, the common man and woman, driven by the enormous hunger, resort to one of the greatest horrors one can imagine: eating their own children. All natural feelings have

disappeared. Even the fruit of the lap is sacrificed to the selfishness to survive. Whoever is tempted into such acts need not be surprised if an agreement is not kept. Everything bears witness to the great degeneration of God's people. All norms and values have disappeared. This is the result of deviating from God (Lev 26:27-29; Deu 28:52-57; Col 2:20; 4:10).

When the king hears the woman's words, he tears his clothes. The garment of mourning that becomes visible is nothing more than outward appearances. Externally he is dressed in mourning, but there is no inner repentance. On the contrary, he is full of murderousness against the prophet of God.

Verses 31-33 | Elisha Gets the Blame

31 Then he said, "May God do so to me and more also, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on him today." 32 Now Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him. And [the king] sent a man from his presence; but before the messenger came to him, he said to the elders, "Do you see how this son of a murderer has sent to take away my head? Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door and hold the door shut against him. Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?" 33 While he was still talking with them, behold, the messenger came down to him and he said, "Behold, this evil is from the LORD; why should I wait for the LORD any longer?"

The king seeks a scapegoat and finds it in Elisha. Just as Ahab attributed the misery to Elijah and thought he would get rid of it if he could kill Elijah, so does the king think he can put an end to the misery by killing Elisha. It is a foolish assumption that comes from a hardened heart. By nature, we blame people who tell us we will be judged. Disasters in an end time do not bring to submission to God. They do not lead to conversion, but to a slander of God (cf. Rev 16:10-11).

While hunger takes such terrible forms and leads to such terrible things, Elisha sits in his house. He will undoubtedly share in the famine. He suffers with the people of God. He has no hidden source of food. There are elders visiting him. They will be there to ask him for advice. It is always available when there is an emergency.

He is also aware of the death threat. He sees in his mind how Jehoram sent a murderer to him. He calls him a “murderer’s son”, for Jehoram himself is the son of a murderer, Ahab. Elisha takes his measures in view of the imminent arrival of the messenger of the king. He knows that Jehoram comes right after him to make sure that Elisha is indeed beheaded.

When the messenger has arrived at Elisha, the messenger speaks the language of his master. He again makes a fierce reproach to the LORD. Elisha must die. He justifies his unjust act by saying, as it were: ‘If God does not take me into account and help me out of my worries, I do not take God into account.’

2 Kings 7

Verses 1-2 | Elisha Foretells Food and Judgment

1 Then Elisha said, "Listen to the word of the LORD; thus says the LORD, '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.'" 2 The royal officer on whose hand the king was leaning answered the man of God and said, "Behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, could this thing be?" Then he said, "Behold, you will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat of it."

Elisha has an extraordinary word from the LORD. He looks death in the eyes, but talks about life coming. This is not God's answer to conversion. It is one of the proofs of God's grace that He shows without any reason or even trace of repentance.

The proof of grace brings to light that man is unrepentant. The royal officer mocks the power of God Who in grace makes this promise. It is the language of the mocker who says: "Where is the promise of His coming?" (2Pet 3:4a). Only judgment can be given on this, and it will come. Every mocker will be brought to the conviction of the truth of God's Word, that it is true, but then it will be too late to repent.

Verses 3-4 | Four Leprous Men Confer

3 Now there were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate; and they said to one another, "Why do we sit here until we die? 4 If we say, 'We will enter the city,' then the famine is in the city and we will die there; and if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us go over to the camp of the Arameans. If they spare us, we will live; and if they kill us, we will but die."

Then our attention is directed at four leprous men at the entrance of the gate of the city. There is hardly a situation imaginable that is more hopeless than that of these four leprous men. They have participated in the same terrible famine, but have also been ejected from the city. They suffer with the people around them and suffer in their own body.

These men are different from Naaman. For they are members of God's people. The law of leprosy applies to them (Leviticus 13-14). Leprosy in a member of the people of God represents the bursting out of sin in this member of the people of God. Therefore, the application here is not primarily that it is about a sinner in the world who lives in his sins, but that we see what a child of God falls into when sin has the opportunity to manifest itself in him. Also the further lessons are different. With Naaman it is about cleaning his leprosy. The four leprous men we see more the way to spiritual recovery.

They sit down and deliberate and face up to the situation in all its realities. Death is around them and death is in them. They are completely without perspective. In the city they will starve and outside the city they will also die. Their only hope is that the enemy will be merciful to them. With this acknowledgement, their path of restoration begins.

Verses 5-8 | Abundance of Food and Wealth

5 They arose at twilight to go to the camp of the Arameans; when they came to the outskirts of the camp of the Arameans, behold, there was no one there. 6 For the Lord had caused the army of the Arameans to hear a sound of chariots and a sound of horses, [even] the sound of a great army, so that they said to one another, "Behold, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us." 7 Therefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents and their horses and their donkeys, [even] the camp just as it was, and fled for their life. 8 When these lepers came to the outskirts of the camp, they entered one tent and ate and drank, and carried from there silver and gold and clothes, and went and hid [them]; and they returned and entered another tent and carried from there [also], and went and hid [them].

The men go to the Syrian army camp to surrender to them. This means that they surrender to the rod of discipline in the hand of God for His people, for that is what the Syrians are. The men thereby take the place of judgment. The path of spiritual restoration begins when we acknowledge that God is chastising us and accepting it from His hand. Then there is return to life (Heb 12:4-11).

When they arrive at the camp, they see that there is no one there. That is the result of the work of the LORD. He made the Syrians hear a sound of the power with which He took Elijah to heaven (2Kgs 2:11) and with which He surrounded Elisha in Dothan (2Kgs 6:17). The Syrians misinterpret this, because they do not count with God. They have a natural statement that they are earthly powers.

This demonstration of power contributes to the restoration of the lepers. God alone has driven out the enemy, without anyone having helped Him. So every restoration is the work of God alone. It is also a restoration that brings great blessings. The leprous men are overloaded with blessings, blessings that are thrown into their laps. At the moment they only think of themselves. There is food, there are silver and gold and there are clothes. They experience what the part of the prodigal son is when he is back with his father (Lk 15:21-23). It is understandable that someone who just knows he has been saved is happy for himself with everything he has received.

Verses 9-11 | Good News Must Be Told

9 Then they said to one another, "We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, but we are keeping silent; if we wait until morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come, let us go and tell the king's household." 10 So they came and called to the gatekeepers of the city, and they told them, saying, "We came to the camp of the Arameans, and behold, there was no one there, nor the voice of man, only the horses tied and the donkeys tied, and the tents just as they were." 11 The gatekeepers called and told [it] within the king's household.

After being so absorbed in their blessings, they come to reflection. They understand that it is a day of good news. They must not keep the salvation they have received for themselves. If we really appreciate the spiritual riches we have received as believers, we will distribute them. Not only is it important to spread the gospel to unbelievers, it is also important to share "the mystery of the gospel" (Eph 6:19) with spiritually poor believers.

The men talk about the morning light that will come and that then their guilt will be established if they have kept everything to themselves alone. We see here a picture of the "morning light" of the judgment seat of Christ, where everything will be revealed (2Cor 5:10). Christ will, when He sits on

the judgment seat and we appear before Him there, make clear what we have done with what we have received. Will He, or will believers, have to reproach us for having kept all riches to ourselves?

The men suit the action to the word and go to town. The king and the people must know what they have discovered. At that moment the people sleep in the city with hungry stomachs. They went to bed with the only knowledge that they will be even more miserable the next day.

The four men go with the good news to the gatekeepers. They cannot do anything else, it is impossible for them to remain silent about these things, just as it is impossible for the apostles not to speak of Christ later on (Acts 4:20). The love of Christ controls them (cf. 2Cor 5:14a). The gatekeeper tells the story of the four lepers in the royal palace. The good news is passed on, higher and higher up to the king.

Verses 12-15 | Reaction to the Good News

12 Then the king arose in the night and said to his servants, "I will now tell you what the Arameans have done to us. They know that we are hungry; therefore they have gone from the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, 'When they come out of the city, we will capture them alive and get into the city.'" 13 One of his servants said, "Please, let some [men] take five of the horses which remain, which are left in the city. Behold, they [will be in any case] like all the multitude of Israel who are left in it; behold, they [will be in any case] like all the multitude of Israel who have already perished, so let us send and see." 14 They took therefore two chariots with horses, and the king sent after the army of the Arameans, saying, "Go and see." 15 They went after them to the Jordan, and behold, all the way was full of clothes and equipment which the Arameans had thrown away in their haste. Then the messengers returned and told the king.

The message is not directly believed. There is suspicion. That means an extension of the misery. We too do not have to count on an enthusiastic reception of the gospel. The king shows false mistrust. The prophet has promised him salvation, but he can only think of an ambush. Salvation is too cheap for him. Thus, faith is often seen as the only means of salvation when it is preached. Faith means that one does not have to do anything to be saved. However, people always want to do something. In this case

everything has already been done. The king only has to go outside and receive.

This king also has good servants. A servant makes a proposal that helps the king cross the threshold of his mistrust, just like a servant helped Naaman cross the threshold before. Simple people are often the deciding factor for an important decision and not the big rhetoric. God uses whom He will for the performance of His work. In this story these are four impure members of His people and a nameless servant of the king. He chooses the base and the insignificant (1Cor 1:25-28).

The proposal is executed. The king sends men to investigate. The few horses that are still there will be used. After all, it made no difference to everything. It is a delay for the whole people, who have to wait until the messengers come back.

The messengers go on their way. They follow the trail of the Syrians who fled to the Jordan. It is not difficult to follow them, because the whole road is “full of clothes and equipment which the Arameans had thrown away in their haste”. Everything is there just to be picked up. The messengers return and report what they have seen.

It is spiritually significant that it is mentioned that the messengers follow the enemies “to the Jordan” and that up to that place all the enemy’s belongings lie. It is a picture that the judgment of God has gone to the Jordan and the blessings to the Jordan lie before us. The victory and the blessing are connected with the Jordan.

In the Jordan Naaman was cleansed, in the Jordan a student prophet got his axe head back. It proposes that through the death and resurrection of Christ cleansing of sins is obtained (Naaman) and power to build (the student prophet) and also that this means the end of the enemy and the beginning of blessing. Israel only has to note it. For us, every victory over our state of sin is achieved by the Lord Jesus on the cross. That is where the restoration came about. The messengers give testimony of this to the king.

Verses 16-20 | The Word of the LORD Fulfilled

16 So the people went out and plundered the camp of the Arameans. Then a measure of fine flour [was sold] for a shekel and two measures of barley for a

shekel, according to the word of the LORD. 17 Now the king appointed the royal officer on whose hand he leaned to have charge of the gate; but the people trampled on him at the gate, and he died just as the man of God had said, who spoke when the king came down to him. 18 It happened just 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, will be [sold] tomorrow about this time at the gate of Samaria." 19 Then the royal officer answered the man of God and said, "Now behold, if the LORD should make windows in heaven, could such a thing be?" And he said, "Behold, you will see it with your own eyes, but you will not eat of it." 20 And so it happened to him, for the people trampled on him at the gate and he died.

After the message of the enemy's run, the people flow out of town to take the booty. The word which the LORD has spoken in verse 1 is fulfilled. The following verses are also a fulfillment of what was announced earlier. The people can eat themselves full. However, we do not read a word of gratitude to the LORD and Elisha, as we do see in Naaman. Do we thank the Lord for our salvation? We should start with that every day and not just enjoy the consequences as if all this were self-evident.

The royal officer comes to his end, as Elisha said. God's Word is terribly fulfilled to him. The king cooperates by leaning on him in the gate. The man is standing in the gate and sees everything the people are going to enjoy, but he has not been given a part in it. Thus the Lord Jesus spoke of people who see others in the bosom of Abraham, but are cast out themselves. There is a seeing that is abhorrent, like the man in the realm of the dead when he sees Lazarus in the distance (Lk 16:23).

Because this event is intended to make a deep impression on us, these verses refer in detail to the reason for the judgment. Almost literally, we are told again what is written at the beginning of this chapter about what Elisha has said and how the royal officer reacted to it. In this section it is told twice. In total it is told three times what the new price of the food is, that the officer dies as the man of God has spoken and that it happens according to the word the LORD has spoken.

The judgment of God is thus doubly underlined, as it were. Again and again in this section there is referred to what the LORD has said and is

pointed out that His Word is actually and literally fulfilled. God forgets nothing of what mockers have said. They are reminded to it. It all happened, as it was said. The man has no excuse, because God maintains His Word.

This royal officer is a penetrating, warning example for young people growing up in an environment where they are made acquainted with the truth and promises of God from an early age. Young people can see a lot of the glorious truths of God's Word and yet stay outside of it, because there is no faith, yes, they can even be mockers. They have been enlightened, but end in eternal darkness (cf. Heb 6:4-6). They have been so close to it, they have tasted everything, but never had an inner part in it through faith. They 'see', that is, they know of the virgin birth, but do not believe. They know about the cross and the resurrection, but they do not believe it. The warning is: "See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking" (Heb 12:25a).

2 Kings 8

Verses 1-6 | The Shunammite Gets Back Her Field

1 Now Elisha spoke to the woman whose son he had restored to life, saying, "Arise and go with your household, and sojourn wherever you can sojourn; for the LORD has called for a famine, and it will even come on the land for seven years." 2 So the woman arose and did according to the word of the man of God, and she went with her household and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years. 3 At the end of seven years, the woman returned from the land of the Philistines; and she went out to appeal to the king for her house and for her field. 4 Now the king was talking with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, "Please relate to me all the great things that Elisha has done." 5 As he was relating to the king how he had restored to life the one who was dead, behold, the woman whose son he had restored to life appealed to the king for her house and for her field. And Gehazi said, "My lord, O king, this is the woman and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life." 6 When the king asked the woman, she related [it] to him. So the king appointed for her a certain officer, saying, "Restore all that was hers and all the produce of the field from the day that she left the land even until now."

In this history we have a striking picture of the fates of the people of Israel in the future. In Gehazi, the leprous servant of Elisha, we can see a picture of Israel in unbelief. The woman is a picture of the faithful remnant that has been among the nations for a full period, "seven years".

Elisha receives a word from the LORD about the famine. Elisha does not bring that famine, as was done by Elijah (1Kgs 17:1). Elijah therefore is the man of judgment, while Elisha announces the famine and shows mercy to the woman by warning her of it. Elisha not only uses his power, which is God's power, but also the knowledge he has received from God of future events in grace for the benefit of others.

As a prophet of grace, Elisha has a place of refuge for women. She is happy among her people, but must leave that place now. That must not have been easy. This is how Israel has been wandering among the peoples for two

thousand years. The famine is no longer that of a particular place, Samaria (2Kgs 6:24-25; 7:3-4a), but of the whole people.

The woman leaves the country at the word of Elisha. She does obediently what has been told to her. By leaving the country she is bowing under the judgment. Elimelech also left the country because of a famine (Rth 1:1), but he did so without the order of the LORD. He wanted to escape the discipline of God. One time God's people must resist the enemy, the next time they must go to the enemy (cf. Jer 27:11-17). Each time only the word of the LORD is decisive. It is about obeying.

The woman goes back when the famine is over. It is not said that she got a message about it. She will have kept track of the time. After seven years she can return. That is what she does. When she is back in the land, she goes to the king. It seems that after her departure her property has fallen to the king. He can therefore give it back. She has to ask for it, because she left herself. What kind of right can she assert?

The moment she comes to the king, the king is in conversation with Gehazi. He asks Gehazi to tell him about the miracles Elisha has performed. Perhaps he is like Ahasuerus who, out of boredom, lets himself be read (Est 6:1), or as Felix who, in search of financial gain, wants to hear Paul regularly (Acts 24:26). God uses both things for His plan with His own. To this end, He uses everyday things He controls in the way only He can. How Gehazi came to the court is not known. The fact is, he is there.

Gehazi seems to be someone who knows a lot about Elisha's religion and the things he has done. He tells about it, but as someone who only knows about it externally, while he has no inner share in it. He is outside the things he can tell a lot about. Thus are the words of God given to the Jews and they have handed them over to us (Rom 3:1-2) without being converted.

There are many people who can explain the gospel without sharing it themselves. It must be clear to anyone who is working on it or hears that they share in it. It makes no sense, for example, to concern oneself with the question of whether people who have never heard of the Lord Jesus can be saved, without first dealing with this question for one's own soul.

It seems coincidental that at this very moment the woman appears before the king. Of course God governs everything, but from our point of view it seems a coincidence (cf. Rth 2:3). The woman gets everything back. She is maintained abroad, but she is also paid for all the produce of the field from the day that she left the land even until now.

The woman receives everything back, by grace, but also because Gehazi just told about her dead son who had become alive. Thus we have received everything by virtue of the resurrection of the Son Who was dead, but Who has become alive again. So will it be with Israel when it is restored to the land, when the people see that their children are more numerous than they ever thought (Isa 54:1-3). That is because of the death and resurrection of the Messiah, the Son of God, as described in the previous chapter, Isaiah 53.

Verses 7-15 | Hazael King of Aram

7 Then Elisha came to Damascus. Now Ben-hadad king of Aram was sick, and it was told him, saying, "The man of God has come here." 8 The king said to Hazael, "Take a gift in your hand and go to meet the man of God, and inquire of the LORD by him, saying, 'Will I recover from this sickness?'" 9 So Hazael went to meet him and took a gift in his hand, even every kind of good thing of Damascus, forty camels' loads; and he came and stood before him and said, "Your son Ben-hadad king of Aram has sent me to you, saying, 'Will I recover from this sickness?'" 10 Then Elisha said to him, "Go, say to him, 'You will surely recover,' but the LORD has shown me that he will certainly die." 11 He fixed his gaze steadily [on him] until he was ashamed, and the man of God wept. 12 Hazael said, "Why does my lord weep?" Then he answered, "Because I know the evil that you will do to the sons of Israel: their strongholds you will set on fire, and their young men you will kill with the sword, and their little ones you will dash in pieces, and their women with child you will rip up." 13 Then Hazael said, "But what is your servant, [who is but] a dog, that he should do this great thing?" And Elisha answered, "The LORD has shown me that you will be king over Aram." 14 So he departed from Elisha and returned to his master, who said to him, "What did Elisha say to you?" And he answered, "He told me that you would surely recover." 15 On the following day, he took

the cover and dipped it in water and spread it on his face, so that he died. And Hazael became king in his place.

Elisha stays in the background, his service is almost over. Yet he still has something to do, namely anoint Hazael. He must do so instead of Elijah to whom the commission was given (1Kgs 19:15). That this has not yet happened is a proof of God's grace which gives the people a longer time to come to conversion. But then comes the time of the anointing of Hazael, as the LORD said to Elijah. Here the rod of God's discipline is prepared by Him, for His grace is not accepted by His people. For that, Elisha comes to Damascus. At that moment the king of Aram, or Syria, is sick.

God uses Ben-hadad's sickness to bring Elisha into contact with Hazael. Ben-hadad wants to know how things will end with him. He sees Elisha as a medium who will be prepared for a favorable conjuration through a purchase price. Maybe he has heard of the curing of Naaman. He sends Hazael, his servant, with a gift to Elisha to ask him about the outcome of his sickness. It is a huge gift. We see that when we compare this gift with the gift Naaman brought (2Kgs 5:5).

In his question Ben-hadad addresses Elisha as a father by addressing him as "your son". Elisha has a double answer. On the one hand, he will recover from his sickness, because his sickness is not lethal. On the other hand he will die, but then by the murderer's hand of Hazael. Healing is a word *to* Ben-hadad, his death is a word *about* him.

When Elisha sees it before by his spiritual eyes, he cannot hold back and bursts into tears. He sees the consequences of what Hazael will do. He weeps because his service has been in vain, and the people will come to judgment. That is ultimately the experience of every servant of the Lord. The situation has deteriorated despite his service. So it went with the apostles and the reformers and the men of the revival. It is still the case. This does not make the service attractive. At the end of the service, the judgment remains.

Do we know what will happen to the world, what will cause evil people to suffer, what evil false teachers will cause in Christianity, what spiritual suffering and spiritual death antichrists will cause? What does that do us, does it bring us to weep like Elisha?

Hazael pretends not to know what it is all about. He presents himself as someone who is unable to do anything like that. But inwardly his plan is brewing. Then Elisha says he will become king. The fact that God has determined that he will become king does not change his responsibility. Just like Jeroboam, who has also been told that he would become king, he takes the law into his own hands when it comes to the moment to become king.

When Hazael reports to Ben-hadad, he only tells half of the story Elisha told him. He tells Ben-hadad that his sickness will not end up in death. Hazael does not tell the other half of the story, but fulfills this part. He kills his king and becomes king in his place.

Verses 16-24 | Jehoram King of Judah

16 Now in the fifth year of Jehoram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Jehoshaphat being then the king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah became king. 17 He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. 18 He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab became his wife; and he did evil in the sight of the LORD. 19 However, the LORD was not willing to destroy Judah, for the sake of David His servant, since He had promised him to give a lamp to him through his sons always. 20 In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves. 21 Then Jehoram crossed over to Zair, and all his chariots with him. And he arose by night and struck the Edomites who had surrounded him and the captains of the chariots; but [his] army fled to their tents. 22 So Edom revolted against Judah to this day. Then Libnah revolted at the same time. 23 The rest of the acts of Jehoram and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? 24 So Jehoram slept with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David; and Ahaziah his son became king in his place.

The history of the kings of Israel is interrupted to mention the history of some kings of Judah. This is because these kings are in contact with the kings of Israel. It begins with Jehoram, the son of the God-fearing Jehoshaphat, who marries Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. She has an extraordinarily bad influence on him. She is like her parents and makes him walk “in the way of the kings of Israel”, a way that is evil in the sight of the LORD. The details we read in 2 Chronicles 21.

By this marriage, the evilness of the house of Ahab penetrated into Judah, in the line of the lineage of David. Yet God's grace is still over Judah. He remains faithful to His word to His servant David (2Sam 7:12-16; 21:17). For his sake the LORD does not destroy Judah, even though it should be deserved.

However, there is a form of discipline. We see it in the revolt of Edom. Whoever departs from God will face all kinds of setbacks. By this God wants to try to bring those who depart from Him back to Him.

In what seems like a clause, the uprising of Libnah is also mentioned. Libnah is a priest city. This city may have revolted because of the idolatry in which they do not want to and cannot participate. That too is a warning voice, a protest voice, against the deviations, intended to bring about a return to the LORD.

Verses 25-29 | Ahaziah King of Judah

25 In the twelfth year of Jehoram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah began to reign. 26 Ahaziah [was] twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. And his mother's name [was] Athaliah the granddaughter of Omri king of Israel. 27 He walked in the way of the house of Ahab and did evil in the sight of the LORD, like the house of Ahab [had done], because he was a son-in-law of the house of Ahab. 28 Then he went with Jehoram the son of Ahab to war against Hazael king of Aram at Ramoth-gilead, and the Arameans wounded Jehoram. 29 So King Jehoram returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which the Arameans had inflicted on him at Ramah when he fought against Hazael king of Aram. Then Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Jehoram the son of Ahab in Jezreel because he was sick.

Jehoram is succeeded by his son Ahaziah. The time when Ahaziah begins to rule is linked to the reign of Jehoram, the son of Ahab. This man goes completely the way of the house of Ahab. For his mother is a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel (verse 18). Here it says that she is "the granddaughter of Omri, king of Israel" (verse 26). She breathes the spirit of this wicked man Omri, a spirit that also breathed her father Ahab, Omri's son. This whole godless influence is only strengthened by the demonic upbringing of her mother Jezebel.

In verses 28-29 the Holy Spirit prepares the stage for the events described in 2 Kings 9-10. He leads the ways of these wicked people and prepares them to receive judgment.

2 Kings 9

Introduction

We have come to a turning point in the history of the kings of the ten tribes realm. The house of Ahab will be exterminated. To this end God calls Jehu. It is a special calling. It is said three times of Jehu that he is anointed king by the LORD (verses 3,6,12). He is the only one of all the kings of the ten tribes of whom that is said. No one of the other kings was anointed. His anointing is therefore unique and means that he is called to a special task.

At the same time we see that, although God calls someone, God does not approve of everything that that person does. God can also use unbelievers and even Satan. In this history we learn how the hand of God is in these things. He leads history, He chooses His instruments and executes judgment through them. Perhaps we can compare Jehu with Nebuchadnezzar who is also an instrument of God and at the same time acts willful. Another question is, what kind of instrument it is, to what extent the anointed Jehu has been guided by the LORD. Was he a believer?

In Hoshea 1 we see the evaluation of all Jehu's actions (Hos 1:4). There is talk about blood debt on the *house* of Jehu, in which the three following generations are included. But it started with Jehu. He shed a lot of blood from people for whom God did not order him to shed their blood.

Why does God call such a man? Because Jehu is the least bad of all the bad guys. He knew and hated the idolatry of Jezebel. He is very energetic. But whoever has a commission from the LORD has no license to do what he wills. For the execution one has to depend on Him step by step. The energy of Jehu is not that of faith, but of the flesh. One may have a command from the Lord, but yet not always be in dependence on the Lord. This is the case with Jehu.

In the history of the church on earth, which we see presented in Revelation 2-3 in the seven churches, we have arrived with Jehu in the phase of Sardis. Sardis follows Thyatira as Jehu follows Jezebel. We see much agreement between Jehu and Sardis. The Lord tells Sardis that she has the name to live, but she is dead (Rev 3:1). The expressions of life are seen, but it is

only a semblance of life. Also, the works were not found to be perfect (Rev 3:2). This does not mean that something is missing, but that more is being done than has been said. Too much has been done and that is a sin. That is how it was in the emerging Protestantism. Protestantism has dealt with the idolatry of Rome. There is much that is of God. That is the reformation. But there is also a lot of the flesh and that is protestantism.

An example of the combination of man's responsibility in a negative sense and God's actions can be seen in the judgment of Ahaziah. In 2 Chronicles 22 we read about the downfall of Ahaziah as a decree by the LORD (2Chr 22:7-9). There the death of Ahaziah is seen from the side of God. Jehu did not receive the instruction to kill also Ahaziah the king of Judah. With that he does more than he should. But that does not mean that God is losing control. It is the problem of the relation between man's responsibility and God's hand. Ahaziah was killed because he had sinned against God. What God uses from the handling of man does not change the responsibility of man.

Verses 1-4 | Command to Anoint Jehu King Over Israel

1 Now Elisha the prophet called one of the sons of the prophets and said to him, "Gird up your loins, and take this flask of oil in your hand and go to Ramoth-gilead. 2 When you arrive there, search out Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi, and go in and bid him arise from among his brothers, and bring him to an inner room. 3 Then take the flask of oil and pour it on his head and say, 'Thus says the LORD, "I have anointed you king over Israel."' Then open the door and flee and do not wait." 4 So the young man, the servant of the prophet, went to Ramoth-gilead.

Why does Elisha send a student prophet? He has to do it himself or did Elijah have to do it before? Elisha did to Hazael what Elijah was told to do. Here we see that Elisha, just like Elijah did with regard to Hazael, gives hands over the command and puts it in the hands of one of the student prophets.

He tells the student prophet to gird up his loins. This indicates that he has to walk fast to fulfil his mission quickly. Jehu must be anointed with oil from flask. That reminds of Saul who was also anointed with oil from a

flask (1Sam 10:1), while David was anointed with oil from a horn (1Sam 16:1). A flask represents fragility and a horn strength. Saul and Jehu have failed in their task; David has served the counsel of God (Acts 13:36).

The anointing must take place behind closed doors (verse 2). It is not a public matter, but a hidden matter. In this we can see an indication that God behind the scenes determines who comes to power. This also applies to all governments. By Him “kings reign” and “princes rule” (Pro 8:15,16).

Verses 5-10 | Anointing of and Command for Jehu

5 When he came, behold, the captains of the army were sitting, and he said, “I have a word for you, O captain.” And Jehu said, “For which [one] of us?” And he said, “For you, O captain.” 6 He arose and went into the house, and he poured the oil on his head and said to him, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘I have anointed you king over the people of the LORD, [even] over Israel. 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 the LORD, at the hand of Jezebel. 8 For the whole house of Ahab shall perish, and I will cut off from Ahab every male person both bond and free in Israel. 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. 10 The dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and none shall bury [her].’” Then he opened the door and fled.

