

Day 161

Elisha, Naaman and the Siege of Samaria

2 Chron.21.18; 2 Kings 6.8 – 23; 8.3 -6; 5.1- 27; 6.24 – 7.20

2 Chr.21.18 Elijah's prophecy is fulfilled and King Jehoram is ill with incurable bowel disease.

2 Kgs.6. 8-12 Through Elisha, God continues to speak to Israel, in spite of their sin, and warns them of Syrian attacks and ambushes. This angers the Syrian King, who wants to know which of his people is a spy. But they explain that it is the gift of knowledge given to Elisha which is causing this insight, so that he knows even what the king is saying in his bedroom!

13to18 The Syrians seek to capture this secret weapon of Israel, and besiege Dothan where Elisha is based. Elisha's servant is horrified when he sees the troops around the city in the morning, but Elisha first lets him see the hosts of heaven which are greater than the Syrian army, and the, stops the Syrians seeing by calling down blindness upon them.

19 – 23 Elisha now leads the Syrian a merry dance, right into the citafel of Samaria and into the arms of Jehoram. He asks the Lord to open their eyes, and they find they are in the capital city fortress of Israel! The King now enquires of Elisha what to do, should he finish off these blinded enemies? But Elisha counsels against this, since God has intervened, this is not man's work, and thus Jehoram feasts his enemies and sends them back, ending the incursions of the Syrians for the time being.

This is a wonderful example of Jesus' lating teaching of loving our enemies. Jehoram 'pours burning coals' on the Syrians heads by serving them in this way, then letting them go.

8.3-6 Taking up the story of the Shunammite woman whose son had been raised to life by Elisha, and who, by his insight, has avoided famine in Israel by living in Philistia seven years, the woman now returns to Israel. She just happens to arrive at the king's palace when Gehazi, Elisha's servant is recounting the great deeds of God through the the prophet; here, she is living witness to the resurrection of her son, and he is so impressed, the king restores all her lands to her which she abandoned seven years before.

5.1- 27 The Syrian general Naaman is a leper, but is directed by his wife's Israelite slave girl to seek out the help of God through his prophet Elisha. Naaman first addresses himself to Jehoram, King of Israel, who is angered by this approach for spiritual and physical intervention, accompanied by a large monetary gift. However, Elisha gets Naaman to come to him, and sends a messenger to him to tell him to dip his diseased flesh seven times in the Jordan.

At first, Naaman is insensed – Syria has better rivers than this piddling stream – but Elisha's servants urge him to obey, saying that if Elisha had ordered a great thing, he would have done it.

Naaman therefore goes, and is miraculously cured, and owns the Lord as the one tue God. An interesting facet of this story is the healing by God of a non-Jew, and even of an

enemy of Israel. Naaman offers a reward to Elisha, but he will not hear of it. He instructs Naaman to ‘go in peace’ (Heb לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם לְךָ *lekh le-shalom*, literally, go to peace, remembering that peace is not only absence of strife, but in Hebrew, *wholeness, health, prosperity and fulness of life.*)

19-27 In an act of greed, Gehazi pursues Naaman and lies about being sent by Elisha to meet a pressing need. Naaman is more than willing to gift him a large amount of silver – about 34kg – and two suits. But as soon as Gehazi returns, his lie is known by Elisha, who saw him in spirit, and Gehazi is blighted with Naaman’s leprosy as punishment.

6.24 – 7.20 The Syrians, having forgotten or ignored their previous drubbing at Samaria, now besiege the city again. The siege is prolonged, and things get so bad that people are in danger of resorting to cannibalising their own children. The king, angered by this terrible privation, blames Elisha, threatening to have him beheaded.

Elisha manages to stave off the King’s murderous messenger, but speaks to the king directly when he arrives, telling him that by God’s miraculous intervention, the siege will be ended, and the markets will be open selling food as cheaply as before the siege. The king’s attendant, on whom in his disabled state he is supported, doubts Elisha’s word, and as a result, is told that although he will see the miracle, he will not eat any of the food.

Four lepers decide it would be better to go and give themselves up to the Syrians. But when they arrive at the camp at evening, it is deserted, because the Lord has scared them off in a second bloodless defeat by the sound of horses and chariots. The lepers can’t believe their good fortune, and start plundering the camp, but realise that this victory needs to be announced. They take the news to Samaria, waking the king in the night to tell him what has happened.

Riders are sent to the Syrian camp, who report back the truth of what the lepers said; at this, the people stampede, crushing through the gate and killing the king’s doubting official in the process, as they go to help themselves to the food and supplies in the deserted tents.