The student prophet comes to Jehu. It seems that Jehu is somewhere on a field, in consultation with fellow captains of the army. He is one of the captains. The student prophet says he has a message “for you, O captain”. He does not mention a name, but Jehu responds to the remark. He is the leader. The student prophet may have looked at him or even appointed him.

When Jehu asks who he means, the student prophet answers with the same word - “for you, O captain”. Jehu gets up and goes into the house. There he is anointed by the student prophet. The words with which the anointing occurs bear witness to the great seriousness associated with the anointing. Being king “over the people of the LORD” is a serious matter. This must penetrate deeply. God does not give up His claims on His people. This is also evident from the command Jehu receives.

The LORD has not forgotten His people: for Jehu must deliver his people from the idolaters and the idols. That should Jehu tell a lot. He must perform the judgment on Ahab and his house (verses 7-10). This is the command made by Elijah (1Kgs 21:21-24).

After the anointing with the accompanying words the student prophet flees. Why this fleeing? Elisha knows the character of Jehu, as he also knew it from Hazael. It seems that he has ordered the young man not to stay with Jehu for a moment longer than necessary for the anointing. He must act as the man of God from Judah (1Kgs 13:7-10,16-17). Jehu is not a company for this student prophet. This is very different from the anointing of David. Samuel must not flee when he has anointed the anointed of the LORD. David is therefore the man after God's heart.

Verses 11-13 | Jehu Proclaimed King

11 Now Jehu came out to the servants of his master, and one said to him, "Is all well? Why did this mad fellow come to you?" And he said to them, "You know [very well] the man and his talk." 12 They said, "It is a lie, tell us now." And he said, "Thus and thus he said to me, 'Thus says the LORD, "I have anointed you king over Israel."'" 13 Then they hurried and each man took his garment and placed it under him on the bare steps, and blew the trumpet, saying, "Jehu is king!"

The company Jehu is in does not excel through Godliness. They call the messenger of Elisha, the man of God, who came to Jehu with a message from God, "this mad fellow". Men with such an appraisal are the friends of Jehu.

Jehu does not protect the messenger either. In his reply, he connects to their appraisal. He even calls the man a man who only talks, by which he could mean empty or negative talk. With these words Jehu wants to finish it off. His comrades insist, however, because they don't like his answer. They may mention the man a man who only talks, but they also know that he didn't come just like that. He will certainly have brought an important message.

When Jehu tells them what the man has said and done, they suddenly change their minds. They do not judge the student prophet differently,

but the message of that ‘talker’ is convenient for them. They do not accept the word because they agree with God’s Word, but because they want it. For them Jehu is immediately the king they want. They all take off their garment and place it under him. Then they say that Jehu has become king.

Verses 14-26 | Jehu Kills Jehoram

14 So Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi conspired against Jehoram. Now Jehoram with all Israel was defending Ramoth-gilead against Hazael king of Aram, 15 but King Jehoram had returned to Jezreel to be healed of the wounds which the Arameans had inflicted on him when he fought with Hazael king of Aram. So Jehu said, “If this is your mind, [then] let no one escape [or] leave the city to go tell [it] in Jezreel.” 16 Then Jehu rode in a chariot and went to Jezreel, for Jehoram was lying there. Ahaziah king of Judah had come down to see Jehoram. 17 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 Jehoram said, “Take a horseman and send him to meet them and let him say, ‘Is it peace?’” 18 So a horseman went to meet him and said, “Thus says the king, ‘Is it peace?’” And Jehu said, “What have you to do with peace? Turn behind me.” And the watchman reported, “The messenger came to them, but he did not return.” 19 Then he sent out a second horseman, who came to them and said, “Thus says the king, ‘Is it peace?’” And Jehu answered, “What have you to do with peace? Turn behind me.” 20 The watchman reported, “He came even to them, and he did not return; and the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi, for he drives furiously.” 21 Then Jehoram said, “Get ready.” And they made his chariot ready. Jehoram 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 property of Naboth the Jezreelite. 22 When Jehoram saw Jehu, he said, “Is it peace, Jehu?” And he answered, “What peace, so long as the harlotries of your mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?” 23 So Jehoram reined about and fled and said to Ahaziah, “[There is] treachery, O Ahaziah!” 24 And Jehu drew his bow with his full strength and shot Jehoram between his arms; and the arrow went through his heart and he sank in his chariot. 25 Then [Jehu] said to Bidkar his officer, “Take [him] up and cast him into the property of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite, for I remember when you and I were riding together after Ahab his father, that the LORD laid this oracle against him: 26

'Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons,' says the LORD, 'and I will repay you in this property,' says the LORD. Now then, take and cast him into the property, according to the word of the LORD.'

Jehu does not oppose his appointment. He accepts the kingship his friends have chosen him to. He also immediately has his plan ready and together with the other captains he conspires against Jehoram, the king of Israel. By doing so, he makes them jointly responsible for his actions. He goes not only because the LORD has said it, but provides himself with the support of others. There is no question whatsoever to the LORD what He wants to happen. He does ask if, if it is really the will of the captains that he is king, they want to show it by making sure that his plan does not become known in Jezreel ahead of time.

In an in-between sentence (verses 14b-15a) it is still told that the wicked king Jehoram of Israel is in Jezreel and that he is there to be healed of the wounds he suffered in the war against the Syrians. That explains why Jehu wants to go to Jezreel. He wants to go there because there is the man he wants to kill first. Also Ahaziah king of Judah is there. He is on a sick visit to his uncle Jehoram.

The watchman on the watchtower of Jezreel sees the company of Jehu arriving and reports it in the city. Jehoram sends out a horseman to ask if it is peace. He may be referring to peace with the Syrians. Jehoram does not think that Jehu is on his way to kill him. When the horseman arrives and asks the king's question for peace, Jehu answers how the man the man is thinking to ask that question. Does he not see that there is no peace in the kingdom as long as it is ruled by such a king? The man can better join him. That is what the messenger does. The same happens to a second messenger who is sent by Jehoram.

The watchman tells Jehoram of both the first and the second messenger that they did arrive at the company of Jehu, but that they did not return. Meanwhile, the company has also come closer. Now the watchman can see from Jehu's style of driving that it is Jehu. Jehu drives furiously.

The question might arise whether it is wrong to carry out a command as quickly and well as possible. Yet that is not what this is all about. With all we know about Jehu, it seems that his sole purpose in driving fast is

to become king as fast as possible. Doesn't he have a wonderful reason in what the prophet said? Isn't it wonderful to be able to carry out God's judgment? Jehu loves to do that, but it's a carnal pleasure with him.

This is how it can be when disciplining in the church. Discipline is necessary when there is openly sinned and it is not confessed. If, however, this discipline is carried out with an unseen pleasure, for example because it eliminates someone who obstructed our plans, the motive is purely carnal. In that case, we act in our own interest. We must always be aware that it is about the Name of the Lord. Otherwise we act in the power of the flesh, as Jehu does.

When Jehoram hears that the second rider has not returned, he and Ahaziah go to meet Jehu. Soon there are three kings together in Jezreel. They are drawn together as by a magnet and that even on Naboth's land. There Jehoram himself now asks the question he had asked by both horsemen, the question of peace with the Syrians. In his answer Jehu does not talk about peace with the Syrians or not, but about the lack of peace among God's people.

He also talks about the cause of the lack of that peace. The cause lies in the harlotries the witchcrafts of Jehoram's mother Jezebel. The diagnosis is correct. How can there be peace among God's people, as long as the disgusting and demonic influence of Jezebel is present and maintained? At the same time, the observation is businesslike. Nothing of the indignation of the prophets who share in the feelings of God's heart's sorrow can be heard.

When Jehoram discovers that Jehu is not an ally, but an opponent, he shouts "treachery" to Ahazia and flees. But Jehu is prepared for that. He draws his bow with his full strength and kills the fleeing Jehoram with one well-targeted arrow. The force with which the arrow is shot is emphasized. It reflects the inner attitude of Jehu. He must and will perform his task without failure. He knows intellectually that he is engaged in carrying out the judgment announced by God through Elijah (1Kgs 21:19-24).

We even hear from what Jehu quotes a peculiarity that we don't read in the history written in 1 Kings 21. Here it appears that Naboth's *sons* were also murdered by Jezebel and Ahab in order to take possession of their piece of

land and to keep it. By also killing the sons there is no one who will be able to claim the land of Naboth, so Jezebel and Ahab will have argued.

Verses 27-29 | Jehu Kills Ahaziah

27 When Ahaziah the king of Judah saw [this], he fled by the way of the garden house. And Jehu pursued him and said, "Shoot him too, in the chariot." [So they shot him] at the ascent of Gur, which is at Ibleam. But he fled to Megiddo and died there. 28 Then his servants carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem and buried him in his grave with his fathers in the city of David. 29 Now in the eleventh year of Jehoram, the son of Ahab, Ahaziah became king over Judah.

When Ahaziah flees, Jehu orders him to kill. The actual death of Ahaziah took place some time later, because he fled to Megiddo. He is killed in the area of Samaria, not in the city of Samaria. Ahaziah is the son of the godless king Jehoram of Judah and Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab. Instead of distancing himself from Ahab's wicked house, he seeks its friendship. Because of this he shares in the judgment that comes over the house of Ahab.

Verses 30-37 | Jehu Kills Jezebel

30 When Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard [of it], and she painted her eyes and adorned her head and looked out the window. 31 As Jehu entered the gate, she said, "Is it well, Zimri, your master's murderer?" 32 Then he lifted up his face to the window and said, "Who is on my side? Who?" And two or three officials looked down at him. 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, and he trampled her under foot. 34 When he came in, he ate and drank; and he said, "See now to this cursed woman and bury her, for she is a king's daughter." 35 They went to bury her, but they found nothing more of her than the skull and the feet and the palms of her hands. 36 Therefore they returned and told him. And he said, "This is the word of the LORD, which He spoke by His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'In the property of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel; 37 and the corpse of Jezebel will be as dung on the face of the field in the property of Jezreel, so they cannot say, "This is Jezebel."'"

After Jehu killed Jehoram, he came into Jerusalem. There is Jezebel and to Jehu it is especially about her. When Jezebel hears that Jehu is coming, she

dresses up. She paints her eyes and takes care of her hairstyle. Does she want to try to impress Jehu with her beauty? She must have known that her life was over. But instead of worrying about her soul, she is concerned about her body. That is also very much present today. It is dangerous to do a lot of physical care and neglect the care of the soul.

When she sees Jehu, she also speaks to him about peace. It is not a question of whether there is still peace to be made. It is more a statement that, as far as she is concerned, there is no peace for Jehu. She speaks to him as "Zimri, your master's murderer". The meaning seems to be as follows. Zimri became king by murder. However, he is king for only seven days, for after seven days of kingship, when he is cornered, he ends his life by suicide (1Kgs 16:8-10,15-18). By naming Jehu Zimri she says that things will not be better for him than for Zimri. She thinks he will only reign for a short time. She holds on to her own position.

Jehu does not answer her, he does not address her. He speaks to her officials and asks who is with him. His question is not who is on the side of the LORD, but who is on his side. He does not honor the Name of the LORD, but gathers people around himself. It should not be important to us who is on our side, but who is on the side of the Lord. It is not about who is with us (cf. Mk 9:38), but about who is with the Lord.

Jehu orders her to throw her out of the window. Then he tramples her under foot. He acts extremely despicable with her. This goes beyond hating evil. The way on which he judges her goes beyond what is appropriate. He is stricter than God. That he is totally insensate is shown by the fact that after having trampled Jezebel like this, he goes inside to eat and drink.

Then he seems to be getting weak again and wants to give a funeral to "this cursed woman" because she is a king's daughter. However, God did not speak of a burial. The men he sent out to bury her, come back with the announcement that there is nothing left of Jezebel except a few bones. She has been eaten by the dogs. Suddenly Jehu knows it again. He remembers what Elijah said. However, he does not allow himself to be corrected by it; it is more a conclusion. Her memory must simply disappear from Israel, she must not be remembered in any way.

2 Kings 10

Introduction

In this chapter we see several sides of Jehu. We see how on the one hand he goes too far by killing people for whom God has not instructed him to kill them. On the other hand, he did not go far enough. He eradicated the Baal service, but not the golden calves, which he continues to serve. He often does the work of God, but pursues actually his own interests. It seems that he is more of an instrument than a servant. He knows how to handle the sword excellently when it comes to judging evil. What he has not learned, however, is to apply the sword, applied in a spiritual sense, to himself.

He is a useful instrument as long as God's interests correspond to his own. If God's interests are not in line with his interests, he goes his own way.

Verses 1-11 | Ahab's Offspring Killed

1 Now Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. And Jehu wrote letters and sent [them] to Samaria, to the rulers of Jezreel, the elders, and to the guardians of [the children of] Ahab, saying, 2 "Now, when this letter comes to you, since your master's sons are with you, as well as the chariots and horses and a fortified city and the weapons, 3 select the best and fittest of your master's sons, and set [him] on his father's throne, and fight for your master's house." 4 But they feared greatly and said, "Behold, the two kings did not stand before him; how then can we stand?" 5 And the one who [was] over the household, and he who [was] over the city, the elders, and the guardians of [the children], sent [word] to Jehu, saying, "We are your servants, all that you say to us we will do, we will not make any man king; do what is good in your sight." 6 Then he wrote a letter to them a second time saying, "If you are on my side, and you will listen to my voice, take the heads of the men, your master's sons, and come to me at Jezreel tomorrow about this time." Now the king's sons, seventy persons, [were] with the great men of the city, [who] were rearing them. 7 When the letter came to them, they took the king's sons and slaughtered [them], seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent [them] to him at Jezreel. 8 When the messenger came and told him, saying, "They have

brought the heads of the king's sons," he said, "Put them in two heaps at the entrance of the gate until morning." 9 Now in the morning he went out and stood and said to all the people, "You are innocent; behold, I conspired against my master and killed him, but who killed all these? 10 Know then that there shall fall to the earth nothing of the word of the LORD, which the LORD spoke concerning the house of Ahab, for the LORD has done what He spoke through His servant Elijah." 11 So Jehu killed all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men and his acquaintances and his priests, until he left him without a survivor.

The events follow each other in quick succession. Jehu acts energetically. After Jezreel, he also wants Samaria at his side. Seventy sons of Ahab live in Samaria. This will mean all his male offspring which he has conceived with his many wives, and also his grandsons. All these sons are a danger to Jehu's kingdom. They must therefore be eliminated. He devises a clever plan for this. He sends letters to Samaria, to the city council. The content of his letter is very challenging, there is bravura in it. It is the language of the confident man who knows his own power and also knows the weak spot of his opponent.

He speaks to them as people who still see their "lord" in Ahab. He also points out to them their military strength. As capital they have access to "the chariots and horses and a fortified city and the weapons". His proposal is that they should only put the best of Ahab's sons on the throne and under his leadership will fight with him. He tells them to appoint a kind of counter king and then, in a fight with him, decide who the real king is.

The fact that Jehu dares to say and present all this shows that he is certain of his case. He knows the sons of Ahab. They are weak guys, just like the leaders of the city. The leaders are men of the kind of elders and distinguished men of Jezreel who have danced to the tune of Jezebel and killed Naboth in response to her letter (1Kgs 21:8-14).

The language of the letter is such that Jehu presents himself as the undisputed king and that whoever dares to dispute it should go ahead. As far as he is concerned, the results are fixed. The choice is up to the leaders of Samaria. Like Jehoram, they will know what kind of man Jehu is, who is known by all as a "furious" rider (2Kgs 9:20), a man who is afraid of

nothing and nobody and who goes aside for nothing and nobody. It is possible that the messengers also told how Jehu raced in Jezreel and what fate Jehoram, Ahaziah and Jezebel underwent. In any case, they refer to it as acts that cause terror.

Would they dare to take the sword against such a man? Their mind says they shouldn't do that. It is much wiser to join Jehu. That is what they do. They let him know that they join him. They do so in words that imply total submission to him. This is exactly what he wants. Now he can use them to exterminate the offspring of Ahab without getting dirty hands himself.

When Jehu has received news from the leaders of Samaria that they promise him their support, he writes them a second letter (verse 6). He gives them a command that allows them to prove that they mean what they say. Jehu begins his letter with words similar to those he said to the officials of Jezebel: "If you are on my side" (cf. 2Kgs 9:32). He is only interested in who is for *him*. When they are for him, they will listen to his voice. Listening to the voice of the LORD is not an issue. He now makes these elders allies and instructs them to kill the sons of Ahab.

The question remains how his command in this second letter is to be understood. His writing may be ambiguous. That is, "the heads of the men, your master's sons" does not mean the literal heads, but the most important sons, the most influential. They should then take the men from the city with them and arrive at Jehu tomorrow around the same time as today. The men of the city literally understand what the letter says and Jehu may have meant it that way. When the heads are cut off, they are sent to Jerusalem. The elders do not bring the heads themselves to offer them personally. They would like to remain at a distance.

Jehu gets a message that the heads are delivered. Then he orders the heads to be placed in two heaps near the city gate. When the people of the city go out of town to work, they see the heads. But Jehu is there to give the explanation of this sinister sight. In the words he uses, he is diplomatic and insincere. He is straightforward when it comes to the sword, but he is not straightforward in his language.

He declares the people innocent. As for himself, he denies any involvement in the murder of these men. Certainly, he killed Jehoram, but that is

because he had to do so because the LORD ordered it, although he does not pronounce it here clearly. Who has been working in this case? No, he wouldn't be able to say that. He plays the innocent, the ignorant. Although he is directly responsible for the murder, his question designates others as murderers. He says nothing about the instruction he has given.

To camouflage his innocence and ignorance even more, he gives a pious twist to his story (verse 10). They should not be too concerned about who did this. It all falls under the administration of the LORD. After all, the LORD's revenge has been carried out, hasn't it? What he in fact does is to blame the LORD.

Verse 11 is a kind of conclusion. Jehu kills all who are left of the house of Ahab. But he also goes further. He also killed "all his great men and his acquaintances and his priests". He was not commissioned to do so. We must never go further than the Lord tells us, no matter how justified certain things may seem. Jehu wants to confirm his kingship and clears away everything that could hinder him. What is the power of his actions? The flesh, he acts for himself. The power of the flesh can work in spiritual things, but then there is always done more than the Lord's command.

Verses 12-14 | The Brothers of Ahaziah Killed

12 Then he arose and departed and went to Samaria. On the way while he was at Beth-eked of the shepherds, 13 Jehu met the relatives of Ahaziah king of Judah and said, "Who are you?" And they answered, "We are the relatives of Ahaziah; and we have come down to greet the sons of the king and the sons of the queen mother." 14 He said, "Take them alive." So they took them alive and killed them at the pit of Beth-eked, forty-two men; and he left none of them.

Nor did Jehu receive a command from the LORD to kill the princes of Judah. Ahaziah is a son of the evil Jehoram and Athaliah and therefore a grandson of Ahab and rightly killed. The brothers of Ahaziah are not literal brothers, because Ahaziah did not have anymore (2Chr 21:16-17). They may be cousins of him. The fact that the men are killed is justified in God's governmental ways, because they deserved to be killed. They were friends of the house of Ahab.

Verses 15-16 | Jehonadab

15 Now when he had departed from there, he met Jehonadab the son of Rechab [coming] to meet him; and he greeted him and said to him, "Is your heart right, as my heart is with your heart?" And Jehonadab answered, "It is." [Jehu said], "If it is, give [me] your hand." And he gave him his hand, and he took him up to him into the chariot. 16 He said, "Come with me and see my zeal for the LORD." So he made him ride in his chariot.

As Jehu continues, there is a sudden meeting with Jehonadab. In response to Jehu's question about the rightness of his heart, Jehonadab answers that his heart is indeed right. He has a right heart, but not so much in relation to Jehu as in relation to God. What the rightness of Jehu's heart is worth, shows his performance, especially in the way he will soon eradicate the worshippers of Baal.

Jehonadab is a remarkable man. He is of the family of Rechab, of the people of Kenites. So he is not from origin from God's people, but descends from a Canaanite people (Gen 15:18-19), so from those peoples God had said they should be eradicated. Now not all Kenites lived in Canaan and therefore not all Kenites fell under the judgement. Several of them lived among God's people (Jdg 1:16; 4:17; 1Sam 15:6; 1Chr 2:55).

In Jeremiah 35 we read extensively about Jehonadab and his descendants and God's appreciation for him and his family. There it turns out that Jehonadab was a faithful servant of the LORD and that his faithfulness is rewarded by the LORD. We have seen before that the period of Jehu can be compared to the period of Sardis in Revelation 3 (Rev 3:1-6). It is remarkable that we not only find Jehu, but also Jehonadab in Sardis.

In Sardis we recognize Jehu in those who say they have the name to live (Rev 3:1b). Jehu testifies of himself that he lives before the LORD when he says to Jehonadab "see my zeal for the LORD". Israel is said to be "zealous for God, but not in accordance with knowledge" (Rom 10:2). That also applies to Jehu. It is not a language of faith to so point at himself in his zeal for the LORD, but pride.

It must therefore be said of Jehu that his deeds have not been found completed in the sight of God (Rev 3:2b). Jehu may be eradicating the

Baal service, but the golden calves still exist. Jehu returns, so to speak, to Jeroboam and not to David. Thus, the period of Sardis is in a sense a relief after the period of Thyatira – although Sardis and Thyatira coexist in church history – but Sardis does not return to the word of the apostles and prophets. Sardis remains, so to speak, ‘hanging’ in Pergamus, that is to say, the time in which the church takes in the world.

Jehonadab we recognize in the “few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments” (Rev 3:4a). They receive a promise (Rev 3:4b), just as Jehonadab also receives a promise from the LORD (Jer 35:18-19). Jehonadab is not in Judah, in Jerusalem, or near the temple, the dwelling-place of God; but he is one of the faithful among the ten apostate tribes. Jehu would also like to insure himself of his company. Jehonadab is an influential man because of his consistent attitude to life and lifestyle. This will appeal to the conservative subjects in his empire.

Jehu makes Jehonadab his friend because of the political advantage this gives him. He uses Jehonadab to strengthen his own position. When Jehu says “give your hand”, it means more than just that he can help him climb up his car. It is also symbolic for the call for his help in his acquisition of the kingship.

Jehonadab is standing by Jehu’s side; he climbs up into the chariot with him. Yet he takes a clear place of separation in the ten tribes. This is clear from Jeremiah 35. He does not drink wine, which indicates that he has no part in the joys of the apostate people. He doesn’t even plant a vineyard, because he doesn’t want to be tempted to drink wine either. He doesn’t even have a house or a field, but lives in tents. He does not want to be connected to the land in any way. For this whole behavior, this consistent attitude, which can also be seen in his descendants, he receives God’s appreciation and reward (Jer 35:12-19).

We see something similar in Protestantism. New churches are formed there, which are separated from the evil in Sardis. They arise as a protest against the prevailing evil. We recognize that in our days, for example, in the restored reformed church. It is a place of separation, although within the boundaries of Sardis, of the ten tribes.

Verse 17 | Jehu Completes His Commission

17 When he came to Samaria, he killed all who remained to Ahab in Samaria, until he had destroyed him, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke to Elijah.

In this verse the historian tells us that Jehu arrives in Samaria and completes his commission there. There he kills all those who “remained to Ahab”. With this he fulfills “the word of the LORD which He spoke to Elijah” (cf. 1Kgs 21:21).

Verses 18-28 | The Worshipers of Baal Exterminated

18 Then Jehu gathered all the people and said to them, “Ahab served Baal a little; Jehu will serve him much. 19 Now, summon all the prophets of Baal, all his worshipers and all his priests; let no one be missing, for I have a great sacrifice for Baal; whoever is missing shall not live.” But Jehu did it in cunning, so that he might destroy the worshipers of Baal. 20 And Jehu said, “Sanctify a solemn assembly for Baal.” And they proclaimed [it]. 21 Then Jehu sent throughout Israel and all the worshipers of Baal came, so that there was not a man left who did not come. And when they went into the house of Baal, the house of Baal was filled from one end to the other. 22 He said to the one who [was] in charge of the wardrobe, “Bring out garments for all the worshipers of Baal.” So he brought out garments for them. 23 Jehu went into the house of Baal with Jehonadab the son of Rechab; and he said to the worshipers of Baal, “Search and see that there is here with you none of the servants of the LORD, but only the worshipers of Baal.” 24 Then they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings. Now Jehu had stationed for himself eighty men outside, and he had said, “The one who permits any of the men whom I bring into your hands to escape shall give up his life in exchange.” 25 Then it came about, as soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, that Jehu said to the guard and to the royal officers, “Go in, kill them; let none come out.” And they killed them with the edge of the sword; and the guard and the royal officers threw [them] out, and went to the inner room of the house of Baal. 26 They brought out the [sacred] pillars of the house of Baal and burned them. 27 They also broke down the [sacred] pillar of Baal and broke down the house of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day. 28 Thus Jehu eradicated Baal out of Israel.

Jehu now focuses on the idolatrous worship of Baal. Here he does again what is good, according to the instruction of the LORD who has said that every idolatry must be cut off from the land (Deu 13:12-18). Only Jehu works in cunning. That is not the work of the LORD. It is a representation of the situation whereby it seems that the lie promotes God's work (cf. Rom 3:8). God never uses man's lie to maintain His truth as truth. What a contrast with Elijah who did everything in public (1Kgs 18:21-24,30). Also in this part we see that Jehu acts more out of the 'anti-Ahab' thought than out of the 'pro-LORD' thought.

He frames the case in such a way that there is no reference to the will of the LORD. Imagine that the Name of the LORD would be mentioned. Then the idolaters would immediately smell danger and his plan would fall to pieces. His plan works. "All the worshipers of Baal came." Possibly under the good influence of Jehonadab, who is present here, he ensures that no servant of the LORD can be found among the worshipers of Baal. Every worshiper of Baal must dress with the clothing of Baal. Thus every worshiper of Baal becomes known. Jehu lets an inspection be carried out to see if there is not inadvertently one of the servants of the LORD among the idolaters.

If all worshipers of Baal and only worshipers of Baal are in the house of Baal, all these worshipers offer "sacrifices and burnt offerings". After they have made their sacrifices, Jehu sends the men he has prepared and instructed, inside, with the instruction to kill every worshiper of Baal. His language is also threatening. Anyone who lets someone escape will have to pay for it with their own lives.

The men of Jehu execute their task thoroughly. All those who are in the house of Baal are killed. The bodies are thrown out. Then everything devoted to Baal is destroyed. Baal's house is demolished and turned into a latrine, the most despicable place in the city.

The result is impressive. It is a good result, but obtained by bad methods. In the ways of God, the end does not justify the means. The means must also be in accordance with His Word. We must fight lawfully (2Tim 2:5). Jehu is not committing murder here. What he does is to execute idolaters by the command of God. Only the method he uses is false. The Spirit will

never urge anyone to bring people together under the pretext of making a sacrifice to the idols.

Verses 29-33 | Reward and Punishment

29 However, [as for] the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin, from these Jehu did not depart, [even] the golden calves that [were] at Bethel and that [were] at Dan. 30 The LORD said to Jehu, "Because you have done well in executing 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." 31 But Jehu was not careful to walk in the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, which he made Israel sin. 32 In those days the LORD began to cut off [portions] from Israel; and Hazael defeated them throughout the territory of Israel: 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.

As has already been mentioned, Jehu's works have not been found complete before God. He eradicated the Baal's service, but he left the golden calves untouched. It is even so that he persisted in the sins of Jeroboam in serving the golden calves in Bethel and Dan. In it he preceded the people on the way of sin.

When the balance of Jehu's life is taken, we see in verses 30-31 the two sides of God's judgment. Good is rewarded, this is first mentioned by God (verse 30). The reward is that his offspring will be on the throne until the fourth generation. This also means that it will not be permanent, as it would have been if he had been faithful. The LORD appreciates what was good with Jehu. God does not only see the wrong.

Yet it must follow "but" because of the unfaithfulness of Jehu (verse 31). As a result, the judgment comes in the following verses. For this the LORD uses Hazael as His rod of discipline. It is in reality, as it says here, the LORD Himself who punishes Israel. He began "to make Israel smaller". All the tribes of Israel on the wilderness side of the Jordan fall into the hands of the Syrians. This is the result of this revival. Jehu has been a sham revival.

Verses 34-36 | The Death of Jehu

34 Now the rest of the acts of Jehu and all that he did and all his might, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? 35 And Jehu slept with his fathers, and they buried him in Samaria. And Jehoahaz his son became king in his place. 36 Now the time which Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria [was] twenty-eight years.

These verses are the end of the description of Jehu's life. He has accomplished much and has been mighty. What all this has been, has been recorded by others. What is important to us is described in the two chapters we have just considered. It concerns the extermination of the house of Ahab and the religion associated with that house. Then his time is over and he dies. He is buried in Samaria, the place he coveted for the exercise of his power. According to the promise of God, he is succeeded by his son Jehoahaz.

The duration of his government is given right at the very end of his life. Usually this happens already at the beginning of the reign of a king. This may have something to do with the fact that his accession to the throne is not clearly mentioned anywhere in his history.

2 Kings 11

Verses 1-3 | Jehosheba Hides Joash

1 When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she rose and destroyed all the royal offspring. 2 But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Jehoram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah and stole him from among the king's sons who were being put to death, and placed him and his nurse in the bedroom. So they hid him from Athaliah, and he was not put to death. 3 So he was hidden with her in the house of the LORD six years, while Athaliah was reigning over the land.

Here we go back to the beginning of the reign of Jehu. We go back twenty-eight years. Jehu has just killed Ahaziah. Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah and daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, seizes power. She kills her own offspring. She doesn't have natural feelings. She does not need to kill many because Jehu has worked thoroughly in the execution of his commission.

Behind this woman stands Satan himself, who is out to eradicate the seed of David to prevent the Messiah from being born. But it does not get out of God's hand. Jehosheba, the sister of Ahaziah, hides the son of Ahaziah, Joash, and thereby prevents the total extermination of the offspring of David. This child, like the Lord Jesus later, is taken away and hidden to stay out of the hands of murderers. Jehosheba signs 'the LORD is faithful'. The LORD will not destroy Judah and keeps a lamp burning for the house of David until the birth of the Messiah.

Joash is secretly fed and raised. He is in one of the rooms of the temple and is therefore connected to the house of the LORD. He lives with the LORD. Through this hidden place he is as it were in death. When he becomes king, it is, so to speak, through death. At the same time, all this time the faithful think that it is over and out with the kingship according to God's thoughts. Christ is also now "hidden in God" (Col 3:3) and waits until the moment He can show Himself to His people. For the faithful now this is no hidden thing, for they see Him in glory, while the world does not see Him.

Athaliah thinks she can control everything. She has the power. It is a representation of the power of the papacy, of the roman-catholic church, which kills all who do not subject themselves to her (Rev 17:6). She has felt supremely powerful. There is absolutely no counting with the coming of Christ. In this woman we see the mystery of the lawlessness that develops in the bosom of Christianity.

Verses 4-8 | Jehoiada's Plan

4 Now in the seventh year Jehoiada sent and brought the captains of hundreds of the Carites and of the guard, and brought them to him in the house of the LORD. Then he made a covenant with them and put them under oath in the house of the LORD, and showed them the king's son. 5 He commanded them, saying, "This is the thing that you shall do: one third of you, who come in on the sabbath and keep watch over the king's house 6 (one third also [shall be] at the gate Sur, and one third at the gate behind the guards), shall keep watch over the house for defense. 7 Two parts of you, [even] all who go out on the sabbath, shall also keep watch over the house of the LORD for the king. 8 Then you shall surround the king, each with his weapons in his hand; and whoever comes within the ranks shall be put to death. And be with the king when he goes out and when he comes in."

Only Jehoiada and Jehosheba and a few more know the hidden king. The whole people are ignorant of it. It is the same now. Only a few know of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus dwells in the Spirit in what is today His temple, the church, and the body of the believer. This is hidden from the world, while unfortunately many Christians are also unaware of this.

When the believers come together as a church, they can also experience this in a special way. Christ is there through the Spirit Himself in the midst. Although He is invisible to the natural eye, the by the Spirit enlightened eyes of the heart see Him. The time of His appearance comes, when the time is fulfilled, when the fullness of the times – “the seventh year” (verse 4) – has come (Eph 1:10).

Jehoiada the priest lets the commanders come to him. He brings them to the area where the presence of the LORD is noticeable, the house of the LORD. In His presence he makes a covenant with them and put them un-

der oath. Then he shows them “the king’s son”. It contains a nice order with an important spiritual application. It is primarily about obedience and faithfulness to the Lord. If this is present, or at least if the longing for it is felt deeply, then we see the Lord Jesus of Whom Joash is a picture here.

Then Jehoiada commands the captains what to do to protect the young king. For us it means that there will also be the desire to protect Him from the attacks of unbelief when we see the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus protects us, but it is also true that we are called to protect and defend His glory with spiritual weapons. God has entrusted us with the glory of His Son to carry it through the world.

Verses 9-12 | Joash Crowned and Anointed

9 So the captains of hundreds did according to all that Jehoiada the priest commanded. And each one of them took his men who were to come in on the sabbath, with those who were to go out on the sabbath, and came to Jehoiada the priest. 10 The priest gave to the captains of hundreds the spears and shields that [had been] King David’s, which [were] in the house of the LORD. 11 The guards stood each with his weapons in his hand, from the right side of the house to the left side of the house, by the altar and by the house, around the king. 12 Then he brought the king’s son out and put the crown on him and [gave him] the testimony; and they made him king and anointed him, and they clapped their hands and said, “[Long] live the king!”

The captains execute the orders of Jehoiada exactly as they have been told. We see here that captains over others can only act well if they themselves are obedient to those who are above them (cf. Mt 8:9). The men they have under their command are the men who serve or have served “on the sabbath”. The sabbath speaks of the rest of God. Only those who know and participate in the rest of God can be used to protect the king of God.

For us, it means that only believers whose feet are shod “with the preparation of the gospel of grace” (Eph 6:15) are able to properly protect the honor of Christ. These are the believers who go their way on earth with the peace of God in their hearts, who show in their lives that they are connected with Christ in heaven, as the letter to the Ephesians makes beautifully clear.

The weapons given to the men to defend themselves are not new weapons. These are the old, familiar weapons that King David has already used. As a particularity also is mentioned that they come from the sanctuary. Jehoiada says with this that he is going back to “what was from the beginning” (1Jn 1:1). He asks, as it were, “for the ancient paths” (Jer 6:16). The ancient Word of God is unrivalled in its battle-force. The spears are to kill the enemy, the shields are to protect themselves from the enemy’s counter-attacks.

The weapons with which we must fight are not the weapons of the flesh, but of the Spirit (2Cor 10:3-5). To use them properly, they must come from the presence of the Lord Jesus. They are weapons that have been tested by Him. When we are in His presence we see how He wants us to use the weapons. We then see that the strength for our struggle lies in showing His features.

Thus armed the men stand around the king. The weapons are in their hands, ready for use. The positions they occupy are all connected to the house of the LORD and the altar. For us it means that the spiritual battle is fought in connection with God’s house. The church is closely linked to the Lord Jesus and the truth of this must be defended by us for the sake of Him Who dwells there.

Once that position is taken, the king can come out and be crowned. The crown here is a diadem. The word ‘diadem’ here is the translation of the Hebrew word ‘nezer’. From this word is also derived the Hebrew word translated with ‘Nazarite’. This indicates that the ceremony is more a consecration than a coronation. This is confirmed by the anointing. The kingship of Joash is dedicated to God.

He also receives “the testimony” that is the law, as the guide for his government (Deu 17:14-20). He must govern in accordance with the Word of God. His ordination happens before God and he is called to live and reign according to the Word of God.

We have nothing else for our stay on earth. The believers now are also “a royal priesthood” (1Pet 2:9). We are dedicated, anointed and called to proclaim God’s virtues in the world, and this is only possible if God’s Word is

our guide in this. It is not about persuasion or training, but about knowing our position and obedience to live in accordance with that position.

Verses 13-16 | Athaliah Put to Death

13 When Athaliah heard the noise of the guard [and of] the people, she came to the people in the house of the LORD. 14 She looked and behold, the king was standing by the pillar, according to the custom, with the captains and the trumpeters beside the king; and all the people of the land rejoiced and blew trumpets. Then Athaliah tore her clothes and cried, "Treason! Treason!" 15 And Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of hundreds who were appointed over the army and said to them, "Bring her out between the ranks, and whoever follows her put to death with the sword." For the priest said, "Let her not be put to death in the house of the LORD." 16 So they seized her, and when she arrived at the horses' entrance of the king's house, she was put to death there.

Athaliah hears the sound of the tribute to the king. She is very frightened. She has lived and ruled for years in the thought that every descendant with a right to the throne is dead. Now it turns out that there is such a descendant alive.

If we faithfully show and let hear our testimony in the world and the religious world, people cannot ignore the fact that the Lord Jesus, whom they believe to be dead, still lives. It is our duty to make that clear. The reactions to this are different. There are people who repent and also join the Lord Jesus. However, there are also people in whom hatred becomes visible and noticeable.

The shock that goes through Athaliah did not bring her to her knees, but in heavy resistance. To personally convince herself that what she hears and fears is true, she goes to the temple, where she will not have been often. There she sees Joash standing by the pillar, the place to be for the consecration of the king.

The sight of the king leads Athaliah to the tearing of her clothes. This is not a sign of humility and repentance for her. She screams out that betrayal is being committed. She is completely blind to the betrayal she committed herself during her seizure of power.

Her shouts do not find any connection with the people. Jehoiada orders to take her out of the temple complex. She must be put to death, but not in the temple. Even those who follow her must be put to death. There should be no pardon for her and anyone who places himself on her side. Then Athaliah is killed at the king's house, where she has put her false claim for such a long time. She is killed at the place where she has shown her pride.

Verses 17-18 | The Covenant

17 Then Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD and the king and the people, that they would be the LORD's people, also between the king and the people. 18 All the people of the land went to the house of Baal, and tore it down; his altars and his images they broke in pieces thoroughly, and killed Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars. And the priest appointed officers over the house of the LORD.

Here the priest makes a new covenant between the LORD, the king and the people. It is a renewal of the old covenant. It is about the people of Israel, that it will also be in practice "the LORD's people".

When the covenant is made, when the people are again in the right relationship with the LORD, the Spirit inspires all the people of the land. They go out and tear down the idols and what has to do with them. Then Jehoiada reinstates the offices for the house of the LORD. Also in our lives there is room again for worship and serving the Lord when we, under the working of God's Spirit, throw away from our lives what is not good.

Verses 19-21 | Joash on the Throne

19 He took the captains of hundreds and the Carites and the guards and all the people of the land; and they brought the king down from the house of the LORD, and came by the way of the gate of the guards to the king's house. And he sat on the throne of the kings. 20 So all the people of the land rejoiced and the city was quiet. For they had put Athaliah to death with the sword at the king's house. 21 Jehoash was seven years old when he became king.

Athaliah was killed at the king's house. The way for the king according to God's appointment is now free. The king can come out of the hidden place of the LORD's house and sit on the king's throne. This speaks of the return

of the Lord Jesus from the sanctuary to openly accept His reign on earth. It also speaks of the moment in the believer's life when the Lord Jesus sits down on the throne of his heart and submits his whole life to Him.

All the people of the land is happy. The 'people of the land' refer to the people who do their work in simplicity. In the city live more the intellectuals and the governors. The city, where undoubtedly still live Athaliah's supporters, remains quiet. These followers of the old regime hypocritically submit to the king.

There is a beginning of restoration, but it is still very weak. Joash is only seven years old when he becomes king. He still has to grow in his kingship.

2 Kings 12

Verses 1-3 | Reign of Jehoash

1 In the seventh year of Jehu, Jehoash became king, and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba. 2 Jehoash did right in the sight of the LORD all his days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him. 3 Only the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.

There are seven or eight kings of whom we read that they did “right in the sight of the LORD”. Without exception, however, we also read of them that things went wrong with them later on. Experiences with the Lord are no guarantee of remaining faithful to the Lord. In youth there is often a freshness for the Lord that can disappear later. It are warnings for older believers.

Of Jehoash we read why it is that it goes wrong. As soon as Jehoiada dies, things go wrong. The big question for anyone who is young is whether faith is based on their own relationship with the Lord or on that of parents or older believers. There can be new life, without practice in personal contact with the Lord and without being taught by Him.

It is not good for (young) believers to remain dependent on older believers. For sisters it is important that in their faith they are not dependent on their husbands. The reverse is also true. For example, for sisters an own life of prayer is of great importance. It should not be the case that believers become helpless when certain believers disappear. This helplessness is the result of the fact that these believers have leaned too much upon other believers, without learning to bear their own responsibility. The same applies to parents and their children. They must teach their children to be independent in the Lord.

The high places mentioned in verse 3 are high places dedicated to the LORD. At such high places Solomon also sacrificed (1Kgs 3:2-3). As long as the temple is not there, God allows sacrifice to be made there. Now that the temple is there, they wouldn't have to sacrifice there any more. It is like

serving God in a place where the Lord Jesus cannot be in the midst. There are Christians who believe that the Lord Jesus is everywhere in the midst, even though things have been introduced that are not in accordance with God's Word, such as a by man appointed pastor.

Verses 4-8 | Jehoash Commands to Restore the Temple

4 Then Jehoash said to the priests, "All the money of the sacred things which is brought into the house of the LORD, in current money, [both] the money of each man's assessment [and] all the money which any man's heart prompts him to bring into the house of the LORD, 5 let the priests take it for themselves, each from his acquaintance; and they shall repair the damages of the house wherever any damage may be found." 6 But it came about that in the twenty-third year of King Jehoash the priests had not repaired the damages of the house. 7 Then King Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest, and for the [other] priests and said to them, "Why do you not repair the damages of the house? Now therefore take no [more] money from your acquaintances, but pay it for the damages of the house." 8 So the priests agreed that they would take no [more] money from the people, nor repair the damages of the house.

Jehoash understands that only the temple is the place where God's people must come to sacrifice. Therefore he wants to restore the temple. Three types of money are used for this restoration: the ransom that every numbered person must pay (Exo 30:11-16), money from someone who has made a promise and converts that promise into a sum of money (Lev 27:1-8) and money that is given voluntarily.

Jehoash does not use the money to build a new temple. With Jehoash it is not about a new temple. He does not act from an attitude that does not like the old because in his opinion 'it is no longer of this time'. This is the reasoning that is often heard and acted upon in Christianity. The old, what God Himself has given, may be restored to its original state. For us this means that in practicing to be a church, we are going back to the principles of the Word concerning the church.

At one point, "in the twenty-third year" of his reign, Jehoash noted that no work had been done to restore the temple. He calls Jehoiada and the priests to account about this and warns them about it. Jehoash is still so

powerful here, that he can even warn Jehoiada. He does not wait for an answer – in any case, we are not informed of any answer – but immediately gives new orders to get the temple restored as soon as possible.

From the run-up to his renewed command to restore the temple, it may be possible to understand why nothing has been done so far to restore it. Jehoash says they shouldn't accept any more money from their acquaintances. They may be so busy collecting and managing the money that the work for which they receive the money does not get off the ground (cf. Acts 6:1-6).

Another way has to be found. The priests should no longer be involved in collecting money. They also do not have to contribute to the restoration of the temple. That work will be done by others.

Verses 9-16 | Temple Restoration Collection

9 But Jehoiada the priest took a chest and bored a hole in its lid and put it beside the altar, on the right side as one comes into the house of the LORD; and the priests who guarded the threshold put in it all the money which was brought into the house of the LORD. 10 When they saw that there was much money in the chest, the king's scribe and the high priest came up and tied [it] in bags and counted the money which was found in the house of the LORD. 11 They gave the money which was weighed out into the hands of those who did the work, who had the oversight of the house of the LORD; and they paid it out to the carpenters and the builders who worked on the house of the LORD; 12 and to the masons and the stonecutters, and for buying timber and hewn stone to repair the damages to the house of the LORD, and for all that was laid out for the house to repair it. 13 But there were not made for the house of the LORD silver cups, snuffers, bowls, trumpets, any vessels of gold, or vessels of silver from the money which was brought into the house of the LORD; 14 for they gave that to those who did the work, and with it they repaired the house of the LORD. 15 Moreover, they did not require an accounting from the men into whose hand they gave the money to pay to those who did the work, for they dealt faithfully. 16 The money from the guilt offerings and the money from the sin offerings was not brought into the house of the LORD; it was for the priests.

It is about the construction of the house of God, that is in our time the church. That house is in decay. There are many in that house who have no life out of God. Many believers associate themselves with unbelievers because they do not ask if there is life. We must restore in God's house what is not good in it. All that is not of the Lord must be removed or restored according to His will.

Many revivals are aimed at personal experience. However, it is important that it is the church of the living God. Whoever repents becomes a member of the body of Christ. This means that such a person is there for the other and for the whole. How a member functions in the church depends on how he or she deals with the Lord. If there is contact with the Lord and His Word is read, He will make known what we can do for others. We live in an 'I' era. We also see this in the perception of faith, which is mainly 'I-focused'.

The collection of the money for the restoration of the temple is now done in a box. Joadah bored a hole in the lid. The funds collected are used only for repair work and not for making utensils in the temple. The money is given to those who do the repair work. They can freely dispose of it and buy what they think they need. They do not have to account for how exactly they spent the money. There is trust because they deal faithfully. Trust is given, not demanded.

There also remains a strict separation between the gifts for the restoration and the money from the offerings. The money from the guilt offerings and the money from the sin offerings is for the priests and is not used for the repair work. The money from the offerings comes from the twenty percent to be given when bringing a guilt offering (Lev 5:16).

Verses 17-18 | Hazael Threatens Jerusalem

17 Then Hazael king of Aram went up and fought against Gath and captured it, and Hazael set his face to go up to Jerusalem. 18 Jehoash king of Judah took all the sacred things that Jehoshaphat and Jehoram and Ahaziah, his fathers, kings of Judah, had dedicated, and his own sacred things and all the gold that was found among the treasuries of the house of the LORD and of the king's house, and sent [them] to Hazael king of Aram. Then he went away from Jerusalem.

Without giving any reason, the historian suddenly mentions Hazael's march against Jerusalem after capturing Gath. In 2 Chronicles 24 we read why this discipline comes over Judah (2Chr 24:17-24). There we see that Jehoash is doing well, as long as he is under the good influence of the priest Jehoiada. When Jehoiada falls away, he listens to others. Jehoash is a man who can be influenced quickly. He admits quickly, he has no powerful own opinion. Good friends have a good influence, bad friends have a bad influence.

The result is that he leaves the LORD. Because of this the temple doesn't mean much to him anymore. When he comes under the pressure of Hazael, he doesn't resort to the LORD. That was the purpose of the LORD, for this enemy comes down upon him as a chastisement from Him. But instead of going to the LORD he devises his own solution. He takes from the temple, which first meant so much to him, to pay the enemy of it, that he may depart from him. He succeeds in his purpose, but at the same time he is further away from the LORD than ever.

Verses 19-21 | Death of Joash

19 Now the rest of the acts of Joash and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? 20 His servants arose and made a conspiracy and struck down Joash at the house of Millo [as he was] going down to Silla. 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, and Amaziah his son became king in his place.

The end of Joash is humiliating. He is murdered by two of his servants. These men are sons of pagan mothers (2Chr 24:26). Joash is buried in the city of David with his fathers. It does not mention that he enters the graves of the kings, which has been interpreted as a sign of disapproval of his later behavior.

2 Kings 13

Verses 1-9 | Jehoahaz King Over Israel

1 In the twenty-third year of Joash the son of Ahaziah, king of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu became king over Israel at Samaria, [and he reigned] seventeen years. 2 He did evil in the sight of the LORD, and followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel sin; he did not turn from them. 3 So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and He gave them continually into the hand of Hazeal king of Aram, and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazeal. 4 Then Jehoahaz entreated the favor of the LORD, and the LORD listened to him; for He saw the oppression of Israel, how the king of Aram oppressed them. 5 The LORD gave Israel a deliverer, so that they escaped from under the hand of the Arameans; and the sons of Israel lived in their tents as formerly. 6 Nevertheless they did not turn away from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, with which he made Israel sin, but walked in them; and the Asherah also remained standing in Samaria. 7 For he left to Jehoahaz of the army not more than fifty horsemen and ten chariots and 10,000 footmen, for the king of Aram had destroyed them and made them like the dust at threshing. 8 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? 9 And Jehoahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in Samaria; and Joash his son became king in his place.

After the history of king Joash of the two tribes realm in the previous chapter, we are now back at the ten tribes. We are in the history of the ten tribes realm during the reign of the house of Jehu. This period of reign is the longest in the history of the ten tribes realm. It is a family reign of no less than five successive kings. It starts with Jehu, who is succeeded by his son Jehoahaz, then comes the son of Jehoahaz, Jehoash, then the son of Jehoash, Jeroboam II and finally Zechariah, the son of Jeroboam II. But then it is over.

The reign of Jehu's house has been limited to four generations after him because Jehu's zeal has been limited or partial. He has done much that God has asked of him, but his heart has not been complete with the LORD. He has allowed idolatry to exist.

It has already been noted that the reign of the kings of the ten tribes is a picture of the development of church history given in Revelation 2-3. We recognize the phase of Jehu's house in the history of the church in the letter to the church in Sardis (Rev 3:1-6). What is said to and of Sardis is a bright spot in comparison with Thyatira, as the history of Jehu is a bright spot after the history of the house of Ahab.

However, of Jehu and his descendants also said that they persist in idolatry. That is why it says of these descendants that they do "evil in the sight of the LORD" (verse 2). This resembles what must be said of Sardis, that they have the name to live, but that in reality they are dead (Rev 3:1b).

Because of the infidelity of Jehoahaz, the LORD sends Hazael as a rod of discipline. Thereby He wants to make them to return to Him. Hazael oppresses the people of God. This is why the prophet Elisha wept (2Kgs 8:11-12).

Then we read something of Jehoahaz that makes him unique among the kings of Israel. For we read for the first and last time and thus the only time of a king of Israel that he entreats the favor of the LORD. Literally it says that Joahaz 'caressed the face of the LORD'. That shows how intensely he prayed.

This prayer is not without an answer. The LORD gives a deliverer. It is as with Ahab that a little humiliation before God allows God's grace to flow (cf. verse 23; 1Kgs 21:27-29). It is not clear who the deliverer is and when the deliverance took place. Perhaps with this deliverer is meant the son of Joahaz, Jehoash, as is written in verse 25. There we read that Jehoash defeats the Syrians three times. It is also possible that Jeroboam II is meant, of whom it says that the LORD by his hand saved Israel (2Kgs 14:27). Unfortunately it must be said that, despite the deliverance, they persist in idolatry (verse 6).

Verse 7 connects to verse 4. Hazael inflicted a major blow on Jehoahaz's army, reducing his power to a minimum. What remains of his power is described "in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel", as well as "all that he did and his might". After this mention follows the announcement of his death and funeral.

Verses 10-13 | Jehoash King Over Israel

10 In the thirty-seventh year of Joash king of Judah, Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz became king over Israel in Samaria, [and reigned] sixteen years. 11 He did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not turn away from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, with which he made Israel sin, but he walked in them. 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, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? 13 So Joash slept with his fathers, and Jeroboam sat on his throne; and Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.

The historian is brief in his report on the reign of Jehoash. In this report we hear the refrain that sounds of all the kings of Israel. This refrain is a summary of the Holy Spirit of his history. No further description of his actions is given. About the power with which he fought against Amaziah, something is said in the following chapter, in the description of the reign of Amaziah (2Kgs 14:8-15). Then the writer mentions the death and funeral of Jehoash. That seems to be the end of his history. But then we get another report of a meeting he had with Elisha.

Verses 14-19 | Jehoash Visits the Sick Elisha

14 When Elisha became sick with the illness of which he was to die, Joash the king of Israel came down to him and wept over him and said, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" 15 Elisha said to him, "Take a bow and arrows." So he took a bow and arrows. 16 Then he said to the king of Israel, "Put your hand on the bow." And he put his hand [on it], then Elisha laid his hands on the king's hands. 17 He said, "Open the window toward the east," and he opened [it]. Then Elisha said, "Shoot!" And he shot. And he said, "The LORD's arrow of victory, even the arrow of victory over Aram; for you will defeat the Arameans at Aphek until you have destroyed [them]." 18 Then he said, "Take the arrows," and he took them. And he said to the king of Israel, "Strike the ground," and he struck [it] three times and stopped. 19 So the man of God was angry with him and said, "You should have struck five or six times, then you would have struck Aram until you would have destroyed [it]. But now you shall strike Aram [only] three times."

Suddenly we meet Elisha again here. The last thing we have heard of him is related to the anointing of Jehu (2Kgs 9:1-4). That is at that moment almost forty-five years ago. All this time he has lived in secret. Elisha is now an old man and his end is approaching. He is sick and he will die of that illness.

By the way, we see here that the claim that a believer does not have to be ill is a lie. God can use a disease as a means in His hand to take a believer to Himself. He does that here with Elisha. There is no trace that he would be sick because of a sin or something like that. It is simply mentioned that he is sick because of the illness of which he will die.

Before he dies, a few remarkable things happen that are also characteristic of his whole life. His end is as remarkable as the beginning and the whole course of his history. We read that the LORD tells Elijah of Elisha that he will kill him who escapes the sword of Jehu (1Kgs 19:17). This is going to happen here, by the hand of Jehoash.

Jehoash comes to visit Elisha. A young king comes to an old, dying prophet. In a way, this can be compared to the combination of the young Elisha and the departing Elijah. Jehoash also uses the words Elisha speaks when Elijah is taken from him (verse 14; 2Kgs 2:12). Jehoash thus says the same as Elisha says about Elijah, that in this one man the whole power of Israel is concentrated and that the whole power is taken from Israel when Elisha dies. The latter is not the case with Elijah, because Elisha follows him while his spirit rests on him. But if Elisha dies, there is no successor who will continue in his power.

With Elisha, God's power is present. Wicked Jehoash sees that well. He uses the same words as Elisha, but he does not have the same faith. That is clear from what follows. He is tested whether he wants to have the spiritual power of Elisha, as Elisha wanted from Elijah and has also gotten it.

The test consists of the way he will handle a bow and arrows. Jehoash has to get it for Elisha. When he has put his hand on the bow by order of Elisha, Elisha puts his hands on the hands of Jehoash. This action shows that Jehoash is the instrument to break the power of Hazeael, but that he must realize that his power lies in the power of Elisha. Of course, this is not the physical strength, but the spiritual strength of this man of God. By placing

his hands on the hands of Joash, what the LORD has said about Elisha and Hazael is fulfilled (1Kgs 19:17).

Jehoash is then instructed to open the window to the east. The east speaks of a new day, of new hope. Through that open window Jehoash has to shoot an arrow. The order to do so sounds with force from the mouth of the weak, dying prophet. Elisha declares that this arrow is “the LORD’s arrow of victory, even the arrow of victory over Aram”. In this arrow the power of the LORD is present. Elisha adds: “for you will defeat the Arameans at Aphek until you have destroyed [them].” If he expects it from God’s power, he can bring about the deliverance of the enemy, Syria. From everything Elisha says, it becomes clear that all actions have a symbolic meaning.

After the education comes the test if he has understood. Elisha tells him to take the arrows in his hand and strike the ground. Jehoash does what Elisha says. From what he does becomes clear that he has understood something about it, but that the essential message has passed him by. He should have empathized with this symbol (cf. 1Kgs 22:11) of victory. Then he would have struck many times. Now he strikes only three times. As a result, he was not able to completely destroy the enemy.

If we have little faith, little will come about. Just like with Jehoash, we often lack the energy of faith that God will do a great work. We often remain passive. Jehoash gets what he believes. He has struck three times, and will achieve three victories (verse 25).

Verses 20-21 | Death of Elisha

20 Elisha died, and they buried him. Now the bands of the Moabites would invade the land in the spring of the year. 21 As they were burying a man, behold, they saw a marauding band; and they cast the man into the grave of Elisha. And when the man touched the bones of Elisha he revived and stood up on his feet.

Jehoash’s faith is weak, because he does not know the secret of life out of death. The power of God is also with Elisha in his death. Even in his death, that power remains present. Elisha remains a source of strength to live. It is the victory of death, that is the power of God that becomes visible in

the resurrection. It is about faith in the God who can give life out of death, even now, but then spiritually. We may know that the true power lies in the grave of the Lord Jesus. In that grave lies also the origin of the new life we have through His death.

Because of the unfaithfulness of God's people, the enemies, the bands of Moab, can come into the land at the beginning of the year to rob. In that situation God gives this wonderful testimony of the power of His grace in the resurrection from the dead. The occasion is the burial of a man. While the man is being taken to his grave, the company is being attacked by a band. Forced by the emergency people throw the man into the nearest grave. That turns out to be the grave of Elisha.

As soon as the man in the grave comes into contact with Elisha's bones, he becomes alive again. What is happening here can be seen as a summary of the whole life of Elisha. He is the man who preached in the resurrection power of God. The other dead man made alive by Elisha lies, so to speak, in the same place, the bed of the man of God (2Kgs 4:21). We can see in this the picture that those who became one with the Lord Jesus in His death have become alive through His death.

In a general sense, we can also see Elisha as a picture of every man of God. Then we know that where a man of God is working, new life comes. A man of God is in connection with the living God and passes on the life of God in all his service.

The man who comes to life can be seen as a picture of the faithful remnant. Israel is currently dead, but the people will come to life by touching the Lord Jesus, that is, by faith in Him. If Israel is again accepted by God as His people, it is nothing but "live from the dead" (Rom 11:15). That life has its origin in the tomb of the Lord Jesus. By this touch the people will rise up "on their feet". It will become an independent nation again and then walk in the way God shows it.

Verses 22-25 | God Is Gracious to His People

22 Now Hazael king of Aram had oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. 23 But the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion on them and turned to them because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would

not destroy them or cast them from His presence until now. 24 When Hazael king of Aram died, Ben-hadad his son became king in his place. 25 Then Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again from the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael the cities which he had taken in war from the hand of Jehoahaz his father. Three times Joash defeated him and recovered the cities of Israel.

In this section we find a final testimony of the grace of God. This grace cannot be great because of the absence of repentance and conversion. Yet there is that grace. Grace finds its source in God Himself. The promises God has made to us are not because of our faithfulness, but because of and based on the work of His Son.

It is remarkable that the manifestation of God's grace is expressed in three different words: He is 'gracious' to them, He has 'compassion' on them, and He 'turns' to them. God has never rejected His people definitively.

The effect of God's grace is beneficial to Israel. God, in His grace, gives Jehoash the power to take the cities of Israel out of their power of the Syrians who possessed them. This will have been a real blessing for those cities themselves. This frees them from the yoke of oppression. It will also have been a blessing for the whole kingdom, which has been strengthened by the return of the cities under the flag of Israel.

By God's grace Jehoash defeated the Syrians three times, just as often as he had struck the ground with the arrows (verses 18-19). But then his victories stop.

2 Kings 14

Verses 1-4 | Amaziah Becomes King of Judah

1 In the second year of Joash son of Joahaz king of Israel, Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah became king. 2 He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Jehoaddin of Jerusalem. 3 He did right in the sight of the LORD, yet not like David his father; he did according to all that Joash his father had done. 4 Only the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places.

So far, we have seen the events in the ten tribes realm mainly in connection with Elijah and Elisha. What remains is the history of Israel and Judah to their end. Nevertheless, there are occasional revivals. The main idea of the remaining chapters, however, is pride and the subsequent fall (Pro 16:18). It is about the lessons we can learn from this.

There are regular alternations between the northern and southern realms. We have now first again a king from the house of David before us, Amaziah. As with other kings, the name of this king's mother is also mentioned (2Kgs 8:26; 12:1). The mothers of these kings are important and are therefore mentioned. Their influence on the forming of the spiritual character of kings is great. This influence is greatest in the first five years of education.

Jehoaddin, the mother of Amaziah, is one of the two women whom Jehoiada gave to Joash (2Chr 24:3). She must have been a woman who feared God. Her name means 'LORD, how long yet'. She was probably born under the reign of the wicked Athaliah and her parents gave her that name at a time of great anger.

Immediately after mentioning the name of his mother we read that Amaziah "did right in the sight of the LORD". We read this because he had such a mother. It is said of several kings. Yet there is a difference. Of Amaziah is also said to have done "not like David his father". That too is said of some of the kings of Judah. Some other kings did. They stood out above the others. Amaziah acts more like his father Joash has done, who has done well

as long as Jehoiada lived. With Amaziah things also go wrong later, just like they went wrong with Joash in his later life.

He also allows the high places to exist. It is the high places where the LORD is served and which remain after the temple is built. That should not have happened, they should have been removed, because they had had their time. This weakness turns to become a trap. The higher the position, the deeper one can fall. This applies not only to young people, but certainly also to the elderly.

Verses 5-7 | First Government Actions of Amaziah

5 Now it came about, as soon as the kingdom was firmly in his hand, that he killed his servants who had slain the king his father. 6 But the sons of the slayers he did not put to death, according to what is written in the book of the Law of Moses, as the LORD commanded, saying, "The fathers shall not be put to death for the sons, nor the sons be put to death for the fathers; but each shall be put to death for his own sin." 7 He killed [of] Edom in the Valley of Salt 10,000 and took Sela by war, and named it Joktheel to this day.

The first act of Amaziah's reign described is that of carrying out a righteous judgment. He kills the servants who killed his father (2Kgs 12:21). When exercising the judgment, Amaziah takes into account an important principle, which is that everyone is punished for his own sin. The king is the highest judge. Amaziah adheres to the Word of God and does not impose any greater punishment. He did not, what would have been conceivable, 'avenge' himself on his father's murderers. He kills, according to what is "written in the book of the Law of Moses", only the criminals and not their families (Deu 24:16). Discipline must always take place according to God's Word and not according to our feelings.

Another act of Amaziah is to defeat Edom. In 2 Chronicles 25 there are more details about this battle against Edom and what the consequences are (2Chr 25:5-16). There we see that he not only has an army from Judah, but also hired many soldiers from the ten tribes realm. If a prophet calls him to account, he sends them all away. Then he achieves that great victory.

Verses 8-14 | Amaziah Defeated by Jehoash

8 Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, "Come, let us face each other." 9 Jehoash king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah, saying, "The thorn bush which was in Lebanon sent to the cedar which was in Lebanon, saying, 'Give your daughter to my son in marriage.' But there passed by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trampled the thorn bush. 10 You have indeed defeated Edom, and your heart has become proud. Enjoy your glory and stay at home; for why should you provoke trouble so that you, even you, would fall, and Judah with you?" 11 But Amaziah would not listen. So Jehoash king of Israel went up; and he and Amaziah king of Judah faced each other at Beth-shemesh, which belongs to Judah. 12 Judah was defeated by Israel, and they fled each to his tent. 13 Then Jehoash king of Israel captured Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Jehoash the son of Ahaziah, at Beth-shemesh, and came to Jerusalem and tore down the wall of Jerusalem from the Gate of Ephraim to the Corner Gate, 400 cubits. 14 He took all the gold and silver and all the utensils which were found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasuries of the king's house, the hostages also, and returned to Samaria.

In his pride and overconfidence Amaziah challenges Jehoash. Why does he do that? This is also clear from 2 Chronicles 25. When Amaziah returns to Edom after his victory, he also takes with him the idols of Edom and bows down for them. That is no longer the service on the high places to the LORD, but idolatry.

The LORD sends a prophet to him who speaks to him about this. However, he is not listening. Instead, having become arrogant by the great victory over Edom, he fights with Jehoash, king of Israel. His heart is darkened by the idolatry. Because of this he is deaf to God's prophet. He can no longer think well and comes to the folly described here.

Jehoash is also arrogant, which is expressed in the fable he tells. He compares Amaziah with a thistle and himself with a cedar. The animals of the field are the soldiers of Jehoash. They will defeat the thistle, Amaziah and his army. That is what has happened. At the same time, the fable is also a reprimand for Amaziah. A believer is reprimanded by an unbeliever.

However, Amaziah persists in his haughty plan, with a dramatic effect on him and his people.

Here stand two proud kings opposite each other, one is a believer, the other is an unbeliever. From Amaziah we read that he did what was right in the sight of the LORD (verse 3); from Joash we read that he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD (2Kgs 13:11). The victory is given by the LORD to the unbelieving Jehoash. If the righteous do wrong, he will find God in his way. We see that in the defeat that Amaziah suffers.

The believer has to do with God's ways of government. God judges His own on earth; He judges the unbelievers after the end of their lives. If a believer goes a wrong way, he cannot count on the help of the LORD and must experience His discipline. The help experienced by the unbeliever will testify against him when he is judged forever.

Judah is beaten by Israel and Amaziah is captured by Jehoash. Amaziah is the first king of the house Judah who is captured by a king of Israel. Jehoash also makes a breach in the wall of Jerusalem. That's the first time something like that has happened. Jehoash is the only king of Israel who in all the wars between the two and ten tribes broke through as far as Jerusalem.

Once Jehoash is in Jerusalem, he plunders the city. He takes everything which is of value with him and returns to Samaria laden with booty.

Verses 15-20 | Death of Jehoash and Amaziah

15 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash which he did, and his might and how he fought with Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? 16 So Jehoash slept with his fathers and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel; and Jeroboam his son became king in his place. 17 Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah lived fifteen years after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel. 18 Now the rest of the acts of Amaziah, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? 19 They conspired against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish and killed him there. 20 Then they brought him on horses and he was buried at Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David.

The death of Jehoash has already been reported (2Kgs 13:12-13). This happens again now because of the intertwining of his history with the history of Amaziah in verses 8-14. After the death of Jehoash, Amaziah lives another fifteen years. In this we see the grace of God that gives Amaziah another fifteen years after his shameful defeat to come to humility and conversion.

Whether he has really repented is not mentioned. His end is as insulting as that of his father Joash. He too becomes the victim of a conspiracy.

Verses 21-22 | Azariah Made King

21 All the people of Judah took Azariah, who [was] sixteen years old, and made him king in the place of his father Amaziah. 22 He built Elath and restored it to Judah after the king slept with his fathers.

After the death of Amaziah, Azariah, also called Uzziah (2Chr 26:1), becomes king. The names Azaria and Uzziah have almost the same meaning. Azaria means 'in the LORD is help' and Uzziah means 'whose strength is the LORD'. Because he is only six-ten years old and there can be no ordinary procedure of succession because of the sudden and minor death of his father, he is made king by "all the people of Judah".

The only act mentioned here of Azariah is that he expands, or reinforces, Elath and brings it back to Judah. With this, Azariah seems to complete the subjugation of Edom to Israel. Elath is an important port city in the area of Edom (1Kgs 9:26). The mention of this act gives rise to the idea that it also marks the power of his reign.

Verses 23-27 | Jeroboam II King Over Israel

23 In the fifteenth year of Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel became king in Samaria, [and reigned] forty-one years. 24 He did 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 sin. 25 He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher. 26 For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, [which was] very bitter; for there was

neither bond nor free, nor was there any helper for Israel. 27 The LORD did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, but He saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash.

Now we go back to the northern ten tribes realm. After Joash's death, his son Jeroboam became king. We don't know why Joash named his son and heir to the throne Jeroboam. It is remarkable that he names his son after the man who gave Israel two alternative places of worship with on each of those places a golden calf.

That Jeroboam made Israel sin, a refrain that we hear from every king who ruled over the kingdom of the ten tribes, apparently didn't concern Joash at all. On the contrary, it seems that he venerated Jeroboam and therefore gave his son the same name. To distinguish him from the first king of the ten tribes realm, this Jeroboam is called Jeroboam II in comments.

The ten tribes realm has blossomed under Jeroboam II. Seen superficially, it seems that he gets the blessing of God. There is an exceptionally great prosperity under his reign. He also reigns for a long time, longer than any other king has reigned over the ten tribes realm. He is the third generation after Jehu. His son reigns only for a few months, and then it is over with the reign of the family of Jehu.

Then we hear of the prophet Jonah. Prophets act when the people have departed from God. That is also the case here. Usually the prophets call for repentance and threaten with God's judgment if they do not repent. That is not the case here. The message of the prophet Jonah is different. He prophesies that there will be prosperity.

Of this Jonah we also have a book in the Bible. The prophecy he made in that time, however, is not in his Bible book. His prophecy refers to the near future and not, as is customary for God's prophets whose book is in the Bible, to the distant future. In this time the service of the writing prophets begins. The prophet Isaiah began prophesying in the days of Uzziah. Amos and Hoshea also started prophesying in these days (Amos 7:9-15).

The reason for sending Jonah is that the LORD sees the misery of Israel and that they have no helper. The misery in which the people find themselves is the consequence of their abandonment of the LORD. Therefore He must

let this misery come upon His people. But in spite of His judgment He will not erase the name of the people from under heaven.

Through a man like Jeroboam II the LORD gives his people deliverance. Here again it is the grace of God Who uses a man who does not take Him into account. The prosperity of Jeroboam II is not a sign of God's approval, but only of His compassion.

Verses 28-29 | Death of Jeroboam II

28 Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam and all that he did and his might, how he fought and how he recovered for Israel, Damascus and Hamath, [which had belonged] to Judah, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? 29 And Jeroboam slept with his fathers, even with the kings of Israel, and Zechariah his son became king in his place.

In a few verses the entire government of Jeroboam is described. God is not impressed by everything he has done and is not detailed about it. We do not get a summation of all his deeds. These are in the books that people keep, but not in God's Word.

2 Kings 15

Introduction

In this chapter, the author lets the history of seven kings pass us by at a rapid pace: at the beginning and at the end a king of Judah – Azariah at the beginning, verses 1-7, and Jotham at the end, verses 32-38 – and in between five kings of Israel (verses 8-31).

Verses 1-7 | Azariah King of Judah

1 In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Azariah son of Amaziah king of Judah became king. 2 He was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. 3 He did right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done. 4 Only the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. 5 The LORD struck the king, so that he was a leper to the day of his death. And he lived in a separate house, while Jotham the king's son was over the household, judging the people of the land. 6 Now the rest of the acts of Azariah and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? 7 And Azariah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David, and Jotham his son became king in his place.

The description of the reign of Azariah is done in the usual terms, with the exception of verse 5. Azariah has ruled for a long time. That indicates a certain stability in Judah. This contrasts sharply with the disorder prevailing in Israel. The five kings mentioned below succeed each other during his reign.

The spiritual level of Azariah is like that of his father and not like that of David. Also during his life the high places remain and the people there bring their sacrifices. Only when Hezekiah rules will these high places be removed.

Azariah has also become unfaithful after a good start. How difficult it is to remain faithful while having a lot of power and good deeds. When he is mighty, he becomes proud (2Chr 26:17-21). He forgets that he owes his

power to the LORD. He moderates himself to a position that the LORD has not given him. He wants to sacrifice, something he is not allowed to do. When he is warned, he gets angry. Then the leprosy breaks out. Azariah must live separately from the people. That is until the day of his death his destiny. His son is in charge of the royal house.

Leprosy is a picture of sin breaking out. We also see this with Miriam (Num 12:10) and Gehazi (2Kgs 5:27). Suddenly, others see that in a believer a sin reveals itself. Primal sin is pride, the sin of Satan (1Tim 3:6b) and of Adam, who both wanted to be like God. This sin is in the heart of each of us. We must remember that we are not too good for sinning (cf. Gal 6:1). We may ask ourselves how we react when someone says something to us.

Verses 8-12 | Zechariah King Over Israel

8 In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah king of Judah, Zechariah the son of Jeroboam became king over Israel in Samaria [for] six months. 9 He did evil in the sight of the LORD, as his fathers had done; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin. 10 Then Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him and struck him before the people and killed him, and reigned in his place. 11 Now the rest of the acts of Zechariah, behold they are written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. 12 This is the word of the LORD which He spoke to Jehu, saying, "Your sons to the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel." And so it was.

After the death of Jeroboam II his son Zechariah becomes king of Israel. He is the last king of the house of Jehu. Then the house of Jehu is over. The last king rules only six months. Yet it is long enough to reveal himself as a king who has not depart from the sins of the first king of Israel.

His reign is so short because he is murdered after only six months. After this the kings follow each other regularly because the reigning king is murdered by his successor. The prophet Hoshea speaks about it. Hoshea begins to prophesy in the days of Jeroboam II (Hos 1:1). In the first chapter of his prophecy the LORD speaks of punishing the house of Jehu for the bloodshed (Hos 1:4). That time has come.

That the kings succeed each other by killing the ruling king, says Hoshea sharply: "bloodshed follows bloodshed" (Hos 4:2). This seems to indicate

that from Hoshea 4 onwards he describes the situation as it starts with Shallum. The statement “They have set up kings, but not by Me; They have appointed princes, but I did not know i[t]” (Hos 8:4a) seems to confirm this. They have made kings, but not from the LORD.

That Shallum by the murder of Zechariah fulfills the word of the LORD (2Kgs 10:30; Amos 7:9), does not diminish his own responsibility. Here again we see the two sides: the side of man’s responsibility and the side of God’s counsel. Shallum could have said with a pious appeal to what God had said that he had done the will of God. But it is not like that. He has acted out of his own will and must bear the punishment for his sin.

At the same time God has fulfilled His counsel through this action. The last part of verse 12 emphasizes that: “And so it was.” It happened exactly as the LORD said and not otherwise. In Hebrew they are the same words as those used in Genesis 1, always after God has spoken, and there are translated with “and it was so” (Gen 1:7,9,11,15,24,31).

Verses 13-16 | Shallum King Over Israel

13 Shallum son of Jabesh became king in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah king of Judah, and he reigned one month in Samaria. 14 Then Menahem son of Gadi went up from Tirzah and came to Samaria, and struck Shallum son of Jabesh in Samaria, and killed him and became king in his place. 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. 16 Then Menahem struck Tiphshah and all who were in it and its borders from Tirzah, because they did not open [to him]; therefore he struck [it] and ripped up all its women who were with child.

Shallum has not been in power for long, only one month. His reign is so short that he was unable to lead the people. As the only king of the five mentioned here, his name does not include the refrain that he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam. When he has ruled for a one month, he is murdered by Menahem, after which Menahem himself sits on the throne.

What an anti-testimony the people gives here of the LORD. As people they should have witnessed the great goodness of the LORD. Instead, they slaughter each other. It is a warning to us that we must be careful not to

live in disgrace with other members of God's people, wherever they may be.

A special atrocity is mentioned of Menahem. Because the gate has not been opened for him, he is severely offended in his pride. He is the king! How do they dare to shut him out instead of receiving him as king with all the honor that a king is worth? This insult he makes them paid for that with an extra-ordinary cruelty. He cuts open the belly of all pregnant women. Menahem lacked all respect for life. This atrocity is committed here by someone who belongs to God's people (2Kgs 8:12; Hos 14:1; Amos 1:13).

The barbaric cruelty he commits and the lack of respect for life he shows are today found in cultivated form in the abortion clinics.

Verses 17-22 | Menahem King Over Israel

17 In the thirty-ninth year of Azariah king of Judah, Menahem son of Gadi became king over Israel [and reigned] ten years in Samaria. 18 He did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin. 19 Pul, king of Assyria, came against the land, and Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver so that his hand might be with him to strengthen the kingdom under his rule. 20 Then Menahem exacted the money from Israel, even from all the mighty men of wealth, from each man fifty shekels of silver to pay the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria returned and did not remain there in the land. 21 Now the rest of the acts of Menahem and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel? 22 And Menahem slept with his fathers, and Pekahiah his son became king in his place.

Menahem, who came to power by murder, is king over Israel for a period of ten years. During his reign, "Pul, king of Assyria" comes against him. Here we hear for the first time in the Bible of the king of Assyria. Menahem prevents a confrontation by paying a large sum of money. He takes that money away from a number of wealthy people. It is not inconceivable that these people became so wealthy in the time of economic prosperity under Jeroboam II. Here, however, they are obliged to cede a considerable part of their fortune to Menahem.

Here we see how relatively wealth is. Today we are also reminded of this when we see how banks can no longer meet their obligations. Then all the savings have suddenly disappeared.

But Menahem does not only buy off an attack by Pul with this money. He has given so much money that he can negotiate an extra advantage. That extra advantage is that Pul is now on his hand. The king of Assyria was bought into an ally, someone who will support him when enemies come. He seeks support from someone who first sought his downfall and in essence still does so. How can anyone be so blind to the real nature of a sworn enemy? This is only possible if there is no trust in the LORD.

Remarkably enough Menahem dies a natural death. He is not killed by the next one who wants to be king, but is succeeded by his son Pekahiah. Pekahiah is murdered again.

Verses 23-26 | Pekahiah King Over Israel

23 In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekahiah son of Menahem became king over Israel in Samaria, [and reigned] two years. 24 He did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin. 25 Then Pekah son of Remaliah, his officer, 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, and he killed him and became king in his place. 26 Now the rest of the acts of Pekahiah and all that he did, behold they are written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

Pekahia reigns two years. That relatively short period is long enough to make the refrain sound over the whole of his reign that he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam. He is succeeded by the man who, by killing him, puts an end to his reign. That man is his officer Pekah.

Pekah is helped in his murder of Pekahia by the Gileadites, people who live on wilderness side of the Jordan. This may be an indication that political interests play a role in this murder of king – as may be the case with other murders of kings. We also see these political interests in the searching for the support of neighboring peoples, sometimes of Assyria and sometimes of Egypt.

In any case, party formation within the present people of God, the church, is unfortunately also now not a strange phenomenon (1Cor 1:11-12). Party formation always brings division and dissatisfaction.

Verses 27-31 | Pekah King Over Israel

27 In the fifty-second year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekah son of Remaliah became king over Israel in Samaria, [and reigned] twenty years. 28 He did evil in the sight of the LORD; he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin. 29 In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and captured Ijon and Abel-beth-maacah and Janoah and Kedesh and Hazor and Gilead and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried them captive to Assyria. 30 And Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and struck him and put him to death and became king in his place, in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah. 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.

Pekah is in power for a longer period of time. He reigns over Israel for twenty years, doing like all the kings of Israel what is evil in the sight of the LORD. In his days, Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, comes against Israel and conquers a number of cities and territories. He takes the inhabitants of it to Assyria. Thus he breaks their power. He takes “Gilead” away, that is part of Israel on the wilderness side of the Jordan, the area of the two and a half tribe, and he takes “Galilee, all the land of Naphtali” away, that is the whole north of Israel; nothing remains of it.

Pekah not only loses a lot of territory and subjects but also his life. He is murdered by Hoshea, who becomes king in his place. Hoshea is a pro-Assyrian king. There is not much left for him as king to rule over. Only in 2 Kings 17 we hear more about king Hoshea.

Verses 32-38 | Jotham King of Judah

32 In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel, Jotham the son of Uzziah king of Judah became king. 33 He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name [was] Jerusha the daughter of Zadok. 34 He did what was right in

the sight of the LORD; he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done. 35 Only the high places were not taken away; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. He built the upper gate of the house of the LORD. 36 Now the rest of the acts of Jotham and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? 37 In those days the LORD began to send Rezin king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah against Judah. 38 And Jotham slept with his fathers, and he was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father; and Ahaz his son became king in his place.

With the arrival of Jotham, the son of Uzziah or Azariah, as king of Judah, we are back in the realm of the two tribes. It is said of him, as of eight other kings who ruled after Solomon, that he does what is right in the sight of the LORD. Of those eight, Jotham is the only one of whom is not said to have become unfaithful at a later age. He follows his father in the good. He does not follow the evil his father did. However, the people he rules continue their pernicious practices (2Chr 27:1-2).

In his days Micah begins to prophesy (Mic 1:1). The prophet Isaiah began his service in the last years of his father Uzziah (Isa 1:1). Isaiah describes the evil deeds in detail in his book. Kings can be used by the LORD for a revival. Revivals, however, have little real and lasting result because of the fact that under the surface the desire of the people for idolatry in whatever form is always present.

In the history of Israel and Judah it goes further and further downhill. In Israel, the last king, Hoshea, is in government. In Judah it will take a while, but then also for that kingdom the curtain will fall because of their stubborn deviations from the LORD. It is the end-time of God's people, just as we live in it. Where is true love for and faithfulness to the Lord found? Church history is often made and written by the great men, but what did it really look like among the people? The mass often goes with in the width, while only a few go into the depths.

Jotham is also interested in the temple. This is evident from the only act that is mentioned of him. It is noted of him that he "built the upper gate of the house of the LORD".

Because of the constant unfaithfulness of the people, the LORD must send enemies against Judah. The new enemy is “Rezin king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah”. Pekah is the king of Israel who here, in an ungodly covenant with Rezin, the ungodly king of Syria, stands up against his brothers. The fact that the LORD does this does not diminish the responsibility of Pekah to do this evil work.

2 Kings 16

Verses 1-4 | Ahaz Becomes King of Judah

1 In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, became king. 2 Ahaz [was] twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD his God, as his father David [had done]. 3 But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and even made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had driven out from before the sons of Israel. 4 He sacrificed and burned incense on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree.

In this chapter the historian continues with the description of the kings who ruled over the two tribes realm. Ahaz the son of Jotham has come to power. This whole chapter is devoted to him and gives a clear picture of his reign. That picture is not rosy.

The summary of his reign, which lasted sixteen years, is that “he did not do what was right in the sight of the LORD his God, as his father David [had done]”. It does not say that he did what was evil, but that he did not do what was right. This is to make the contrast with David clear. David did in all what was right in the sight of the LORD. Everything Ahaz does is completely and radically contrary to what David did. That there is also talk of “the LORD his God” is said, because this was his confession.

The deeds described of Ahaz bear witness to great corruption. They are acts modelled on the kings of Israel. Ahaz even adds a little extra: He “even made his son pass through the fire”. He sacrifices his son to the realm of the dead. So it is not just a way of acting like the kings of Israel, but he does “according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had driven out from before the sons of Israel”. This man has lost every connection with the LORD his God. There is the greatest possible contrast between what he confesses and what he does.

His entire attitude towards idols and idolatry is evident from the sacrificial places he has. He offers not only on the high places that were first dedicated to the LORD, but on all that is raised above the earth.

Verses 5-9 | Ahaz Makes an Alliance with Assyria

5 Then Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to [wage] war; and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him. 6 At that time Rezin king of Aram recovered Elath for Aram, and cleared the Judeans out of Elath entirely; and the Arameans came to Elath and have lived there to this day. 7 So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son; come up and deliver me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are rising up against me." 8 Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king's house, and sent a present to the king of Assyria. 9 So the king of Assyria listened to him; and the king of Assyria went up against Damascus and captured it, and carried [the people of] it away into exile to Kir, and put Rezin to death.

While Ahaz is so idolizing, enemies come towards him: "Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah." They come "to Jerusalem to [wage] war". As always, enemies attack God's people when the people depart from God. Without God they are always weaker than the weakest enemy. At the same time, a hostile people is a means in God's hand to bring His people back to Him. And what an abhorrent role does Pekah play in his covenant with Syria: he, the king of Israel, wants to help put an end to the house of David.

In Isaiah 7 we read more details about this coming up of Rezin and Pekah to Jerusalem. There we see that God wants to act in grace with Ahaz. In His grace God does not allow these enemies to take Jerusalem (Isa 7:1). Then through Isaiah He has a message for Ahaz "at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway to the fuller's field" (Isa 7:3). It is a symbolic place. It is a place that speaks of purifying and refreshment that are offered to him if he is willing to listen to the voice of the LORD.

Isaiah presents the enemies, "Rezin and Aram and the son of Remaliah" (Isa 7:4), as completely trivial. He prophesies about their end by the power

of Assyria, from which Ahaz expects his help. Isaiah encourages Ahaz that there is a solution, if he quietly trusts in the LORD. Ahaz even gets the offer to ask a sign from the LORD, so he can be sure that the LORD will deliver him from those enemies. But Ahaz refuses this offer with pretended piety (Isa 7:10-12). He has his own politics.

Then the LORD Himself gives a sign, not to Ahaz, but to the house of David. He promises the Messiah (Isa 7:13). He is the answer to all political questions. He also lets Ahaz know that he himself will perish by the ally on whom he has placed his hope, because he refuses to trust in the LORD (Isa 7:17).

Ahaz is one of those figures who only trust on their own mind and perception. Trust in the LORD, Someone you cannot see, and with Whom you just have to wait or what He says will happen, is too vague for him. Then look at Assyria. He is nearby, you can see him and he helps immediately.

Isn't that a tension field that we recognize, in which we too can find ourselves? Don't we often choose a direct solution instead of submitting to what God says? Do I choose what I think works, or do I wait for what God has offered? For example, let us think of tensions in a marriage. In a marriage disappointments can occur. Is the husband then looking for the conversation with his wife, perhaps also with the help of someone else, so that they can pray together again for their need? Or is he seeking refuge with another woman, someone from his work, with whom he can tell his story, someone 'who understands me so well'?

The request for help to Assyria may also cost some money. The costs for the help are paid with silver and gold from the temple, "the house of the LORD". Every covenant a Christian enters into with the enemy of God, the world, is at the expense of the truth of reconciliation, of which the silver speaks, and at the expense of the glory of God, of which the gold speaks. Again and again the temple is looted for the benefit of the world. God and His interests no longer matter.

The covenant seems to work and to be worth the price. The king of Assyria does what was asked of him. He goes up against Damascus, defeats the Syrians and thus takes away the threat to Ahaz from these enemies. This makes Ahaz all the more captured in the snare of the devil. His next steps

make it clear that he settles with the LORD. He will replace Him by what is attractive to him.

Verses 10-18 | Replacing the Altar of the LORD

10 Now King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and saw the altar which [was] at Damascus; and King Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the pattern of the altar and its model, according to all its workmanship. 11 So Urijah the priest built an altar; according to all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus, thus Urijah the priest made [it], before the coming of King Ahaz from Damascus. 12 When the king came from Damascus, the king saw the altar; then the king approached the altar and went up to it, 13 and burned his burnt offering and his meal offering, and poured his drink offering and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings on the altar. 14 The bronze altar, which [was] before the LORD, he brought from the front of the house, from between [his] altar and the house of the LORD, and he put it on the north side of [his] altar. 15 Then King Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, "Upon 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]." 16 So Urijah the priest did according to all that King Ahaz commanded. 17 Then King Ahaz cut off the borders of the stands, and removed the laver from them; he also took down the sea from the bronze oxen which were under it and put it on a pavement of stone. 18 The covered way for the sabbath which they had built in the house, and the outer entry of the king, he removed from the house of the LORD because of the king of Assyria.

Ahaz goes to Damascus to greet his benefactor and protector, the king of Assyria. It seems that the place of meeting is the altar in Damascus. Ahaz is impressed by that altar. It is a *great* altar (verse 15). Possibly it is an originally Assyrian altar. He sees that the gods of Assyria have helped them. Now he also wants to secure the favor of these gods and sacrifice to them. Therefore he wants to have an altar like theirs.

While he is still in Damascus, he sends a pattern of it to the priest Uria. Uria is a faithful man (Isa 8:2a), but also a man without a backbone. He has

no strength to say no. He does what he has been told, and even so quickly, that the altar is ready before Ahaz is back. When Ahaz is in Jerusalem again and sees the altar, he approaches the altar and sacrifices on it. Verse 12 speaks emphatically about Ahaz as “king” (three times in this verse). There is a strong similarity with the first king Jeroboam and his altar (1Kgs 12:32-33). We have to conclude that Jeroboam and his altar service have now entered Judah.

The sacrifices Ahaz brings (verse 13), we know from Leviticus 1-7. Remarkable is that the sin offering is missing. It emphasizes that his service is only an external service. There is no sense of sin. He arranges everything as he sees fit. It is totally a self-willed religion. We also see this when he removes the bronze altar of burnt offering from the place where it belongs and instead places his own imitation altar (verse 14). The altar of Ahaz must be central.

The altar of the LORD is not completely removed. It is placed at a distance, so that it reminds of the LORD’s service in the distance, as it were, at the place where it stands.

Ahaz determines that from now on the great altar, his altar, must be used to bring the prescribed sacrifices (verse 15). He ordered the priest Uria to see to it that it happens as he had ordered. The bronze altar of the LORD is dismissed for him as for the sacrificial service to the true God. Instead, he makes it a place where he can approach demons to seek their advice.

Ahaz’s drive for innovation knows no bounds. The next part of the old worship that is removed is the bronze sea that stands on twelve oxen. He cuts off the borders of the stands, and removes the laver from them (verse 17). He also takes down the sea from the bronze oxen. He settles (in this picture) with the thought that cleanliness is necessary to be able to do service in the house of the LORD.

The oxen are not a decoration for the bronze sea, but form the basis for cleansing. It is a picture that speaks of the fact that cleansing must be done on the ground of the sacrifice of Christ. Oxen speak of His service which He continually performs for us. That foundation is replaced by a stone floor, a foundation made by people.

The covered way for the sabbath is also sacrificed for its innovativeness (verse 18). What exactly the covered way for the sabbath has been is not clear. It is thought that there is a covered place in the temple where the king sat on the sabbath during his visit to the temple. This may well be possible, because the removal of the covered way for sabbath is linked to the removal of “the outer entry of the king” (cf. 1Kgs 10:5; Eze 46:1-2). It shows his contempt for the sabbath – which speaks of the rest of God and His people – and the absolute unwillingness as king to be connected to the dwelling place of God, with which he refuses to acknowledge that he can only be king if he acknowledges that God is his Lord.

He lets remove everything that reminds of the service of the true God. All his actions mean the abolition of true service to God. He establishes a religion that is completely to his taste. That is the tried and tested method of dealing with what God has to say about it. It is important to ask God how He wants us to worship. For us, that means that we consult His Word in an attitude of submission to what He says.

It does not mean that our worship must always follow certain fixed patterns through standard formulations. The Holy Spirit will show us different aspects each time for which we can and want to worship God. There is no liturgy to be devised.

Someone rightly said: We should not play with our worship and cheer it up with interviews and entertaining performances. Remarkably enough, he added: “In the church I serve, our worship is carefully planned so that we never have the same thing on two consecutive Sundays.

When I read this, I couldn’t help but feel that the writer himself acted after Ahaz’s model, which he first (rightly) accused. Isn’t the Holy Spirit the only One Who can lead the worship of the church in such a way that every time worship is different, new and fresh, and that it still meets the ancient truths of God’s Word (cf. Jn 4:23-24)?

Verses 19-20 | Death of Ahaz

19 Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz which he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? 20 So Ahaz slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David; and his son Hezekiah reigned in his place.

With the above, God has said in this book all about Ahaz what can be said of him and what is useful for us to know. “The rest” is “written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah”. That “rest” cannot be darker than what God’s Spirit has told us in this chapter, but it can be more in detail. We don’t need to know those particularities. What we are told contains a severe warning not to turn to the world for help and not to follow our own ideas in serving God.

The last verse gives a ray of hope in the people of God in this deeply dark period. That ray of hope is Hezekiah. God prepares a revival by making a God-fearing son king instead of his godless father Ahaz.

2 Kings 17

Introduction

This chapter describes the history of the Samaritans. After this chapter the book continues with the kings of Judah. Most tribes of the north have already been taken away. The empire now contains only Samaria and the surrounding areas. Hoshea, who also came to power by murder, reigns over this.

Verses 1-4 | Hoshea King Over Israel

1 In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea the son of Elah became king over Israel in Samaria, [and reigned] nine years. 2 He did evil in the sight of the LORD, only not as the kings of Israel who were before him. 3 Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against him, and Hoshea became his servant and paid him tribute. 4 But the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea, who had sent messengers to So king of Egypt and had offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as [he had done] year by year; so the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him in prison.

We return to the ten tribes realm, the end of which we read in this chapter. It has been mentioned before that Hoshea is the new king of Israel (2Kgs 15:30). Also of him must be said what is said of all the kings of Israel, that he does what is “evil in the sight of the LORD”. What does not follow is that he does as Jeroboam did, that is to say that he worships the calves made by Jeroboam. It seems that this cannot be said of him because these calves probably have already been taken away (Hos 10:5). If someone doesn’t do an evil, it doesn’t mean he’s better. He may not have been able to do so.

King Hoshea is good at conspiracies. He has previously forged a conspiracy against Pekah to kill him and become king (2Kgs 15:30). Now he has forged a conspiracy with the king of Egypt, with whom he secretly seeks support. The king of Assyria, however, discovered this conspiracy. Hoshea is captured and taken as a prisoner to Assyria. Another reason for his imprisonment is that he no longer pays the tribute imposed on him by

the king of Assyria. All this means his downfall. The prophet Hoshea also writes about the downfall of king Hoshea (Hos 10:7; 11:5).

Verses 5-6 | Israel Deported

5 Then the king of Assyria invaded the whole land and went up to Samaria and besieged it three years. 6 In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and carried Israel away into exile to Assyria, and settled them in Halah and Habor, [on] the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

Not only king Hoshea is taken away in captivity. The king of Assyria invades the whole land, besieges Samaria and captures it in and carries the entire population of Israel away into exile to Assyria. This happens in the ninth year of Hoshea, which is the last year of his reign (verse 1). The people of God have fallen into slavery and are forced to serve a foreign king in a foreign country.

This is the inglorious end of a (part of a) people that once among another Hoshea, the son of Nun, that is Joshua (Num 13:2,8,16), has entered the land. Now they are being libelously deported from the land under king Hoshea, the son of Ela. The reason for this is explained in detail in the following verses.

In the time ahead they will mix with the Gentiles in the midst of which they live. That seems to mean that Israel's name has disappeared from the earth's surface. But God keeps an eye on His people (cf. Jam 1:1; Acts 26:7). At the end of time He will bring back a remnant into his land of the tribes he had to disperse in His discipline (Isa 11:12; Deu 30:2-4; Psa 147:2; Isa 56:8).

During the reign of king Hoshea, the prophet Hoshea also spoke of the glorious restoration of the ten tribes realm, together with the two tribes realm. In Hoshea 11 we hear that the Lord in His mercy says about them: "How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel?" (Hos 11:8). In Hoshea 13 the LORD says that He shall "ransom them from the power of Sheol" and "redeem them from death" (Hos 13:14). Also in Hoshea 14 He speaks of His work in Israel and what He will be for them, that He will heal them and that He will be as dew for them (Rev 14:4-9). If we know this, the history of this chapter looks different indeed.

Verses 7-23 | Reason for the Deportation

7 Now [this] came about because the sons of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up from the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and they had feared other gods 8 and walked in the customs of the nations whom the LORD had driven out before the sons of Israel, and [in the customs] of the kings of Israel which they had introduced. 9 The sons of Israel did things secretly which were not right against the LORD their God. Moreover, they built for themselves high places in all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city. 10 They set for themselves [sacred] pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, 11 and there they burned incense on all the high places as the nations [did] which the LORD had carried away to exile before them; and they did evil things provoking the LORD. 12 They served idols, concerning which the LORD had said to them, "You shall not do this thing." 13 Yet the LORD warned Israel and Judah through all His prophets [and] every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments, My statutes according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you through My servants the prophets." 14 However, they did not listen, but stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God. 15 They rejected His statutes and His covenant which He made with their fathers and His warnings with which He warned them. And they followed vanity and became vain, and [went] after the nations which surrounded them, concerning which the LORD had commanded them not to do like them. 16 They forsook all the commandments of the LORD their God and made for themselves molten images, [even] two calves, and made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal. 17 Then they made their sons and their daughters pass through the fire, and practiced divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him. 18 So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from His sight; none was left except the tribe of Judah. 19 Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the customs which Israel had introduced. 20 The LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel and afflicted them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until He had cast them out of His sight. 21 When He had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. Then Jeroboam drove Israel away from following the LORD and made them

commit a great sin. 22 The sons of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them 23 until the LORD removed Israel from His sight, as He spoke through all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away into exile from their own land to Assyria until this day.

God has used Assyria as a disciplinary rod for His people. The direct reason for the deportation by the king of Assyria was the uprising of king Hoshea. But the spiritual backgrounds are of course much more important and far-reaching. The spiritual backgrounds that are the underlying reason for the deportation, which are the justification for it, are given in detail in the following verses.

The whole description makes it clear that God, on the one hand, has been very patient and, on the other hand, is finally forced to pass this judgment on His people. The historian reviews the entire history of God's people, not only of the ten tribes, but of all twelve tribes.

There is given an abundance of reasons for the deportation, all of which are closely interrelated, why God has done this with His people. It happens because they had sinned and not only during the reign of and by king Hoshea. The Spirit of God goes all the way back to the beginning of their history as people of God. From then until now, Israel's sin has accumulated. It all finds its origin in the worship of "other gods" (verse 7).

The veneration of other gods has led to the walking "in the customs of the nations" (verse 8). This is mentioned as the first sin. We see here a picture of the development of Christianity. This has led to the thinking of things "which were not right against the LORD their God" (verse 9). They have made their own places to sacrifice God.

In those self-conceived and homemade places they sacrificed to the idols (verse 11). We also know this in Christianity, where everything that takes us away from the true God is to be called idolatry. For this we are strongly warned (1Jn 5:21).

The next step is that the people have surrendered themselves to the gods, began to serve them and this against the explicit prohibition of the LORD (verse 12; Exo 20:3-5). The LORD has given an explicit prohibition, but after that He also has not let Himself without witness about His will. He has "warned Israel and Judah through all His prophets [and] every seer" to

repent and to return from their evil ways and to observe His statutes again. Instead of listening, the people rejected the testimony of God. They have despised God's statutes, while keeping the statutes of the nations. Both His servants and His statutes are despised (verses 13-15).

To replace the service in Jerusalem they have made two golden calves. They have bowed down before them. They even let their sons and daughters go through the fire. So they sold themselves to the devil. The purpose of all this is to badger and offend the LORD and to provoke Him (verses 16-17).

The result is that the LORD has become "very angry with Israel" and has cast them out of His sight. There was no tribe left, except Judah. Only a few of the other tribes have stayed behind in the land (verse 18).

The fact that Judah is the only tribe left is not a matter for Judah to congratulate themselves. In this whole enumeration of the sins of Israel, in a single verse (verse 19) something is also said about Judah. Judah will not do better. This is to prevent Judah from boasting that they are not as bad as the ten tribes. Such an attitude would be very inappropriate and very unjustified, because they follow Israel, albeit at a distance, in evil. They will even overtake Israel when it comes to committing injustice. The result is that all Israel, the twelve tribes, are rejected by the LORD from before Him (verse 20).

The judgment of His people has in fact already begun with the tearing of the realm (verse 21). Jeroboam, the first king of the ten tribes, preceded them on the way of departure from the LORD. It is a way that God's Spirit describes here as a way in which "great sin" is committed. Jeroboam's sin is general and also persistent. They did not depart from this (verse 22).

It is tragic that of the people of God must be said that they did not to depart from all the sins of Jeroboam. That means they have persisted. What a contrast with their attitude towards the LORD. It should have been so that they would not have departed from the LORD by persevering in following Him.

In verse 23 follows the conclusion of all the listed sins of the people. God keeps to what He has said, even if it is a word of judgment about unfaithfulness. All His servants, the prophets, have announced the judgment.

Now it must come. “So Israel was carried away into exile from their own land to Assyria until this day.”

The tribal bonds may have disappeared, but for the few there is always a path of faithfulness and faith that can be gone with and for God. That is true at all times. God always provides a remnant that goes the way of faith. So we see that in the time of Jeroboam faithful believers go to Jerusalem (2Chr 11:16). They only want to serve God in relation with the true altar. They have literally separated themselves from the ten tribes.

Later Hezekiah sends out an invitation to all areas of the ten tribes to call those who live of God’s people there to come to Jerusalem. Although the masses react negatively, some of the ten tribes respond to the call and come to Jerusalem (2Chr 30:11,18,25). It is also true for God’s people in our time that we must never give up hope that God will maintain the truth of the church as the one body of Christ. If only there is faith to accept this blessing.

There are also revivals in Samaria (2Chr 31:1; 34:6,9,21). So we don’t need to get the impression from this chapter that it is all over with Samaria and the ten tribes. God also knows those in the ten tribes who are His. However, the main line in this chapter is sad.

Verses 24-28 | The New Inhabitants of Samaria

24 The king of Assyria brought [men] from Babylon and from Cuthah and from Avva and from Hamath and Sepharvaim, and settled [them] in the cities of Samaria in place of the sons of Israel. So they possessed Samaria and lived in its cities. 25 At the beginning of their living there, they did not fear the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them which killed some of them. 26 So they spoke to the king of Assyria, saying, “The nations whom you have carried away into exile in the cities of Samaria do not know the custom of the god of the land; so he has sent lions among them, and behold, they kill them because they do not know the custom of the god of the land.” 27 Then the king of Assyria commanded, saying, “Take there one of the priests whom you carried away into exile and let him go and live there; and let him teach them the custom of the god of the land.” 28 So one of the priests whom they had carried away into exile from Samaria came and lived at Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the LORD.

In verse 24, the thread of history is taken up again. We see how the cities of Samaria are doing after having been carried away into exile. These cities will have new inhabitants. They are populated with people from other nations. Their characteristic is the same as that of God's people who lived there first, for they fear not the LORD either (verse 25). For this reason the LORD sends lions among them.

A natural reason may be that the number of inhabitants is insufficient to populate the land, giving the wild animals a chance to multiply (Exo 23:29). In any case, the hand of God is in it. He uses the lions to make these people remember that He is there and that they are in His land. The people who have come to live there are people who have nothing to do with God, they do not interfere with Him. However, God does interfere with them. Because these people live in His land, He sends a judgment. God is not the God alone of the land of Israel, but of the whole world.

The inhabitants of the Samaritan cities draw the right conclusion, but the solution to their problem is not correct. While God's action is aimed at people asking for Him, the king of Assyria is approached. It is clear to him that the lions were sent because of the lack of knowledge of the God of the land. To change this, the king of Assyria commands a priest to go there and "teach them the custom of the god of the land".

The priest who is sent will undoubtedly be one of the priests of the golden calves. It is a priest of a mixed religion. This man introduces an even more mixed service among the new inhabitants of the cities of Samaria. What he teaches the people of the land about the service of God is nothing but the observance of outer forms as he did when he himself still lived there.

This terrible mixture is also seen in Christianity. Priests of the roman-catholic church have established a mixed religion all over the world. It is a mixture of truth and world. People are driven by the sword into the water to be baptized. That is what made Europe Christian. How much the name 'Christian' has become a hollow concept today, goes without saying for those who love and know God's Word.

Verses 29-33 | The Religion of the Samaritans

29 But every nation still made gods of its own and put them in the houses of the high places which the people of Samaria had made, every nation in their cities

in which they lived. 30 The men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, the men of Hamath made Ashima, 31 and the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech the gods of Sepharvaim. 32 They also feared the LORD and appointed from among themselves priests of the high places, who acted for them in the houses of the high places. 33 They feared the LORD and served their own gods according to the custom of the nations from among whom they had been carried away into exile.

In addition to the ritual worship of the God of Israel, each nation also remains faithful to the homemade gods. Externally they do what is appropriate for a faithful Israelite, assisted by an 'original' priest. Serving their own gods is perfectly compatible with the service to God as taught to them by the priest. This is what the roman-catholic church did, which made pagan gods Christian, so that everyone can become a supporter of them and still be able to hold on to their own gods, albeit sometimes with other names.

Verses 34-41 | Disobeying the Word

34 To this day they do according to the earlier customs: they do not fear the LORD, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances or the law, or the commandments which the LORD commanded the sons of Jacob, whom He named Israel; 35 with whom the LORD made a covenant and commanded them, saying, "You shall not fear other gods, nor bow down yourselves to them nor serve them nor sacrifice to them. 36 But the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power and with an outstretched arm, Him you shall fear, and to Him you shall bow yourselves down, and to Him you shall sacrifice. 37 The statutes and the ordinances and the law and the commandment which He wrote for you, you shall observe to do forever; and you shall not fear other gods. 38 The covenant that I have made with you, you shall not forget, nor shall you fear other gods. 39 But the LORD your God you shall fear; and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies." 40 However, they did not listen, but they did according to their earlier custom. 41 So while these nations feared the LORD, they also served their idols; their children likewise and their grandchildren, as their fathers did, so they do to this day.

Verse 34 seems to be another contradiction to the previous verses. In the previous verses it says that they fear the LORD, and now it says that they

fear not the LORD. However, it is not a contradiction. The first fear is only outwardly, while in verse 34 it is about fearing with the heart.

A true fear of the LORD, a fear with the heart, is not present among the people. The touchstone for a true fear is whether there is obedience to what God has said in His Word. This obedience is completely absent from the inhabitants of the cities of Samaria. This is clearly stated in verses 34-40. In these verses, the importance of the Word is discussed in detail – “the statutes and the ordinances and the law and the commandment” (verse 37) – with the conclusion in verse 41.

The conclusion brings us into a next phase of the development of Samaria and the religion that is adhered to there. We find that phase in the Gospels. There we find nothing about an idolatry service carried out by the Samaritans. The Samaritans believe in the five books of Moses and serve God on Mount Gerizim. However, it is a religion that has its roots in what we find here.

In what the Lord Jesus says to the Samaritan woman, we hear how He judges the service: “You worship what you do not know” (Jn 4:22a). Samaritans worship what they do not know. These Samaritans have the Scriptures in their hands in which it is written that the LORD dwells in Jerusalem and that He wants to be worshipped there. The woman knows that and yet she says that “our fathers worshipped in this mountain” that is the mountain Gerizim. Contrary to the clear statements of God’s Word, the Samaritans have their own place of worship with a form they have devised themselves.

In church history we have such a development. What we see in the Samaritans, we see repeated in protestantism. In protestantism, the Word has been recaptured from roman-catholicism and idolatry has been dealt with. But that is not enough to reach the end station. There is something more to come. It is about taking the true place of worship. This can only be made known by the Prophet, the Lord Jesus. He Himself is that true place.

What the Samaritans and Christianity need is the Lord Jesus, the Son of God Who can speak of the Father. Whoever comes into contact with Him is also made aware of the true place of worship. That place is not geographically defined, like Jerusalem, but is spiritual in nature. It is about worship

“in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23-24), that is: worship must be done in a spiritual and true way. This means that a completely different basis has to be taken than the one used in Samaria in the time of the deportation.

The contradictions between Jews and Samaritans are great. The Jews despise the Samaritans, but the Lord Jesus does not despise the Samaritans. For us, that means a warning. If by grace we may worship the Father in spirit and truth in the place where the Lord Jesus now dwells, that is where the church meets (Mt 18:20), we may not despise others who go to a place that is not in accordance with the Word. It is pride to know the true place of worship and to look down with contempt on those who do not know this place. Wherever that is found, the Lord disappears from the midst. He cannot be in a place where pride is. There reigns the spirit of Laodicea. There He stands outside, at the door (Rev 3:14-20).

What we read about the Samaritans here, in 2 Kings 17, is not the last thing we hear from them. “To this day” means to the day of the historian. It has already been pointed out previously that in John 4 the Lord Jesus speaks to a woman from Samaria about the highest service of the believer or the purpose of the life of the believer: the worship of the Father.

Something like that we see in Luke 17. There a Samaritan cleansed of his leprosy finds the true place of worship: at the feet of the Lord Jesus (Lk 17:15-16). Following these two examples, we can say that a sister, in John 4, and a brother, in Luke 17, have found this place of worship.

In the familiar parable of the good Samaritan, the Lord Jesus compares Himself to a Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). At the end He asks: ‘Who shows himself to be a neighbor of others?’ The answer is that our neighbor is he who comes to help us in our need. Our neighbor is not the one to whom we must show love, but the neighbor is the one who takes care of us. This means that we see ourselves in the man who fell into the hands of robbers and that we are dependent on someone who wants to be our neighbor. The Lord Jesus became the Neighbor for us. Do we want to take the neighbor’s place in relation to Him and be dependent on His grace?

2 Kings 18

Introduction

Here begins the last part of 2 Kings. It is about the history of Judah, the two tribes realm. This history is mainly determined by the kings Hezekiah and Josiah. The LORD has provided by each of them for a period of revival.

The history of Hezekiah can be found three times in Scripture: in 2 Kings 18-20, 2 Chronicles 29-32 and Isaiah 36-39. The fact that his history is told three times does not mean that we read the same story three times. It is not just a repetition. The history in Isaiah largely corresponds with what we find here, but in 2 Chronicles it is often different. In 2 Chronicles the priestly side is described, while here we have the historical events. In Isaiah history is described from a prophetic perspective.

In 2 Chronicles it is mainly about the restoration of the temple and the celebration of the Passover. Both events take place in the early days of the reign of Hezekiah. In 2 Kings and Isaiah it is more about events that take place in the second half of his reign.

In Isaiah this history gets its prophetic meaning. Isaiah 36-39 closes the first part of the book, with Assyria as the great enemy. This is also what will happen in the end time. The extermination of the king of Assyria, the king of the north, will be done by the LORD Himself, that is the Lord Jesus. Thereby He will deliver His people and thereafter the people will be in the realm of peace under the rule of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. The direct lesson is that there can be trust in the Lord Jesus in the most difficult circumstances.

Verses 1-8 | Hezekiah Becomes King of Judah

1 Now it came about in the third year of Hoshea, the son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah became king. 2 He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. 3 He did right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. 4 He removed the high places and broke down the [sacred] pillars and cut down the

Asherah. He also broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel burned incense to it; and it was called Nehushtan. 5 He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel; so that after him there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor [among those] who were before him. 6 For he clung to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses. 7 And the LORD was with him; wherever he went he prospered. And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. 8 He defeated the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city.

Only a few years after Hezekiah becomes king, the ten tribes are deported from the land of Israel. What remains is the history of the two tribes. As has already been mentioned, the two tribes did not have let themselves be warned by what happened to the ten tribes. Nevertheless, it will take some time before for the two tribes also fall will the curtain and be taken away into exile. The two tribes remain the object of God's grace for quite some time. In the remaining time that the two tribes live in the land, we get to see some special evidences of that grace.

The first proof is that God gives to an ungodly king, Ahaz, a God-fearing son, Hezekiah. In it we see the care of God for a remnant. The name of the mother of Hezekiah is mentioned. She is called Abi, which means 'my father'. She knew in the LORD a Father who helped her to raise her son Hezekiah in the fear of the LORD, a fear that completely failed with Ahaz.

Hezekiah is a king upon whom the LORD looks down with joy, and who reminds him of David, the man after his heart. The first acts of Hezekiah's reign to be noted are things that have to do with idolatry. He takes away and destroys what has seized the hearts of the people, and by which the LORD is forgotten and despised. This also includes the bronze serpent. The bronze serpent was once a blessing by the grace of God. It has been a God-given means to be healed for every member of the people who had been bitten by a poisonous serpent when he looked at it (Num 21:9).

That is not to say that the bronze serpent gave healing. A person was healed only when he looked at the serpent in obedience to what God had said. So someone only looked if he believed in what God had said. However, the

bronze serpent has become an object of worship instead of God. As if the bronze serpent, that piece of metal, had given the salvation.

It can also be the same with wearing a cross. The cross brings salvation to anyone who believes that Christ died there for him (Jn 3:14-16). But whoever wears a wooden cross and pays homage to it, shows that for him this cross is a mascot. That must be destroyed. This is also what Hezekiah does with the Nehushtan. He shatters this idolatrous image.

The strength of Hezekiah's actions lies in his faithfulness. Verses 5-6 give an impressive testimony to this. There we read that "he trusted in the LORD" in a way that is unique "among all the kings of Judah". He "clung to the LORD", another beautiful expression. "He did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses."

His whole performance bears witness of his faithfulness to the LORD, submitting himself to what the LORD has said to Moses. The word that the LORD has spoken many centuries before, is for Hezekiah the absolute measure for his behavior. The same applies to us. We, who also live in an end time, are reminded of "the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior [spoken] by your apostles" (2Pet 3:2; Jude 1:17).

It should come as no surprise then that we read from Hezekiah that "the LORD was with him" and that "wherever he went he prospered". Because he trusts in God, he puts an end to the connection with the king of Assyria. Every human support is a denial of trust in the LORD. The consequence of his breaking off of contacts with the king of Assyria was that he defeats the Philistines. The Philistines are allies of Assyria and are a great threat to Israel because of their claim to the land.

Verses 9-12 | Israel Carried Away Into Exile

9 Now in the fourth year of King Hezekiah, which was the seventh year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against Samaria and besieged it. 10 At the end of three years they captured it; in the sixth year of Hezekiah, which was the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel, Samaria was captured. 11 Then the king of Assyria carried Israel away into exile

to Assyria, and put them in Halah and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes, 12 because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed His covenant, [even] all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded; they would neither listen nor do [it].

These verses repeat a part of the history of Israel and Hoshea (2Kgs 17:4-8). One possible reason is that the writer wants to show the contrast between Hoshea and Hezekiah. Hoshea has not taken the LORD into account, while Hezekiah fully trusts in the LORD. Israel did not listen to “all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded”, which Hezekiah exactly does (verse 6).

Verses 13-16 | Hezekiah Pays Sanherib Tribute

13 Now in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and seized them. 14 Then Hezekiah king of Judah sent to the king of Assyria at Lachish, saying, “I have done wrong. Withdraw from me; whatever you impose on me I will bear.” So the king of Assyria required of Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. 15 Hezekiah gave [him] all the silver which was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasuries of the king’s house. 16 At that time Hezekiah cut off [the gold from] the doors of the temple of the LORD, and [from] the doorposts which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

The historian passes over ten years of the reign of Hezekiah and takes us to the fourteenth year of his reign. It seems that in the years that have passed, his confidence in faith has slowly declined, so we must now hear that he is bowing before the king of Assyria who is threatening him. His trust in God seems to have disappeared.

Hezekiah subjects to the king of Assyria and has forgotten the LORD. He has left the way of faith. When he says to the king of Assyria, “I have done wrong,” he is actually saying that his right way for the LORD is a wrong way. It is not the LORD Who is standing before him any more, but he sees things in the light of the king of Assyria. It is a sin of Hezekiah to say so.

To buy off the threat, Hezekiah proposes to the king of Assyria that he will pay what is imposed on him. The sum is determined. To pay it Hezekiah

takes all the silver of the temple and of his own treasures. It is an action due to lack of faith. Hezekiah also cuts off the gold from the temple doors and doorposts to pay for what is imposed on him by the king of Assyria.

Verses 17-37 | Bluster Against the LORD

17 Then the king of Assyria sent Tartan and Rab-saris and Rabshakeh from Lachish to King Hezekiah with a large army to Jerusalem. So they went up and came to Jerusalem. And when they went up, they came and stood by the conduit of the upper pool, which is on the highway of the fuller's field. 18 When they called to the king, Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe and Joah the son of Asaph the recorder, came out to them. 19 Then Rabshakeh said to them, "Say now to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria, "What is this confidence that you have? 20 You say (but [they are] only empty words), '[I have] counsel and strength for the war.' Now on whom do you rely, that you have rebelled against me? 21 Now behold, you rely on the staff of this crushed reed, [even] on Egypt; on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who rely on him. 22 But if you say to me, 'We trust in the LORD our God,' is it not 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'? 23 Now therefore, come, make a bargain with 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. 24 How then can you repulse one official of the least of my master's servants, and rely on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? 25 Have I now come up without the LORD's approval against this place to destroy it? The LORD said to me, 'Go up against this land and destroy it.'"" 26 Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and Shebna and Joah, said to Rabshakeh, "Speak now to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand [it]; and do not speak with us in Judean in the hearing of the people who are on the wall." 27 But Rabshakeh said to them, "Has my master sent me only to your master and to you to speak these words, [and] not to the men who sit on the wall, [doomed] to eat their own dung and drink their own urine with you?" 28 Then Rabshakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in Judean, saying, "Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria. 29 Thus says the king, 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you from my hand; 30

nor let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, "The LORD will surely deliver us, and this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." 31 Do not listen to Hezekiah, for thus says the king of Assyria, "Make your peace with me and come out to me, and eat each of his vine and each of his fig tree and drink each of the waters of his own cistern, 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 honey, that you may live and not die." But do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you, saying, "The LORD will deliver us." 33 Has any one of the gods of the nations delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? 34 Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria from my hand? 35 Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their land from my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?" 36 But the people were silent and answered him not a word, for the king's commandment was, "Do not answer him." 37 Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe and Joah the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn and told him the words of Rabshakeh.

The word "then", which begins with verse 17, makes it clear that the enormous tribute given by Hezekiah to the king of Assyria has helped nothing. The king of Assyria continues to rob. He breaks the covenant Hezekiah made with him. He sends high officers with a large army to Jerusalem.

The place where the enemy comes (verse 17b) is the place where Isaiah has previously met king Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah (Isa 7:3). Isaiah has his little son with him on that occasion. There Ahaz is shown a way out, but he refuses to accept it in faith. At that place of water and a fuller's field a promise is given. Water speaks of cleansing and the fuller's field of cleansing of clothing. The name of the son of Isaiah, Shear-jashub, means 'a rest will repent'. There is also talk about the birth of the Messiah. This is where the enemy comes up with a message that puts Hezekiah to the test.

Hezekiah sent a delegation to hear what the men of Assyria want (verse 18). It becomes a one-sided conversation. In verse 19, the commander begins an impressive speech with much rhetoric. There is a lot of what is true in this and there is also a lot of falsehood. Everything he says is meant to frighten Hezekiah and the men of Judah.

He begins by presenting the king of Assyria as “the great king”. The question in verse 20 is a penetrating and justified question. In verse 21 Hezekiah must hear from the mouth of a heathen that his trust is not in the LORD, but in an earthly king. This is a correct and sad observation. Egypt is not to rely on. The LORD himself compares Egypt to a broken reed (Eze 29:6-7).

But, the commander goes on, if Hezekiah would say that he trusts in the LORD, this also means nothing (verse 22). Hezekiah may have taken away the high places, but what has that yielded? Has this brought any good to the people? Are they grateful for that? The commander tries to create discord between Hezekiah and the people, because the people hear everything the commander says.

Another argument for breaking the resistance is to point out the weakness of Hezekiah’s army (verses 23-24). His whole army is nothing. Hezekiah would not even be able to supply the horsemen for two thousand horses if the king of Assyria gave them to him.

Another argument to impress the men of Judah is a reference to a command of the LORD which the commander would have to come up (verse 25). He says that without any faith. At the same time there is truth in it, because the Assyrians are God’s rod of discipline for His people. This statement will therefore turn against him, because while he says what is true, he does nothing to change his relationship with God.

It seems that the commander is silent for a moment to see how his words are reacted to. Hezekiah’s delegation also reacts (verse 26), but without any resistance. They give no sign of trust in the all-powerful God, the God of His people. Their reaction is one of fear. They do not want the people to hear this, because it will only discourage them more. But that is precisely the intention of the commander.

The reaction elicits another tirade from the commander. Encouraged by what the delegation has said in their fear, he speaks to all the people who are there. They should listen carefully to his words, otherwise they will, together with the leaders of the people, feed themselves with their own excrements and quench their thirst with their own urine (verse 27). When he has painted this picture in front of them, the commander, in Judean and

with a loud voice, starts again with the representation of “the great king” (verse 28; cf. verse 19).

The people must understand well that Hezekiah is a worthless and misleading king. Hezekiah is powerless, as is the LORD, to whom Hezekiah refers (verses 29-30). No, it is better for them to surrender to the king of Assyria. Instead of feeding on their excrement and quenching their thirst with their own urine, they will eat the delicious fruits of their own vine and fig tree and drink water from their own well (verse 31).

The commander, clever and misleading as he is, makes it very attractive to surrender by presenting the country where he will lead God’s people as the same country they now live in (verse 32). Faith will see this immediately. That land is not the land of God; for his temple is not there, where he cistern. It all seems to look beautiful, but the LORD is not there. Let us also hold on to what God has given and not exchange it for false promises.

The deeds he mentions (verses 33-35) are right, but he commits folly to lower the LORD to an idol. The LORD is for him as one of the idols of the other countries. This foolish and low view will therefore ultimately lead to his insulting downfall.

The reaction of Hezekiah’s delegation to this second speech by the commander is one of silence (verse 36). They remain silent because Hezekiah had told them to. It is sometimes good and important not to respond to certain statements. Silence sometimes speaks more clearly and louder than speaking. Not that the mission is silent in faith. The promise has brought them into deep dismay. With torn clothes they go to Hezekiah and tell him what the commander said (verse 37).

2 Kings 19

Verses 1-5 | Hezekiah Sends Servants to Isaiah

1 And when King Hezekiah heard [it], he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth and entered the house of the LORD. 2 Then he sent Eliakim who was over the household with Shebna the scribe and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz. 3 They said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah, 'This day is a day of distress, rebuke, and rejection; for children have come to birth and there is no strength to [deliver]. 4 Perhaps the LORD your God will hear all the words of Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to reproach the living God, and will rebuke the words which the LORD your God has heard. Therefore, offer a prayer for the remnant that is left.'" 5 So the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah.

When the delegation has passed on the commander's words to Hezekiah, Hezekiah tears his clothes. He also covers himself with sackcloth. He shows his good mind, that of humility. He is not arrogant, but bows under the judgment that comes upon him. He knows what he has earned, and that the hand of the LORD brings it upon him. Therefore he goes to Him in His house.

Furthermore he sends a delegation, with some persons he first sent to the commander, to Isaiah. With this he takes refuge in the Word of God to ask what should happen. It is the example for us to ask God by consulting His Word.

They bring Hezekiah's need to Isaiah. It is "a day of distress" because the enemy lies in front of the gate of Jerusalem and the strength lacks to fight the enemy. Powerlessness causes distress. It is also a day of "rebuke". Thus Hezekiah acknowledges that the distress of the enemy is a rebuke they deserve for their unfaithfulness to the LORD. Hezekiah also characterizes the commander's words as "rejection".

Hezekiah continues his feelings in verse 4. But first he speaks in pictorial language about God's work in His people. He compares the situation of the people with a birth that presents itself, while there is no strength to

give birth. There are birth contractions, but the children are not born, so that the mother's death threatens. There is in the people, in the person of Hezekiah, acknowledgment of unfaithfulness. Confession of unfaithfulness can be compared to the pain of a new birth (cf. Jn 16:21a). But it seems that the birth will not continue. Hezekiah sees only distress and no salvation.

He no longer dares to speak of the LORD as 'my God'. For himself he sees that he has lost that right. But "perhaps" the LORD will listen to Isaiah. He speaks to Isaiah about "the LORD your God". He recognizes the good relationship Isaiah has with the LORD. The reason for his request for prayer is not that he is personally offended or that the people are threatened, but that the enemy has dishonored the living God (cf. 1Sam 17:45). It is about the Name of God. Is that also our motivation when we ask something, or is it about our own honor?

The question to Isaiah is whether he wants to send a prayer "for the remnant that is left". That makes this history applicable to the end time, when there will be a remnant that is in great need. It also applies to us, believers in an apostate Christianity, who (want to) be a remnant that focuses on the honor of the Name of God.

Verses 6-7 | Encouragement by Isaiah

6 Isaiah said to them, "Thus you shall say to your master, 'Thus says the LORD, "Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. 7 Behold, I will put a spirit in him so that he will hear a rumor and return to his own land. And I will make him fall by the sword in his own land."'"

The servants of Hezekiah come to Isaiah as men who share in the feelings of Hezekiah. They can therefore interpret them correctly. That is why they get an encouraging answer. It is the promise of deliverance of the people and judgment on the king of Assyria. The LORD will ensure that the king of Assyria hears something that will lead him to give up the siege of Jerusalem and return to his land. When he is back in his own land, the LORD himself shall cut him down by the sword.

Here is the promise that judgment will come over the rod of discipline used by God to discipline His people (Isa 10:12). God shows that He is not only a God of Judah, but of all kingdoms. He is not a local God, but God of the whole earth. He makes sure that this king will be killed in his own land in the midst of his own gods and thus shows His omnipotence.

Verses 8-13 | Assyria Wants to Impress Again

8 Then Rabshakeh returned and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he had heard that the king had left Lachish. 9 When he heard [them] say concerning Tirhakah king of Cush, "Behold, he has come out to fight against you," he sent messengers again to Hezekiah saying, 10 "Thus you shall say to Hezekiah king of Judah, 'Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you saying, "Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria." 11 Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands, destroying them completely. So will you be spared? 12 Did the gods of those nations which my fathers destroyed deliver them, [even] Gozan and Haran and Rezeph and the sons of Eden who [were] in Telassar? 13 Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, and [of] Hena and Ivvah?"

The commander makes one last attempt to break the resistance of the people. It is an emergency attempt to subjugate the people in order to then go and fight Tirhaka. The rumor has reached him that he is attacking him. The commander once again uses an argument already used before. That argument is to point to achievements of the Assyrian kings, what they have done with other lands. He also points to the gods of those nations and to their inability to deliver the nations of which they were the gods. Thus the commander, without saying it explicitly, compares the LORD, the God of His people, again with the idols of the nations. He prunes that the LORD, like the idols, will not be able to deliver His people from the power of the king of Assyria.

Verses 14-19 | Hezekiah's Prayer

14 Then Hezekiah took the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it, and he went up to the house of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. 15 Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said, "O LORD, the God of Israel,

who are enthroned [above] the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. 16 Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and listen to the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God. 17 Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have devastated the nations and their lands 18 and have cast their gods into the fire, for they were not gods but the work of men's hands, wood and stone. So they have destroyed them. 19 Now, O LORD our God, I pray, deliver us from his hand that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, O LORD, are God."

Hezekiah's response to the threats of the enemy is beautiful and imitable. Hezekiah once again resorts to the LORD. What he does is always God's great purpose in trials. It is also nice to see how he does that. He does not ask God for an answer to these letters for the king of Assyria, but for a solution for the content.

He spreads out the letters containing all the threats to the LORD. He acquaints the LORD with its content. In this way, we may lay down all our needs before the Lord, one by one. We can mention by name all the things we care about.

Hezekiah acknowledges that God alone is God on earth. In that awareness he approaches God. He first addresses God with the name "LORD, the God of Israel, who are enthroned [above] the cherubim". This beautiful name of God shows His connection with His people and that He rules. Hezekiah confesses Him as the only God, not only of Israel, but "of all the kingdoms of the earth". This is He because He is the Creator of heaven and earth. Therefore He is the Owner of it. No such thing is ever said of or to any idol. God is the God of the universe.

That almighty God can be approached and addressed and be moved to listen and see. Hezekiah begs him to pay attention to "the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God". We see that with Hezekiah it is not about words spoken to him, but about what has been said to the living God, with what He has been dishonored and offended.

Hezekiah is not blind to what his enemy has done. It is all true what the enemy has said about peoples and their gods they have conquered. But Hezekiah immediately says why. Of course the king of Assyria could con-

quer these gods, because they were only dead things of wood and stone, the work of human hands. You can just pick up such things and burn them or throw them to pieces.

Hezekiah knows that despite all the achievements of the enemy, his God is above all. He alone is able to deliver; He can judge this enemy. Hezekiah asks for the delivery to the LORD. He does not do this primarily for his own salvation, but that “all the kingdoms of the earth”, of which God is God (verse 15), will actually know that He “alone” is God” (verse 19).

Verses 20-34 | Prophecy of Isaiah

20 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah saying, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Because you have prayed to Me about Sennacherib king of Assyria, I have heard [you].’ 21 This is the word that the LORD has spoken against him:

‘She has despised you and mocked you,
The virgin daughter of Zion;
She has shaken [her] head behind you,
The daughter of Jerusalem!

22 ‘Whom have you reproached and blasphemed?
And against whom have you raised [your] voice,
And haughtily lifted up your eyes?
Against the Holy One of Israel!

23 ‘Through your messengers you have reproached the Lord,
And you have said, “With my many chariots
I came up to the heights of the mountains,
To the remotest parts of Lebanon;
And I cut down its tall cedars [and] its choice cypresses.
And I entered its farthest lodging place, its thickest forest.

24 “I dug [wells] and drank foreign waters,
And with the sole of my feet I dried up
All the rivers of Egypt.”

25 ‘Have you not heard?
Long ago I did it;
From ancient times I planned it.
Now I have brought it to pass,

- That you should turn fortified cities into ruinous heaps.*
- 26 *'Therefore their inhabitants were short of strength,
They were dismayed and put to shame;
They were as the vegetation of the field and as the green herb,
As grass on the housetops is scorched before it is grown up.*
- 27 *'But I know your sitting down,
And your going out and your coming in,
And your raging against Me.*
- 28 *'Because of your raging against Me,
And because your arrogance has come up to My ears,
Therefore I will put My hook in your nose,
And My bridle in your lips,
And I will turn you back by the way which you came.*
- 29 *'Then this shall be the sign for you: you will eat this year what grows of itself, in the second year what springs from the same, and in the third year sow, reap, plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. 30 The surviving remnant of the house of Judah will again take root downward and bear fruit upward. 31 For out of Jerusalem will go forth a remnant, and out of Mount Zion survivors. The zeal of the LORD will perform this. 32 'Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, "He will not come to this city or shoot an arrow there; and he will not come before it with a shield or throw up a siege ramp against it. 33 By the way that he came, by the same he will return, and he shall not come to this city,"' declares the LORD. 34 'For I will defend this city to save it for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.'*

Hezekiah himself prayed directly to God, but the answer comes via Isaiah (verse 20). It is an exhaustive answer from the LORD. This answer applies to the end time.

The LORD begins by mocking the power of the king of Assyria (verse 21). With this word of mockery of God about the enemies the people make themselves one. They are also the words of the people, presented here as "the virgin daughter of Zion" and "the daughter of Jerusalem". These mocking words are put into the mouth of the remnant by the LORD. Only when the people really have the character of virgin and daughter they will be able to speak these words.

It is here a holy, a divine mocking (Psa 2:4). That's how we should learn to mock. Mocking is often an expression of the flesh or an expression of feelings of revenge. Feelings of gloating are also often present when we mock. None of this is present in the mockery of God and in divine mockery by His people.

The LORD takes the insults by the king of Assyria very serious (verse 22). How audacious is it to speak in this way to the Holy One of Israel! The LORD can do only bring His wrath upon him.

The LORD knows exactly what the proud king has said and on which he boasts (verses 23-24). Through Isaiah He lets know what lives in the heart of the enemy. It is the language of pride. He believes he can overcome the greatest powers of the world. He has indeed conquered a great deal, but in his pride he believes that he can also conquer God. The king of Assyria speaks as if he were God.

Then the LORD speaks to the conscience of the enemy (verse 25). Has it never occurred to him that he is only an instrument of God, and that he only carries out His will? The enemy does not do anything but what God intended long ago. *God* governs history and not the mighty men of the world. If those in power realized this, they would come to conversion and perform their duties in fear of God and for the good of their subjects. Therefore we are exhorted to pray for all who are in authority (1Tim 2:1-4).

God lets the king of Assyria know that he could only get the conquered peoples in his power because God has given them in his power (verse 26). In himself he is as one of the peoples conquered by him. For him, the conquered peoples have become like grass, but he himself is no different from the same grass. "All who hate Zion" will "be put to shame and turned backward". They will "be like grass upon the housetops, which withers before it grows up" (Psa 129:5-6). This judgment also includes the pruning king of Assyria.

God knows the enemy through and through. For the believer, this awareness is an encouragement, and at the same time he has the desire to be known through and through himself, so that he may be totally to God's glory (Psa 139:1-3,23-24). For the unbeliever, that thought is intolerable.

The LORD will deal with the enemy without being able to resist (verse 28). The enemy will be removed by Him as an unwilling animal with means which He will use for this purpose and which are in accordance with his pride.

In verse 29 Isaiah suddenly turns to Hezekiah. The sign Hezekiah receives is a sign that God will not leave His people. The LORD will bless the fruit of the land again. There has been no opportunity to sow, but they will be able to eat what comes naturally. God will ensure that the people will have to eat. In the third year they will have to start sowing again and will be able to reap and eat again.

We can also apply this spiritually. Someone who has just been delivered from the power of sin, who has just been converted, does not know much yet, but the Lord will bless him richly. He gets all these blessings thrown into his lap, as it were, and is allowed to eat what is given to him in this way. But he must also read and study himself, he must sow himself and will also be allowed to reap. He goes looking for food himself.

The beautiful verses 30-31 are about the remnant. These verses correspond to what Isaiah said earlier: "Now in that day the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped, will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God." (Isa 10:20-21). The mighty God is the Messiah (Isa 9:6). Here we see the connection between the events here and the future.

We must have this remnant character. Mighty enemies threaten us, but we are dependent on the Lord. We may look forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus. For us He does not intervene by judging our enemies, but by taking us up from between our enemies to Himself.

The LORD concludes His answer to Hezekiah with the promise that the enemy will not enter the city. This promise is made repeatedly and in different ways in verses 32-34. The LORD does everything to convince Hezekiah of the certainty of the deliverance. The main reason that the enemy will not get possession of God's city is that the LORD protects the city for His own sake and for His servant David's sake.

The LORD has chosen this city, it is His city to which his name is connected forever. The LORD also has chosen David his servant to be his king. For the sake of the true David, the Man according to His heart, the Lord Jesus, God will in the future “defend this city to save it”. That salvation is given a pre-fulfilment in the following verses.

Verses 35-37 | Deliverance of Jerusalem

35 Then it happened that night that the angel of the LORD went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men rose early in the morning, behold, all of them were dead. 36 So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned [home], and lived at Nineveh. 37 It came about as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son became king in his place.

Immediately after the LORD has promised to deliver Jerusalem, He fulfills his promise. “That night” it happens. “The angel of the LORD”, that is the Lord Jesus, goes to war. That night He kills no less than 185,000 enemy soldiers by an act of power. Thus, in the future, the Lord Jesus will come to earth to judge the enemy and to deliver His people.

Sennacherib’s answer is that he breaks up and returns home. When he is worshiping before his god in the house of his god, he is killed with the sword by his sons. It is really touching, pathetic, to see how “the great king”, as he called himself, bows down before a dead idol. He worships a piece of wood or stone to expect its help, despite the shameful retreat out of Judah. And it becomes even more slanderous when he, worshiping this piece of wood or stone to ask for help there, is killed. In his idol there is no movement to protect him. The idol stands there unmoved.

The death of Sennacherib happens as God has predicted in verse 7b. God shows here that He is the God of the whole earth and stands above all gods. Similarly, the king of Assyria that will be there in the end time will find its end by the power of God (Dan 11:45).

2 Kings 20

Verses 1-11 | Illness and Recovery of Hezekiah

1 In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, "Thus says the LORD, 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.'" 2 Then he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, saying, 3 "Remember now, O LORD, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart and have done what is good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. 4 Before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 5 "Return and say to Hezekiah the leader of My people, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, "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 the LORD. 6 I will add fifteen years to your life, and I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.'" 7 Then Isaiah said, "Take a cake of figs." And they took and laid [it] on the boil, and he recovered. 8 Now Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What will be the sign that the LORD will heal me, and that I shall go up to the house of the LORD the third day?" 9 Isaiah said, "This shall be the sign to you from the LORD, that the LORD will do the thing that He has spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten steps or go back ten steps?" 10 So Hezekiah answered, "It is easy for the shadow to decline ten steps; no, but let the shadow turn backward ten steps." 11 Isaiah the prophet cried to the LORD, and He brought the shadow on the stairway back ten steps by which it had gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.

"In those days" (verse 1), that is, in the days of his distress because of the enemy from outside, Hezekiah becomes ill. He even gets so ill that he has to die. Hezekiah therefore has a trial from outside, that is the enemy who has surrounded Jerusalem, and a trial from within, within himself. This second test comes on top of the first and is even greater, because it concerns himself.

What happens to Hezekiah is a picture of the trials of the faithful remnant in the end time that also has an enemy from the outside and also an enemy

from the inside. Both enemies are death threatening, but the enemy inside is the worst. The enemy from within is someone from the people themselves, the antichrist.

Isaiah comes to Hezekiah with the announcement that he will die and that he will have to arrange the affairs of his house for that purpose. For us, we must have our affairs arranged in view of the coming of the Lord. This can happen at any moment and that is why we must always be ready for it.

The announcement that he must die causes enormous sadness in Hezekiah. For an Old Testament believer, dying is very sad, especially when he is still relatively young, like Hezekiah, who is about forty years old here. For the promise of the LORD is a long life by faithfulness to Him. That is what Hezekiah the LORD reminds of. If he were taken away now, it would seem as if God is taking him away because of his bad spiritual condition.

The LORD wants Hezekiah to discover the power of death through what happens to him here. He also wants him to discover the power of the resurrection. We see that the Lord always gives richer lessons than we perceive at first sight. Events that we think put an end to certain things are often not intended by God to take something away from us, but to give us something in addition: a greater view of His power.

When Hezekiah has poured out his grief to the LORD, Isaiah receives a new message for Hezekiah. When the word of the LORD comes to Isaiah, he is not even completely out of the door. As a result, he soon returns to Hezekiah with the answer to his prayer.

Hezekiah gets a wonderful answer from the LORD. Isaiah must give him the answer on behalf of "the LORD, the God of your father David". In this way the gaze is again focused on David as the picture of the Messiah. In the answer of the LORD we can notice seven blessings.

1. The LORD has heard his prayer. We may also know that the Lord hears all our prayers.
2. The LORD has seen his tears. The Lord also knows from us our anguish and repentance for our sins.
3. The LORD tells him that he will recover. God will take care of him and recover his health by letting him experience the power of the resurrection, as the following sentence shows. For us, every prayer

that fits into His plan is answered by Him. It is not an incentive for anyone who is ill to claim recovery from the disease. Hezekiah has not claimed any health. He has revealed his need, and this is God's answer for him.

4. After the promise that he will recover, the LORD says that on the third day he will go to the house of the LORD. The power of the resurrection will make him go to the house of the LORD. For us it means that if we are aware that we have new life, we will take our place in the church.
5. The LORD promises him an extension of his life of fifteen years.
6. The LORD promises that he will be saved from the hand of the king of Assyria. The LORD promises protection of the city. Hezekiah gets this protection because of Who the LORD is and because of the Messiah.

The answer to Hezekiah's prayer is not by a sensational miracle. A common, everyday and tangible medicine is used for his healing that others have to apply to him. That medicine is a cake of figs. The result is that "he recovered".

In a spiritual sense figs are a picture of righteousness. Nathanael sits under the fig tree (Jn 1:48). The Lord Jesus says of him that he is an Israelite "in whom there is no deceit" (Jn 1:47). Nathanael and the fig tree give a picture of the faithful remnant that does justice. A cake of figs is sweet. Knowing the sweetness of righteousness by doing righteousness brings recovery.

Hezekiah also asks for a sign. There seems to be a certain lack of faith in what the LORD has said. That lack of faith is not 'punished' by leaving him in his illness with the accusation that he should have believed. This is often done by contemporary so-called faith healers. Instead, Isaiah gives him a choice of two kinds of signs. In this way God meets the small faith of Hezekiah.

In choosing one of the two signs we see that there is faith in Hezekiah. It is not a question for him whether the signs Isaiah proposes to him can be given. He considers in faith which sign will be most obvious. In that consideration, he chooses the least obvious sign. The accelerated progression of time is not as impressive as putting time back. This is not about the time

of a clock, of which you can turn back the hands, but about the sun that is in the sky and that no man can reach, but only God.

When Hezekiah has made his choice, Isaiah cries to the LORD. Also Isaiah does not doubt the outcome. Through his prayer God intervenes in nature. All of nature is set back by the God of nature to a situation of ten steps ago to help a believer believe in Him. The whole course and the whole order are in His hand. He can stop the sun and the moon (Jos 10:12-13) and also set them back, as He does here.

Verses 12-19 | The Delegation From Babylon

12 At that time Berodach-baladan a son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, for he heard that Hezekiah had been sick. 13 Hezekiah listened to them, and showed them all his treasure house, the silver and the gold and the spices and the precious oil and the house of his armor and all that was found in his treasuries. There was nothing in his house nor in all his dominion that Hezekiah did not show them. 14 Then Isaiah the prophet came to King Hezekiah and said to him, "What did these men say, and from where have they come to you?" And Hezekiah said, "They have come from a far country, from Babylon." 15 He said, "What have they seen in your house?" So Hezekiah answered, "They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasuries that I have not shown them." 16 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD. 17 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the LORD. 18 'Some of your sons who shall issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away; and they will become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.'" 19 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good." For he thought, "Is it not so, if there will be peace and truth in my days?"

In verse 12 we hear about Babylon for the first time in the history of Israel. Babylon is still an insignificant city and far from being a world power. The king of Babylon has heard of the disease and healing of Hezekiah. That is the reason for him to visit Hezekiah. However, the king of Babylon is not interested in Hezekiah's disease. His visit has a political reason. He wants to try to make Hezekiah his ally to fight with him against Assyria.

This visit becomes a trap for Hezekiah. He is flattered by this visit. Blinded by the high visit he forgets the LORD. He shows the delegation from Babylon everything he has in his house, all his treasures. That must make an impression on this delegation. Not a word does he mention about the LORD, and the miracle He did to him. He is silent about Him Who has taken away the threat of death for him and by doing so has come to know Him as the God of resurrection.

When Hezekiah has answered the questions of Isaiah, Isaiah announces the judgment about all that Hezekiah has shown. He predicts that everything will be taken away and brought to Babylon. Not only things will be taken away, but also people. His descendants will be taken to Babylon to serve as officials of the king of Babylon. Here we hear the first announcement in Scripture about the deportation of the two tribes to Babylon.

Hezekiah bows down under this judgment. He accepts that the LORD does this. In so doing he expresses with a certain sense of gratitude for undeserved grace the thought that this judgment will not take place in his days.

Verses 20-21 | The Death of Hezekiah

20 Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and all his might, and how he made the pool and the conduit and brought water into the city, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? 21 So Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and Manasseh his son became king in his place.

Hezekiah has been powerful. This power is “written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah”, which is unknown to us. A special feature is that Hezekiah brought water from the pool he made and through the watercourse he made into the city. In the case of a siege, it is of vital importance that the water supply is secured. Hezekiah has taken care of that. Spiritually it is also important to be able to take God’s Word, which is compared with water, to us in times of trial.

The extra fifteen years also come to an end. Hezekiah dies. This end, as with the other kings of Judah, is lower than he began. He was better able to deal with distress than with prosperity. He has been able to cope better with illness than with health. Illness and distress have driven him out to the LORD. His health and prosperity have led him to forget the LORD.

2 Kings 21

Verses 1-9 | Manasseh King of Judah

1 Manasseh was twelve years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Hephzibah. 2 He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD dispossessed before the sons of Israel. 3 For he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he erected altars for Baal and made an Asherah, as Ahab king of Israel had done, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. 4 He built altars in the house of the LORD, of which the LORD had said, "In Jerusalem I will put My name." 5 For he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. 6 He made his son pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft and used divination, and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD provoking [Him to anger]. 7 Then he set the carved image of Asherah that he had made, in the house of which the LORD said to David and to his son Solomon, "In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will put My name forever. 8 And I will not make the feet of Israel wander anymore from 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." 9 But they did not listen, and Manasseh seduced them to do evil more than the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the sons of Israel.

The God-fearing Hezekiah is followed after his death by his godless son Manasseh. Manasseh is only twelve years old when he starts reigning (verse 1). His reign lasts no less than fifty-five years, a period that exceeds that of all the other reigns. It is one of the enigmas of God's government that He allows such a wicked man as Manasseh to rule over His people for so long.

The name of his mother is also given. Hephzibah means 'My lust is in her'. In that name we hear what Jerusalem means to the LORD. What kind of woman she is, is not told. Whether she is a good or a bad mother, we do not know. Judging by the development of Manasseh, she certainly could

not prevent him from developing into such an ungodly king. We cannot point to a cause for all time when children go against what their God-fearing parents have told them.

Manasseh does not take as an example his father Hezekiah, but the kings of Israel, of whom we have read over and over again that they did, whatever is said here of Manasseh, “evil in the sight of the LORD” (verse 2). He does “according to the abominations of the nations”.

He quickly undoes his father’s reforms and “he rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed” (verse 3). He is also inspired by Ahab, the most godless king of Israel. It is quite possible that his worship and serving of sun, moon and stars (“all the host of heaven”) comes through Assyrian influence. So we see that Manasseh takes over the worst of everything and everyone and puts it into practice. The judgment that God has given both to the nation and to Ahab doesn’t matter him at all.

That the wicked Manasseh seems to be able to do unhindered whatever it takes also says something about the people. The revival under Hezekiah has apparently not deeply rooted in the population. The people are easily carried away on the bad road on which Manasseh is leading them.

He openly provokes the LORD by building idol altars in the house of the LORD (verses 4-5). The greatness of this evil is clearly expressed by saying that Manasseh does this in the house “of which the LORD had said, “In Jerusalem I will put My name.””. Manasseh doesn’t care about that. He ignores the rights of the LORD to His house and just makes it a dwelling place for demons. Manasseh does not act out of ignorance concerning the will of the LORD, but he does not care at all about that will.

His whole performance shows his surrender to demonic powers to whom he has voluntarily surrenders (verse 6). This means that he sacrifices his children to the devil, engages in occultism – he practices witchcraft and uses divination – and stimulates all sorts of forms of sorcery – he appoints mediums and spiritists. The conclusion is that he does not ‘only’ ignore the LORD. It is much worse. Not only does he pass by the LORD with contempt, but he intentionally acts in this way to defy the LORD: “He did much evil in the sight of the LORD provoking [Him to anger].”

Verse 7 gives another example of his gross violation of the rights of the LORD and his defiance of Him. Even more emphatically than in verse 4 we hear the indignation of God about Manasseh's shameless courage to set the carved image of Asherah in the temple. We hear God's indignation in what He says of His house and of His city. God's feelings about what He has chosen to put His Name there forever are deeply offended by Manasseh's contemptuous actions.

In verse 8 the LORD continues, in connection with verse 7, to speak about what He would have liked to do. He had wanted to put His Name forever among a people whom He would never drive out of this land, if they at least listened to His law. And there it went wrong: "But they did not listen" (verse 9). They follow Manasseh and it makes them wander in a way that makes them sin worse than the heathen peoples who first lived in the land. We have here the side of the godless mass of the people, after we have seen in Hezekiah the history of the faithful remnant.

Even now there is no nation that has corrupted it more than Christianity, just as Israel here is sinning worse than the nations. That is why God's judgment will all the severer come over Christianity.

Verses 10-16 | The LORD Announces Judgment

10 Now the LORD spoke through His servants the prophets, saying, 11 "Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations, having done wickedly more than all the Amorites did who [were] before him, and has also made Judah sin with his idols; 12 therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Behold, I am bringing [such] calamity on Jerusalem and Judah, that whoever hears of it, both his ears will tingle. 13 I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. 14 I will abandon the remnant of My inheritance and deliver them into the hand of their enemies, and they will become as plunder and spoil to all their enemies; 15 because they have done evil in My sight, and have been provoking Me to anger since the day their fathers came from Egypt, even to this day.'" 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 sin, in doing evil in the sight of the LORD.

Because of all the wickedness of Manasseh and his perseverance in it, the LORD must announce the judgment. He does so “through His servants the prophets.” The contents of His words are in verses 11-15. God does not remain silent and sends His warnings. When the judgment comes, no one can say that he did not know. This judgement will be carried out by Babylon.

Verse 11 first gives a summary of the sins of Manasseh. In this summary he is emphatically called “king of Judah”. He should have thought that he was king of Judah. Judah means ‘God lover’. Manasseh has overloaded this name with the greatest shame. His deeds are atrocities, in which the deeds of the pagan Amorites fade away. By his wrong example he made Judah sin.

In verses 12-14 follows the announcement of what the LORD will do as punishment for these sins, while verse 15 gives the reason for the punishment. The judgment that the LORD will bring over Jerusalem and Judah will astonish those who hear of it. The standard set for judgment is the same as the one the LORD has set for Samaria and the house of Ahab. God is perfectly righteous in His judgment. He doesn’t measure by double standards.

By this judgment there will be nothing left of Jerusalem. The city will be like a dish wiped clean and turned upside down (verse 13). The LORD will withdraw from the remnant of His inheritance and give it into the hands of their enemies. He no longer gets involved with them and leaves them to their fate. For this fate they have chosen themselves. The “remnant of My inheritance” (verse 14) refers to the inhabitants of Jerusalem who have not perished in a previous judgment. So this is not about the faithful remnant, but what remains after the first judgment.

Many of the remnant who have lived in the days of Hezekiah are killed by Manasseh. According to tradition, Manasseh has let Isaiah “cut into pieces” (Heb 11:37). He would have committed this terrible murder with a wooden saw. We also live in days comparable to the days of Manasseh. If we want to be faithful to the Lord and His Word, we must count on being persecuted (2Tim 3:12) and we will have to be willing to pay our faithfulness dearly.

Verses 17-18 | Death of Manasseh

17 Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh and all that he did and his sin which he committed, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? 18 And Manasseh slept with his fathers and was buried in the garden of his own house, in the garden of Uzza, and Amon his son became king in his place.

The brief previous description of all the atrocities of Manasseh is all the author of 2 Kings has to say. Here we read nothing about his conversion, which is reported in 2 Chronicles 33 (2Chr 33:10-20). We only read here about his government, about his responsibility, how he ruled. In books of Chronicles we read about the grace of God.

Verses 19-26 | Amon King of Judah

19 Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name [was] Meshullemeth the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah. 20 He did evil in the sight of the LORD, as Manasseh his father had done. 21 For he walked in all the way that his father had walked, and served the idols that his father had served and worshiped them. 22 So he forsook the LORD, the God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the LORD. 23 The servants of Amon conspired against him and killed the king in his own house. 24 Then 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. 25 Now the rest of the acts of Amon which he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? 26 He was buried in his grave in the garden of Uzza, and Josiah his son became king in his place.

After the wicked Manasseh, who ruled for a long time, comes another wicked king, his son Amon. These two kings are between two God-fearing kings. Grace is not an inheritance, one cannot demand it. Grace is given by God without reason in man.

In the description of Amon's reign, the full emphasis is on the fact that Amon completely follows his father Manasseh in his wickedness: "He walked in all the way that his father had walked" (verse 21). That is worse than "not walk in the way of the LORD" (verse 22). He does this as a conscious choice, because we read that he "forsook" the LORD. Forsaking is

leaving consciously. The LORD is called here “the God of his fathers”. He turns his back on everything God has been to his fathers, with whom we will think of David and Hezekiah in the first place.

The LORD allowed his father Manasseh to reign for fifty-five years. In all his godlessness He did not intervene. That does not mean that everyone can do what he wants. Amon gets a quick judgment. After only two years reign, he is murdered by his servants.

The people of the land, the hard-working people, kill Amon’s killers. Then they make his son Josiah king in his stead. They take the law into their own hands. Somehow they want a king from David’s house to remain in power. Possibly they act, because there is still something of the good influence of a converted Manasseh present in them. In any case God uses it to place a king on the throne of David in Josiah, whom He will use as a special instrument for a last revival among His people. God controls everything, including the autocratic actions of population groups, to fulfill His plan.

2 Kings 22

Verses 1-2 | Josiah King of Judah

1 Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name [was] Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. 2 He did right in the sight of the LORD and walked in all the way of his father David, nor did he turn aside to the right or to the left.

Josiah is only eight years old when he starts reigning. The name of his mother is mentioned, Jedidah, which means 'darling'. She is the daughter of Adaiah, which means 'the LORD is a jewel'. The place Bozkath is one of the cities of Judah (Jos 15:21,39).

The general characteristic of Josiah is read in verse 2. There is nothing present with him of the godless characteristics of his father Amon and his grandfather Manasseh. On the contrary, he does what is right in the sight of the LORD and goes "in all the way of his father David". He goes straight, without deviating to the right or left. There is always the danger for a believer of deviating to the right, what stands for legalism, or to the left, what stands for liberalism. Only dependence on the Lord can save us from deviation to either side.

Verses 3-7 | Money for the Restoration of the Temple

3 Now in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan, the son of Azaliah the son of Meshullam the scribe, to the house of the LORD saying, 4 "Go up to Hilkiah the high priest that he may count the money brought in to the house of the LORD which the doorkeepers have gathered from the people. 5 Let them deliver it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the LORD, and let them give it to the workmen who are in the house of the LORD to repair the damages of the house, 6 to the carpenters and the builders and the masons and for buying timber and hewn stone to repair the house. 7 Only no accounting shall be made with them for the money delivered into their hands, for they deal faithfully."

As with all good kings we also see with Josiah that his first acts of reign have to do with care for the temple. He orders the temple to be restored. His first concern is God's house, which has fallen into decay during the reign of the kings Manasseh and Amon. He orders the writer Shaphan to tell the high priest Hilkiah that he should use the money that is in the house of the LORD for that reparation.

Josiah has a loyal and dedicated helper in Shaphan. Shaphan has some sons and a grandson who are faithful men just like him (Jer 26:24; 29:3; 36:10; 40:5). This offspring has had a positive influence. They are God-fearing sons. So it is possible to be a God-fearing family in a godless time. For the sake of completeness it should also be mentioned that he has a son who becomes an idolater (Eze 8:9-11).

The money must be given to those who carry out the work. They can then buy the necessary materials. They can do that without 'presenting every receipt'. It is always good to give in confidence that the person to whom it is given is acting well. This does not mean that control can be refused. Control is often good. Control does not take place out of mistrust, but because there is always the possibility of error. Trust should not be demanded, but should be given.

Verses 8-11 | The Book of the Law Found

8 Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, "I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan who read it. 9 Shaphan the scribe came to the king and brought back word to the king 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 the LORD." 10 Moreover, Shaphan the scribe told the king saying, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it in the presence of the king. 11 When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes.

After the historian has told about the order to restore the house of God, he writes about the finding of "the book of the law in the house of the LORD". That is what his report now emphasizes. What follows is the effect that what is written in the book of the law has on the heart and conscience of Josiah. The revival of Josiah is characterized by finding the Word of God.

It should be noted that the finding of the book of the law is done in connection with the care for the temple. In a spiritual sense, we can make the application that we will discover God's Word, that is, its meaning, if our hearts go out to what is now God's house, His church. When the heart goes out to the same thing God's heart goes out to, the right mind is present to be taught by God from His Word.

We do not know what this book of the law is, that they find. It may be that it concerns the five books of Moses or only the book Deuteronomy. That is not important either. What matters is the effect of that find. It is a great grace from God that He gives His Word back to His people, as it were. It says that Hilkia says that he "found" the book of the law, which does not mean he searched for it. God takes care he finds it.

When it is found, the Word begins its unstoppable run (cf. 2Thes 3:1). Hilkia, the high priest, has found it. He gives it to Shaphan. Shaphan is going to read in it. Then he goes with the book of the law to the king. Once there, he first reports on his original mission with regard to the money. Furthermore we hear nothing about the work on the temple. All attention is focused on the Word and the effect of the Word.

After the report about the money Shaphan tells the king about the book of the law he received from Hilkia. He does not hand it over to the king as an antiquity, to marvel at it, but he reads it to the king because of current events, to be addressed by it. The Bible is best honored when we read it faithfully, study it, and incorporate into our hearts what we read and practice what the Lord says to us.

We see that with Josiah. The effect God's Word has on him is impressive. He is seized by it or even better, he is overwhelmed by it. He is not only hit by the Word, but he is defeated by it. Josiah does not wonder if this is the Bible, if it is true. He does not argue, but the Word works in him. He accepts it, "not [as] the word of men, but [for] what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe" (1Thes 2:13).

Perhaps the opposite is more the case with us. We do not have to search for a Bible. Often we have several Bibles, in different translations and different languages, at our fingertips, but often it doesn't care us when we read in it. Josiah discovers the Bible. He makes a great discovery, he "finds great

spoil" (Psa 119:162). It tears his heart. As a sign of his inner dejection he tears his clothes (cf. Joel 2:13).

It is to be hoped that we will experience this every time we read in God's Word. That is possible! We can pray that the Lord will show Himself and His will to us in His Word. If He sees that sincere desire with us and also that we will be humbled when He shows us things that are not good, He will show Himself and His will.

Verses 12-20 | The Word of the LORD

12 Then the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor the son of Micaiah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the king's servant saying, 13 "Go, inquire of the LORD for me and the people and all Judah concerning the words of this book that has been found, for great is the wrath of the LORD that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us." 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 spoke to her. 15 She said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Tell the man who sent you to me, 16 thus says the LORD, "Behold, I bring evil on this place and on its inhabitants, [even] all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read. 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 burns against this place, and it shall not be quenched.'" 18 But to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of the LORD thus shall you say to him, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, "[Regarding] the words which you have heard, 19 because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before Me, I truly have heard you," declares the LORD. 20 "Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes will not see all the evil which I will bring on this place."'" So they brought back word to the king.

Josiah does what every soul does who in truth is convinced of his sins and therefore fears for judgment. Someone who really discovers that he is a sinner will turn to God to ask what to do. Every person who is touched by the Word of God and sees what he is in the eye of God has that question. The Word brings into in the arms of God.

Whoever lives through the Word also knows the value and especially the practice of prayer. Josiah wants to know from the LORD if there is still hope. He seeks that hope with Him Who also has to let the judgment come. There is no moderation at all with Josiah. He brings his need to the LORD by acknowledging that he and the people have earned the judgment. He leaves it to the LORD how He will answer.

Josiah sends reliable men to Hulda. It is not clear why he sends to a woman, the prophetess Huldah, and not to Jeremiah or Zephaniah, who acted as prophets in his days. Possibly they are still too young and unknown. He knows the prophetess Huldah. The fact that he goes to a prophetess at least marks the time of decay, as in the time of Deborah's performance, when decay was also great (Jdg 4:1-9).

The name of her husband is explicitly mentioned by also mentioning the name of his father and grandfather and also his profession, that he is keeper of the wardrobe, i.e. of the priestly clothes. Huldah's husband takes care of the priests' clothes. In the spiritual sense this means that he supervises the behavior of the believers, that this is in accordance with their confession.

Huldah knows God's thoughts regarding the practice of the life of the people of God. A prophet or prophetess speaks utterances of God with a view to current situations. Such a person can apply the Word to it. Josiah also experiences this through the message she has for him.

Huldah must speak about Josiah on behalf of the LORD as "the man" and not as "the king". For the LORD, all the dignity Josiah has as king is not important here as here it is about His judgment. Huldah is told by the LORD what He has to say to Josiah and what she has to pass on. It starts with a repetition of what Josiah has heard read aloud and what has brought him to dejection. For the third time we hear the announcement of

the punishment of God over His people. What Hulda says is nothing but saying what God's Word says.

Then follows a word for Josiah personally. That personal word is addressed to him as "the king of Judah". It is a word of encouragement. The reason for this is his humiliation which the LORD has noted. The LORD sees this humbling in his heart and He has also observed the outer characteristics of the tearing of his clothes and tears.

Of Josiah's father Amon we read that he did not humble himself before the LORD (2Chr 33:21-23). His father Manasseh humbled himself, but is forced to do so because of his own sins. Josiah does not humble himself because of his own sins, but because of a common guilt. He humbles himself over the sins of the people and of his fathers. He makes himself one with it.

The encouragement is that the LORD will gather him to his fathers and that he will be gathered to his grave in peace. He will see nothing of the calamity that the LORD will bring on Jerusalem.

The men he has sent to Huldah report to him on what the LORD has told Huldah. We see the effect in the next chapter.

2 Kings 23

Verses 1-3 | The Covenant

1 Then the king sent, and they gathered to him all the elders of Judah and of Jerusalem. 2 The king went up to the house of the LORD 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; and he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the LORD. 3 The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all [his] heart and all [his] soul, to carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people entered into the covenant.

Neither the message of judgment concerning Jerusalem nor the reassuring message concerning himself leads to passivity with Josiah. As far as the message of judgment is concerned, he could have thought that it does not make sense to work anyway. As for the reassuring message, he could have been satisfied and thought that he will see it out. But no, both messages bring him to action.

He lets the elders of Judah and Jerusalem come to him. He wants to wake them up from their false rest and put them back into action. The upcoming judgment makes him extra zealous. He is working hard to implement the necessary reforms. He does not say that it makes no sense because everything will be destroyed anyway. The certainty that we will not come into judgment will not make us passive, but all the more zealous to reach people with the gospel. It will also increase our commitment to the Lord and His church.

When the elders are with him, he goes with them to the house of the LORD, the temple, the place where the book of the law was found. Not only the elders go with him, but the “all the people, both small and great”. It has become a general matter. Before this whole company Josiah reads “all the words of the book of the covenant”. He wants the people to hear the words by which he himself was so seized.

Nothing is more important to us than passing on God's Word (cf. 1Tim 4:12-13). It is important that we do so as people who have been addressed by it themselves and also live by it. Otherwise the Word will not come across – although God is sovereign to let it do its work in heart and conscience of one or another.

When Josiah has read the book of the covenant, he makes a covenant between the people and the LORD. Although the revival is not deep, as the book of Jeremiah shows, Josiah makes this covenant. Perhaps many have joined this covenant because at that time they were very impressed by the Word, without the conscience having been touched. But although the mass may not really have been touched inward, it is often the case that there are a few in the mass with whom it is the case.

That is how we speak to all people, although perhaps only a few really listen. The Lord Jesus speaks of this situation in the parable of the sower (Mt 13:1-9,18-23). Every soul that we can still gain for God from the apostate whole makes every effort a valuable thing and worthwhile.

Verses 4-14 | The Cleansing

4 Then the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second order and the doorkeepers, to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels that were made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel. 5 He did away with the idolatrous priests whom the kings of Judah had appointed to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah and in the surrounding area of Jerusalem, also those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and to the moon and to the constellations and to all the host of heaven. 6 He brought out the Asherah from the house of the LORD outside Jerusalem to the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and ground [it] to dust, and threw its dust on the graves of the common people. 7 He also broke down the houses of the [male] cult prostitutes which [were] in the house of the LORD, where the women were weaving hangings for the Asherah. 8 Then he brought all the priests from the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba; and he broke down the high places of the gates which [were] at the entrance of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which [were] on one's left at the city gate.

9 Nevertheless the priests of the high places did not go up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread among their brothers. 10 He also defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire for Molech. 11 He did away with the horses which the kings of Judah had given to the sun, at the entrance of the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathan-melech the official, which [was] in the precincts; and he burned the chariots of the sun with fire. 12 The altars which [were] on the roof, the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, the king broke down; and he smashed them there and threw their dust into the brook Kidron. 13 The high places which [were] before Jerusalem, which [were] on the right of the mount of destruction 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 sons of Ammon, the king defiled. 14 He broke in pieces the [sacred] pillars and cut down the Asherim and filled their places with human bones.

In verses 4-20 the cleansing is described in detail. Josiah starts and continues to do away with everything that is not good. And what a lot that is! There is an abundance of wickedness in Judah and Jerusalem, that is, in the area where one should be most familiar with God. Josiah is reigning for 18 years now and has set a good example to the people. Yet the depth and extent of the dunghill of the idolatry is enormous.

Josiah is not discouraged by the enormous amount of uncleanness to be cleared up. Every idolatry is to the LORD's gross dishonor and must be eradicated. The work is not going fast. A lot of cleansing is required and thorough cleansing is required. Thorough cleansing is often difficult. A revival is not possible without cleansing. Cleansing is not just about the visible things. The visible things arise from the inner. Above all, it is about an inner cleansing, a cleansing of the heart.

We need a renewal of our thinking. Cleansing our thinking means above all that we examine how we think. Our children go to school and their thinking is shaped by the thinking of the world. The world does determine how they see everything. Parents are also influenced, especially by the mass media. It is through this channel that the opinion of the world is

forced upon them. We can only keep ourselves clean of it if we do not take it in. If we sometimes take things from the world to us, let us then make up our mind not to take things to us that defile us. Daniel is an example in this (Dan 1:8-16). This is possible if we have a heart in which the Word of God dwells richly (cf. Col 3:16a).

The first task Josiah gives is to discard everything that has to do with Baal and has been brought into the temple (verse 4). First of all, we must consider what things of the world are permitted in the temple of today, that is, the church and our body, our thinking. Josiah gives this order to “Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second order and the doorkeepers”. Cleansing is primarily a priestly activity. If uncleanness has entered our lives, it is above all at the expense of our service to God. He will no longer receive from our hearts and lives what He is entitled to and desires.

Josiah lets burn the objects sacrificed to the idols. This happens in Jerusalem, the city of God. The remains of these objects are brought to Bethel, a place in the ten tribes realm. This means that he brings the ashes to an unclean place.

The three idols mentioned here, Baal, Asherah and all the host of heaven, are seen as a picture of prosperity. That makes today’s application easy. After all, we live in a time of idolization of prosperity. We can sometimes check ourselves to see if we really only give God the honor in all things, or if we are committed to get as much of the cake of prosperity as possible.

He also deposed the idolaters “whom the kings of Judah had appointed” (verse 5). With the kings of Judah will undoubtedly be meant Manasseh and Amon. The idol priests sacrifice on the high places in Judah and around Jerusalem. They will have thought in their folly to sacrifice incense to the LORD. There are also direct idol priests, who bring incense to the Baal and other idols. Josiah also removes them.

The next action concerns the Asherah (verse 6), which Manasseh placed in the house of the LORD (2Kgs 21:7). Here Josiah does a very thorough job. First he burns it and then ground [it] to dust. The place of action is the brook Kidron. Then he throws the dust on the graves, an unclean place. By throwing the dust over the graves he also expresses his contempt for this god. Perhaps when we think of “the graves of the common people” we

have to think of a kind of mass grave, where people are buried together because they could not afford their own grave.

The horrific defilement knows no bounds. In verse 7 there is talk of dwellings made in the house of the LORD for prostituting men. The most disgusting sexual acts were performed in God's house. The women also played their roll in this horrific scene. They weaved hangings for the Asherah, the goddess of lust. Instead of denouncing these atrocities, they have, as it were, covered up these horrific practices with their hangings.

Then Josiah lets all the priests in his entire area, from Geba in the north of Benjamin to Beersheba in the south of Judah, come to him (verse 8). These priests are taken away from their defiled environment. He defiles the high places where those priests have brought incense. The high places of the gates are broken down. A precise specification of the location of these high places is given: "At the entrance of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which [were] on one's left at the city gate."

The priests called to Jerusalem by Josiah cannot offer there on the altar of the LORD (verse 9). However, they may eat unleavened bread with their brothers. They are in a situation similar to that of priests who, due to a physical defect, cannot participate in the service, but are allowed to eat from the holy place (Lev 21:17,22-23). Sometimes it is the case that someone who comes to conversion cannot do a certain service because of the life he has led. For example, a person who has two women, as occurs in certain countries, cannot be an elder after his conversion (1Tim 3:2).

He is always working. His work in verse 10 is the extermination of yet another unparalleled horror: the sacrifice of the own children to the Molech, the god of fire (cf. Jer 32:35). This happened in Topheth, in the valley of the son of Hinnom, which because of these practices is called "the valley of Slaughter" by the LORD (Jer 19:6). How terrible this place is, is clear from the fact that the name Hinnom is derived from the name 'Gehenna', which is 'hell'.

Josiah defiles this place so that no one can let his son or daughter go through the fire anymore as a sacrifice for the Molech. In this verse there is a strong call to parents to think about the purpose of raising their children and what they should keep their children for.

The horses mentioned in verse 11 are dedicated to the sun by “the kings of Judah” – Manasseh and Amon. According to their idolatrous thoughts, these horses with their chariots must draw the sun along the sky. The horses are standing “at the entrance of the house of the LORD”. Thus they defy and insult the LORD in a gross way. We do not know who “Nathan-melech, the official” was. But the LORD knows him well. Was he a driver of the chariots of the sun?

To see the number of altars that Josiah cleans up, Jerusalem must have been full of idol altars. On every corner and every spot there was an altar. In verse 12 some altars are mentioned specifically. Josiah breaks down “the altars which [were] on the roof, the upper chamber of Ahaz”. These altars were also made by “the kings of Judah”. Also “altars which [were] on the roof, the upper chamber of Ahaz”, Josiah breaks down. The insults of the LORD by Manasseh have no end. He has done his utmost to transform the house of the LORD in all respects into an idol temple. Josiah takes away all the idols, turns them into dust and throws the dust into the brook Kidron.

It is shocking in this purification work, in which we encounter names like Ahaz and Manasseh, to suddenly come across the name of Solomon as someone who is also connected to the cult of idols (verse 13). We know from 1 Kings 11 that Solomon has departed from the LORD by his many wives and the gods that these women have brought along. We even read that he built high places for those gods (1Kgs 11:7-8). All these idols are meaningfully referred to here as “abomination” by which the contrast between the idols of Solomon and God’s judgment of them is strongly emphasized.

In verse 14 we read that Josiah cut down the sacred pillars that functioned as objects of worship. King Hezekiah has done this before (2Kgs 18:4). The fact that two generations later this is done again by Josiah shows how persistent this idolatry is. Josiah fills the vacant space with human bones. He probably does so in order to defile this area and thereby to make people fear that they will not fall back into this idolatry again.

Verses 15-20 | The Altar at Bethel

15 Furthermore, the altar that [was] at Bethel [and] the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel sin, had made, even that altar and

the high place he broke down. Then he demolished its stones, ground them to dust, and burned the Asherah. 16 Now when Josiah turned, he saw the graves that [were] there on the mountain, and he sent and took the bones from the graves and burned [them] on the altar and defiled it according to the word of the LORD which the man of God proclaimed, who proclaimed these things. 17 Then he said, "What is this monument that I see?" And the men of the city told him, "It is the grave of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar of Bethel." 18 He said, "Let him alone; let no one disturb his bones." So they left his bones undisturbed with the bones of the prophet who came from Samaria. 19 Josiah also removed all the houses of the high places which [were] in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made provoking the LORD; and he did to them just as he had done in Bethel. 20 All the priests of the high places who [were] there he slaughtered on the altars and burned human bones on them; then he returned to Jerusalem.

In these verses we are reminded of a history from 1 Kings 12-13. The name of Jeroboam is also mentioned here, with as so often before the addition of the negative characteristic "who made Israel sin". In his audacity, Jeroboam had invented his own religion (two golden calves) and had erected his own altar (1Kgs 12:25-33). God tells him by a prophet from Judah He will judge this.

Verses 15-16 refer to this. In the announcement of that judgment the man of God from Judah mentions the name of Josiah as the performer of that judgment (1Kgs 13:1-2). The moment of fulfilment has now come. God does not let any of His words fall to the earth. Every word comes true, both in terms of blessing and judgment.

In verses 17-18, something else takes place which is related to the history which is recorded in 1 Kings 13. This time it concerns the bones of the old prophet. Josiah notices a monument and asks what it means. It is not clear why Josiah does not know this, but the people of the city know it. They tell him about what the man of God said and that Josiah did what the man of God announced.

It is nice that people remember this event in Bethel, but it is not nice to learn nothing from it. It is not so beautiful that Josiah apparently knows

nothing about it, but it is beautiful that after the memory he acts as is said by the man of God. The bones of the old prophet also remain untouched.

In the same way as before in Bethel, Josiah “removed all the houses of the high places which [were] in the cities of Samaria” (verse 19). These houses were made by the kings of Israel to provoke the LORD. The priests who have served on these high places are slaughtered by Josiah (verse 20), something he has not done with the priests in Judah who have also sacrificed at high places (verse 8).

Verses 21-23 | Josiah Celebrates the Passover

21 Then the king commanded all the people saying, “Celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God as it is written in this book of the covenant.” 22 Surely such a Passover had not been celebrated from the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and of the kings of Judah. 23 But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was observed to the LORD in Jerusalem.

The Passover is celebrated by order of king Josiah. The fact that the order to celebrate the Passover is given by a king is unique. The Passover is celebrated here during a revival. It has been celebrated more often (Exo 12:3-11; Num 9:5; Jos 5:10; 2Chr 30:1,15,18-20,26), but also often not. The Passover represents the Lord’s Supper. We can deduce this from the fact that the Lord Jesus institutes the Supper during the celebration of the Passover (Lk 22:7-8,13-20). The Lord’s Supper is often celebrated, but also for a longer time it was not. It has been there from the beginning.

Josiah celebrates the Passover because he has found it in Scripture and after he has cleansed the city and the land of the idols and their priests. Thus, the (local) church can only celebrate Lord’s Supper if the believers have discovered it in God’s Word and have removed from their lives what goes against God’s Word (1Cor 5:7-8).

After the days of the judges we read only of a celebration of the Passover by Hezekiah (2Chr 30:1). The Passover which Josiah celebrates also surpasses the Passover which Hezekiah celebrated, for it says: “Surely such a Passover had not been celebrated from the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and of the kings of Judah”

(verse 22). Here we see that the greater the decay, the greater the LORD's appreciation is when His institution of the Passover is kept. To celebrate it, Josiah did not think of any new things to make it attractive, but ordered that it be kept "as it is written in this book of the covenant". Josiah keeps it because it is in God's Word and he keeps it as it is in God's Word.

It is a unique Passover, because it is the best feast ever in the land, better than in the times of David and Solomon and Hezekiah. It is so great because it is held at the end of the realm of Judah, which is about to be deported.

We too live in an end time and even now it is possible to celebrate the Lord's Supper in a way that it has not been celebrated for a long time. That can happen now. The question is whether we participate. God has a meal for the end time, His Supper, prepared according to His thoughts, to take part in it as He wills. All believers who come together with cleansed, willing hearts can participate. If this happens without being sectarian – Josiah speaks to "all the people" – we too may know that, however great the decay may be, the appreciation of the Lord Jesus is great when His institution of His Supper is held.

Verses 24-25 | Last Acts and Testimony of Josiah

24 Moreover, Josiah removed the mediums and the spiritists and the teraphim and 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 Hilkiyah the priest found in the house of the LORD. 25 Before him there was no king like him who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.

Josiah executes the words of the law to the last letter. The Word lives so powerfully in him because it is so fresh to him. He wants to obey it with all his strength and zeal. He can only be satisfied when everything that is an insult to God and disobedience to His Word has been removed. It seems that after the Passover he is even more impressed by God's Word and God's holiness, so he makes another tour through Judah and Jerusalem to see if there is anything else to clear up.

What may have escaped his attention will be seen and removed during this inspection round. These are the mediums and the spiritists who have kept themselves hidden as much as possible. They will have done their works of darkness as quietly as possible, but they will not escape the purification actions of Josiah, nor will the images they have used.

The testimony given of Josiah is very similar to that given of Hezekiah. It is also said of Hezekiah that before him and after him there is no one like him. How is that possible? The solution may be that they are both the best in different respects. Hezekiah has no equal when it comes to trust in God. Josiah has no equal when it comes to obedience to the Word of God, to which he has always acted. He has kept the Word of God and has not denied the Name of God.

His true and profound conversion “to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might” (verse 25; cf. Deu 6:5) has produced abundant works in keeping with repentance. This testimony of his conversion is also unique in Scripture. That no one like him rose up after him, becomes quickly clear in the kings who came after him. These kings have quickly brought God’s judgment over Judah and Jerusalem by deporting them to Babylon.

Verses 26-27 | The Wrath of the LORD Must Come

26 However, the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath with which His anger burned against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. 27 The LORD said, “I will remove Judah also from My sight, as I have removed Israel. And I will cast off Jerusalem, this city which I have chosen, and the temple of which I said, ‘My name shall be there.’”

Despite the revival which God has brought in His grace to His people, “the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath”. What has been for Josiah a profound work in his heart and conscience has been for the people only a superficial, temporary condition (Jer 25:3-7). They have not radically converted to God. The same we see in Christianity. If God were to give the greatest revival, this would not change the fact that the judgment of Christianity comes, as Judah stands here just before the deportation to

Babylon. This has nothing to do with the failure of God's omnipotence, but with the incorrigibility of man.

God has to reject Jerusalem because of the provoking by Manasseh. What Manasseh has done to provoke God knows no limits. God owes it to His holiness to judge the people who, instead of calling to God, have joined Manasseh. We listen to the sorrow in the heart of the LORD in what He says in verse 27 about the removing of Judah and the rejection of Jerusalem.

Verses 28-30 | Death of Josiah

28 Now the rest of the acts of Josiah and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? 29 In his days Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. And King Josiah went to meet him, and when [Pharaoh Neco] saw him he killed him at Megiddo. 30 His servants drove his body in a chariot from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem and buried him in his own tomb. Then the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah and anointed him and made him king in place of his father.

At the end of his life Josiah also departed from the LORD. He has become stubborn. His authority becomes his trap. He is often a picture of the Lord Jesus, but he is not a perfect picture of Him. Josiah wants to be part of the great world politics and is crushed between the superpowers Egypt and Assyria. He interferes in a fight that does not concern him and dies.

His death is not honorable. His burial is not honorable either. His burial is done by his servants. They bring him, that is to say his body, to Jerusalem and bury him in his tomb. Josiah is succeeded by his son Jehoahaz who is anointed king by the people of the land.

Only Solomon and Jehoash are said to be anointed king to take their place on the throne immediately after that. In those cases, this was done to make meaningless any claim of others on the throne. That seems to be the case here too. Jehoahaz is not the eldest son of Josiah. The eldest son is Jojakim. Solomon's and Jehoash's anointing is justified, Jehoahaz's anointing seems to have been preferred by the people because of his political position.

Verses 31-34 | Jehoahaz King of Judah

31 Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 32 He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done. 33 Pharaoh Neco imprisoned him at Riblah in the land of Hamath, that he might not reign in Jerusalem; and he imposed on the land a fine of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. 34 Pharaoh Neco 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 brought [him] to Egypt, and he died there.

From now on, until the end of the realm – that is, over a period of about twenty-two years – four kings are presented. In the time of these kings nothing happens that gives joy. The time of revivals like under Hezekiah and Josiah is over. None of the successors of Josiah is God-fearing.

The writer limits himself in his description of the kings will come to power, before Judah is taken away into exile. Through the book of Jeremiah, however, we learn a lot about the downfall of the realm. There we find encounters between some of the four kings with the prophet Jeremiah, about whom there is not a single word here.

Jehoahaz is a bad king. He reigns only briefly. But just like other bad kings who have reigned for a short time, in those three months he has proven what kind of king he is. Ezekiel compares him to a young lion (Eze 19:1-4). After three months God's judgment comes upon him through Pharaoh, who is still the mighty ruler on the world stage. Pharaoh imprisoned him at Riblah, a priest city. Thereby his kingship is over. Pharaoh Neco also imposes a fine on the land. God seems to be on the side of Pharaoh and to give up the kings of Judah. It does not mean that they are more wicked than Pharaoh, but that they are much more responsible.

Pharaoh also shows his power over Judah by making a brother of Jehoahaz, Eliakim, king. Another proof of the power of Pharaoh is that he changes the name Eljakim to Jehoiakim. He does not make him king in the place of Jehoahaz, but in the place of Josiah his father. It is as if the whole kingship of Jehoahaz did not exist. It is possible that Jehoahaz pursued an anti-Egyptian policy and thereby aroused the anger of Pharaoh. It says it

so explicitly, that Pharaoh imprisoned Jehoahaz “that he might not reign in Jerusalem”.

Verses 35-37 | Jehoiakim King of Judah

35 So Jehoiakim gave the silver and gold to Pharaoh, but he taxed the land in order to give the money at the command of Pharaoh. He exacted the silver and gold from the people of the land, each according to his valuation, to give it to Pharaoh Neco. 36 Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name [was] Zebidah the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. 37 He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.

Jehoiakim may have been made king by Pharaoh, but he has to pay Pharaoh a high tribute. To be able to pay that tax he applies the same method as Menahem did (2Kgs 15:20). Only he does not limit himself, like Menahem, to the financially strong, but demands his contribution from every member of the population. It has been assumed that he extorted the population of the land out of revenge, because they had chosen his brother above him to be king (verse 30).

The submission to Pharaoh does not make Jehoiakim a king who bows down under the judgment of God. During his eleven-year reign he does what is evil in the sight of the LORD. In this he follows his fathers, with whom Manasseh and Amon will be meant.

We see how Judah comes more and more into the power of other peoples, to eventually end up in the power of Babylon.

2 Kings 24

Verses 1-7 | Jehoiakim King of Judah (continued)

1 In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant [for] three years; then he turned and rebelled against him. 2 The LORD sent against him bands of Chaldeans, bands of Arameans, bands of Moabites, and bands of Ammonites. So He sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD which He had spoken through His servants the prophets. 3 Surely at the command of the LORD it came upon Judah, to remove [them] from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, 4 and also for the innocent blood which he shed, for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; and the LORD would not forgive. 5 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? 6 So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers, and Jehoiachin his son became king in his place. 7 The king of Egypt did not come out of his land again, for the king of Babylon had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt from the brook of Egypt to the river Euphrates.

“In his days”, which are the days when Jehoiakim is king, Nebuchadnezzar – his name is mentioned here for the first time in Scripture – comes up against Jerusalem for the first time (cf. Dan 1:1). On that occasion Daniel, together with other princes, is brought to Babylon. It is then the year 606 BC. A year later an important battle takes place, at Carchemish, where Nebuchadnezzar takes the world domination of Egypt (verse 7; Jer 46:2). From then on, Nebuchadnezzar is the golden head (Dan 2:37-38), the first world empire after Judah is not any longer the people of God.

When Jehoiakim has submitted to Nebuchadnezzar for three years, he “rebels” against him. Perhaps we should consider the possibility that he has taken sides with Pharaoh. As a result, Nebuchadnezzar is taking measures to subjugate the rebellious Jehoiakim.

Remarkable is that the coming of the bands is not attributed to Nebuchadnezzar, but to the LORD. The LORD acts and does so in faithfulness to His Word. He had foretold this by the service of His servants, the prophets,

and so it happens (verse 2). The coming up of the bands against Judah don't even happen in the first place because of the rebellion of Jehoiakim, but "because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done" (verse 3).

A sin of Manasseh that is particularly important in this judgment is that he has shed "innocent blood", yes, that he has "filled Jerusalem with innocent blood" (verse 4). The LORD takes all this so seriously, that He "would not forgive".

We certainly have to do with a forgiving God. However, that does not mean that God's patience is infinite. When the judgment comes, the moment has come when He will no longer forgive. This is never due to God, but to man's impenitence.

We live in a time comparable to that of these last kings. Judgment comes on Christianity. The fact that God has chosen a remnant for Himself, even now, does not change this judgment. For the mass of Christianity there is no forgiveness anymore.

This brings the historian to the end of his description of the life of Jehoiakim. He only mentions his death (verse 6). Nothing is said of a burial. He doesn't get one either. What he gets is a donkey burial: he is thrown away as unsuitable and despicable (Jer 22:18-19).

The communication of verse 7 follows directly on from the communication of Jehoiakim's death. In this verse the writer explains that Jehoiakim did not receive help from the king of Egypt in his revolt against Babylon (verse 1).

Verses 8-12 | Jehoiachin King of Judah

8 Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem; and his mother's name [was] Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. 9 He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done. 10 At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon went up to Jerusalem, and the city came under siege. 11 And Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came to the city, while his servants were besieging it. 12 Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he

and his mother and his servants and his captains and his officials. So the king of Babylon took him captive in the eighth year of his reign.

After the death of Jehoiakim his son Jehoiachin becomes king. This boy is only eighteen years old. The duration of his reign is three months. Also his short reign is long enough to give him the standard feature that “he did evil in the sight of the LORD”. To indicate the evil he has done, it is said that he did “according to all that his father had done”.

“At that time”, that is, in the three months that he reigned, the servants of Nebuchadnezzar go up to Jerusalem and besiege the city. While his servants are besieging, Nebuchadnezzar himself also comes up to Jerusalem. When he is there, Jehoiachin voluntarily surrenders, “, he and his mother and his servants and his captains and his officials”. That in itself is a sensible act. At the same time it shows that there is no trust in God in him. If he had bowed before God with confession of his sins, he would have been able to resist the king of Babylon in faith, just as Hezekiah has done at the time with the threat of the king of Assyria (2Kgs 19:15-19,35-36).

The surrender takes place in “the eighth year of his reign”, i.e. the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. This is the first dating with a reference to the reign of a foreign ruler.

Verses 13-16 | All Jerusalem Led Away Into Exile

13 He carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD, 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 the temple of the LORD, just as the LORD had said. 14 Then he led away into exile all Jerusalem and all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land. 15 So he led Jehoiachin away into exile to Babylon; also the king's mother and the king's wives and his officials and the leading men of the land, he led away into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. 16 All the men of valor, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths, one thousand, all strong and fit for war, and these the king of Babylon brought into exile to Babylon.

After the surrender of Jehoiachin Nebuchadnezzar “carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's

house". He takes everything with him to Babylon. The treasures of the LORD's house are later abused by Belsazar (Dan 5:1-4). Again later Cyrus the Persian ensures that they are brought back to Jerusalem (Ezra 5:14).

After the valuable materials, also the people with influential functions are deported from Jerusalem to Babylon. These people could organize an uprising and thus endanger the authority of Nebuchadnezzar. In this captivity also the prophet Ezekiel (Est 1:1-2) and Mordecai (Est 2:5-6) are deported. The only ones who do not have to go are the poorest people of the land. From them there is no danger of an organized uprising.

He also deports Jehoiachin Babylon, along with his mother, his wives, his officials and the leading men of the land. The militant men and people who can make weapons (cf. 1Sam 13:19) are also deported by Nebuchadnezzar. In this way, Nebuchadnezzar prevents any form of resistance.

If the devil succeeds in somehow capturing us by a certain sin, he has nothing left to fear from us and nothing remains of our testimony for the Lord. The same applies to the church. If we engage in strange teachings, such as legalism (see the letter to the Galatians) and philosophy (see the letter to the Colossians), we will also be captured by them and cannot testify of the Savior. The church also loses its witnessing character, both to God and to the world, when the flesh can assert itself in it without being condemned. We see this in the first letter to the Corinthians.

Verses 17-20 | Zedekiah King of Judah

17 Then the king of Babylon made his uncle Mattaniah king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah. 18 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. 19 He did evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. 20 For through the anger of the LORD [this] came about in Jerusalem and Judah until He cast them out from His presence. And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar makes Mattaniah, a son of Josiah, king instead of Jehoiachin, who he deported to Babylon. He gives Mattaniah an other name and calls him Zedekiah. Zedekiah means 'my righteousness is Yahweh'. He acted in complete conflict with that name in his actions, for he brought the

iniquity of Jerusalem to a climax. As for the righteousness of Yahweh, we see that He acts with Zedekiah in accordance with that name. The judgment on Israel because of Zedekiah is an expression of the LORD's righteousness.

Although he could have been warned by what happened to his three predecessors, he has continued to do what is evil in the sight of the LORD, following Jehoiakim. Zedekiah is a weakling. He listens to what seems reasonable to him (cf. Jer 38:4-6). He does not listen to the warnings of the LORD by his prophets. There is no faith in him.

In his stupidity he rebels against the king of Babylon and breaks the oath he sworn. Therefore he will perish (Eze 17:15). He resorted to Egypt to cast off the yoke of Babylon. As if then he would not become a servant of Egypt. He does not know history, he is blind to it. So stupid is man without God.

2 Kings 25

Verses 1-7 | Flee and Capture of Zedekiah

1 Now in the ninth year of his reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, camped against it and built a siege wall all around it. 2 So the city was under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. 3 On the ninth day of the [fourth] month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land. 4 Then the city was broken into, and all the men of war [fled] by night by way of the gate between the two walls beside the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were all around the city. And they went by way of the Arabah. 5 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho and all his army was scattered from him. 6 Then they captured the king and brought him to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and he passed sentence on him. 7 They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, then put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him with bronze fetters and brought him to Babylon.

The history described in these verses is also found in Jeremiah 39 and Ezekiel 24. Here the final judgement begins. Now it is over for Judah and there can be no more grace.

As a result of the uprising of Zedekiah, Nebuchadnezzar comes to Jerusalem for the third time. The city is besieged and a siege wall is built all around it. This happens with the city that was first surrounded by the favor of the LORD. The city, however, has driven out the LORD by its iniquity, and now experiences its consequences. The city is no longer surrounded by the favor of God, but by enemies.

Nebuchadnezzar takes the time for the conquest. For two years he besieges the city. His aim is to starve the city. Lack of food will cause many to starve to death and have made the remaining living so weak that the city can be taken without any resistance.

The famine drives the militant men to a deed of despair. Instead of surrendering, as Jeremiah has strongly urged (Jer 38:17), an attempt is made to

escape. The moment the city is broken into by the enemy and the enemy is in the city, they make the attempt. When it is night, they leave the city through the gate. Zedekiah also participates in the flee attempt. It is all foretold by God (Eze 12:12-15). It does not get out of His hand. It goes as He has said.

Zedekiah manages to get away far. He is already far away, in the plains of Jericho. Just a moment and he can cross the Jordan. Then he is overtaken. It is also nonsensical to think that you can flee from the discipline of God. There is no defense whatsoever when he is arrested. Nothing is left of his army. It is completely scattered. Every soldier thinks only of himself. There is no one who wants to defend him any more.

When he is seized, he is brought to the king of Babylon, who is then in Riblah, the place where Jehoahaz was imprisoned (2Kgs 23:31-33). Here stands a little king of a small city, king of the throne of David, before the mighty Nebuchadnezzar, whom God has said to be the golden head (Dan 2:37-38). God is on the side of Nebuchadnezzar because of the unfaithfulness of His people. Nebuchadnezzar is His rod of discipline for His people. Although it says here “he passed sentence on him”, it is actually Nebuchadnezzar who does so (Jer 52:9).

This sentence is executed in verse 7. It is a dramatic and horrific sentence. This verse speaks twice about Zedekiah’s eyes. First his sons are slaughtered before his eyes. The word “slaughtered” shows that they were killed in a horrible way. He sees how it happens. With this picture before his eyes his eyes are blinded. This picture has remained with him for the rest of his life. What happens to him is worse than death. It is an incessant torment of the mind.

Verses 8-21 | Judah Led Away Into Exile

8 Now on the seventh day of the fifth month, which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. 9 He burned the house of the LORD, the king’s house, and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every great house he burned with fire. 10 So all the army of the Chaldeans who [were with] the captain of the guard broke down the walls around Jerusalem. 11 Then the

rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon and the rest of the people, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away into exile. 12 But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen. 13 Now the bronze pillars which were in the house of the LORD, and the stands and the bronze sea which were in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces and carried the bronze to Babylon. 14 They took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the spoons, and all the bronze vessels which were used in [temple] service. 15 The captain of the guard also took away the firepans and the basins, what was fine gold and what was fine silver. 16 The two pillars, the one sea, and the stands which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD—the bronze of all these vessels was beyond weight. 17 The height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits, and a bronze capital was on it; the height of the capital was three cubits, with a network and pomegranates on the capital all around, all of bronze. And the second pillar was like these with network. 18 Then the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest and Zephaniah the second priest, with the three officers of the temple. 19 From the city he took one official who was overseer of the men of war, and five of the king's advisers who were found in the city; and the scribe of 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. 20 Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. 21 Then the king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was led away into exile from its land.

These verses report on the downfall of the realm of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by order of Nebuchadnezzar. This work begins “the fifth month, which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon” (verse 8), which in our era is August 15, 586 BC. “Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, the servant of the king of Babylon, a servant of the king of Babylon” begins burned with fire all the houses in Jerusalem. He sets them on fire in order of importance.

The first house he burns is “the house of the LORD” (verse 9). The house has been empty for five years. Maybe there are still some materials, but the glory of the LORD has left. That glory is gone to this day. Christianity also has buildings that are impressive to the eye but empty inside. They are empty shells. The house of the LORD has become useless, and is given

away to the nations. The king's house and the other houses have lost their meaning and are being destroyed. Where there are no more houses and people, a wall is no longer necessary. The wall is also demolished (verse 10).

Then it is the turn of the rest and homeless population of the city. Together with the deserters and a remnant of the crowd living outside Jerusalem, they are led by Nebuzaradan to Babylon (verse 11). Nebuzaradan does not take all people with him. He leaves a few to take care of the land and not to let it fade (verse 12).

In verses 13-17, a detailed description is given of everything Nebuchadnezzar takes with him. It shows us once again how beautiful everything has been and how good it could have been if the people had not only a beautiful temple, but also a heart to serve the LORD. If that heart is not there, everything loses its value to God. He is not bound to His people. If it does not meet His purpose, He sets it aside. This is also the general judgment on Christianity.

What happens to all these temple objects is an extremely sad contrast to the destination given to them by Solomon and as he placed them with great care in the house of the LORD at the time. In verse 15, reference is still made to that time in connection with "the two pillars, the one sea, and the stands". The Babylonians have no respect for this. They demolish these parts. What is of value to them, they take with them.

The people was not worrying about the meaning of the pillars and the sea. The pillars symbolically represent the power of God, the basis on which the temple can only be maintained. The sea points to the cleansing of the priest to be fit to enter God's temple. However, if the people deny God's power and the necessary cleansing, the symbols lose their meaning and God let these things taken away by the nations.

Today we see the same thing in Christianity. The meaning of baptism and the Lord's Supper lose their real meaning when they are separated from God's meaning and given their own interpretation. If we do not experience them prayerfully and spiritually, the flesh will feed on them. In this way God let take away these things by the nations and withdraws Himself

from them and from those who give them their own interpretation. It may all look beautiful, but He is not present there.

The verses 18-21 give an account of the putting to death of leading persons from Jerusalem. In the city the people who are connected to the temple are first captured. They must have been the most fierce opponents of surrendering to the king of Babylon. They were also those who preceded the people in idolatry. Their imprisonment and death are an exercise of God's righteousness. With the prisoners the commander takes some other prominent people from the city to the king of Babylon to be killed together with the temple officials.

This liquidation as an expression of God's righteousness is the beginning of the Babylonian exile (verse 21b).

Verses 22-26 | Appointment and Death of Gedaliah

22 Now [as for] the people who were left in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, he appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan over them. 23 When all the captains of the forces, they and [their] men, heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah [governor], they came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, namely, 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. 24 Gedaliah swore to them and their men and said to them, "Do not be afraid of the servants of the Chaldeans; live in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will be well with you." 25 But it came about in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal family, came with ten men and struck Gedaliah down so that he died along with the Jews and the Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah. 26 Then all the people, both small and great, and the captains of the forces arose and went to Egypt; for they were afraid of the Chaldeans.

In this section we have a brief announcement about what happens to the people who were left in the land of Judah. These people will largely end up in Egypt. A detailed description of this can be found in Jeremiah 40:1-43:7. The announcement here completes the picture of the end of Judah's realm. It ends with the deportation to Babylon and the flee to Egypt.

After Nebuchadnezzar had finished all his actions in and with Judah and Jerusalem, he appointed Gedaliah, “the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan” over the people he let live in “the land of Judah”. Gedaliah is one of the descendants of the God-fearing Shaphan we met during the reign and reformation of Josiah (2Kgs 22:3,8-14).

When four of the named captain hear of Gedaliah’s appointment, they and their men come to him in Mizpah. These four probably fled with Zedekiah (verse 4) and escaped the pursuit by the Babylonians. They do not seem to accept the situation that has arisen. Gedaliah advises them urgently, he “swore to them”, to just stay in the land. He wants to convince them that they have nothing to fear from the Chaldeans if they stay and serve the king of Babylon. They can be sure that things will go well with them. Gedaliah speaks what God has said through Jeremiah. Jeremiah has always summoned to bow for king Nebuchadnezzar. If we bow under the discipline of God, it will bring blessing to us.

Despite Gedaliah’s penetrating words, the few remaining in the land revolt against Gedaliah. They pertinently refuse to function as servants of the Babylonians. They have their own views on the matter and their own plans to deal with it and see in him a danger to their plans. That is why Gedaliah is being murdered. A detailed account of the murder of Gedaliah (verse 25) can be found in Jeremiah 40:13-41:15. The perpetrators and all the people flee to Egypt.

However, the Holy Spirit does not close the book with this. He finishes with a ray of hope about which we read in the following and also the last verses of this book.

Verses 27-30 | Grace for Jehoiachin

27 Now it came about in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh [day] of the month, that Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he became king, released Jehoiachin king of Judah from prison; 28 and he spoke kindly to him and set his throne above the throne of the kings who [were] with him in Babylon. 29 Jehoiachin changed his prison clothes and had his meals in the king’s presence regularly all the days of his life; 30 and for his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, a portion for each day, all the days of his life.

In these verses a ray of hope lights up. For this, the Holy Spirit advances to “the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin”, which is 560 BC. Nebuchadnezzar is no longer king. Jehoiachin, who has been in Babylon since he was eighteen, is now fifty-five. It is his deserved judgment, for he has done what is evil in the sight of the LORD.

But then suddenly we read in these verses about grace. Jehoiachin is taken out of captivity, is spoken kindly to and gets a position of prestige above the other kings who are subject to the king of Babylon. He may eat at the table of the king of Babylon, as long as he lives. His entire allowance is also guaranteed for all the days of his life.

In what happens to Jehoiachin we see a picture of what will happen to all the people of God in the future. God will accept His people again in grace and take care of them as long as they are His people on earth, that is, during the entire period of the millennial kingdom of peace.

In what happens to Jehoiachin, we still see another picture. Here we see the change in someone who repents. It is the display of undeserved and unexpected grace. It also shows that in an evil time, when the judgment on the mass comes, God has grace for the individual. Those who take part in it are given different clothing, which speaks of different behavior, and are assured of an allowance for their spiritual life.

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