Day 162

Jehu, Avenging Angel c841BC

2 Kings 8.23 – 26; 9.29; 2 Chr.22.1 – 4; 2 Kings 8.7- 15 (mirrored in 2 Chr.22.5) ; 2 Kings 9.14b, 15a (mirrored in 2 Kgs 8.29a & 2 Chr.22.6a) ; 2 Kings 8.29b (mirrored in 2 Chr. 22.6b); 2 Kings 9.1 -14a, 15b – 27; 2 Chron.22.7; 2 Kings 9.30- 10.14;2 Chron.22.8; 2 Kings 9.28; 2 Chr. 22.9; 2 Kings 10.15-17

In Judah

A sad codicil to Jehoram’s career; he dies in pain with a chronic bowel condition, and no one particularly mourns his passing.

His son Ahaziah takes his place as king of Judah. His brothers have all been killed by raiders, and so even though he is the youngest, he gains the crown. However, his reign will not be long, only a year. He is the son of Athaliah, a granddaughter of Omri of Israel, who established Samaria. Under the tutelage of his mother, he leads the country astray, listening to Israelite counsel.

2 Kgs 8.7-15 Ben-Hadad of Syria (Aram) falls ill, and wants to know the prognosis for his recovery. He sends a messenger to Elisha, who is in Damascus, his capital, the messenger's name being Hazael. The messenger asks if Ben-Hadad will recover, but in looking at him, Elisha sees the heart of Hazael, and sends back the message that although the King will recover from the illness, he is going to die. He then starts staring straight at Hazael, until the messenger is uncomfortable with embarrassment. Elisha then starts weeping.

When Hazael asks him what the trouble is, Elisha explains that he is seeing in his spirit the damage which Hazael the Syrian will wreak on the land of Israel, since Elisha perceives that Hazael will be king.

Hazael goes back to Ben-Hadad and passes on only the part of the message, that the king will recover. Next day, in cold blood, the servant smothers his master, kills him and is made king in his place!

Battle with Syria

Ahaziah of Judah allies with Joram of Israel and goes into battle against the regicide Hazael of Syria. The Israeli king is wounded, and retreats to Jezreel to be nursed. There he is visited by his new ally, Ahaziah of Judah.

Jehu Anointed King

While the two kings are on retreat, Elisha commissions a young man, one of his prophet disciples to go and find Jehu son of Jehoshaphat (presumably not the late king, as all his sons were killed.) who is at Ramoth Gilead, where the battle has been taking place, and anoint him King in Joram of Israel's place.

Jehu's commission from the man of God is to completely liquidate the descendants of Ahab. Having anointed him in the privacy of an indoor room, the man then runs away, leaving Jehu to make excuses for the strange conduct of the prophet, whom they call a madman (2 Kings 9.11 - Heb. מְשֻׁגָּע *meshuggah*, a word which has passed into modern American Jewish-English usage, here found in Scriptures.) They press him to say what their conversation was about, and Jehu eventually confesses he has been anointed king. His colleagues fete him, and announce that Jehu is the new King of Israel.

Jehu now leaves them with a band of soldiers in tow, and before news can get to Jezreel, Jehu is seen arriving at the place where Joram is recuperating. When the troops are spotted, a messenger is sent to ask if Jehu has peaceful intentions, but the messenger is immediately co-opted into Jehu's ranks, and doesn't return. This happens twice with another horsemen who doesn't return from his errand. At this point, Jehu is recognised by his reckless driving of the chariot, - 'he drives crazily' (Heb. כִּי בְשֻׁגָּעוֹן יְנַהֵג *ki ve-shigga'on yinhag* – the word *shigga'on*, madness, is from the same word as *meshuggah* above. – 2 Kings 9.20)

The two kings now ride out to meet Jehu, and ask his intentions. Jehu declares he has come to avenge the sorcery and idolatry of Joram's mother, Jezebel. Joram turns to flee in fear of Jehu, but Jehu fires an arrow and kills him, commanding his body be thrown

into the field of Naboth, whom Jezebel so cruelly executed to get his vineyard, to fulfil Elijah's prophetic word that this is where Ahab's descendants would end up.

Jehu also pursues Ahaziah of Judah, but he manages to escape across the wide valley to take refuge in Megiddo.

Jehu now goes into Jezreel, where the queen mother Jezebel taunts him as he arrives, calling him a 'Zimri', recalling the murder of King Elah of Israel by a servant of that name in 1 Kings 16.10. But Jehu calls on her servants to throw her down, and two or three eunuchs oblige, splattering her blood on the walls as she smashes down. She is then trampled by the horses, with nothing left to bury after the dogs have been at her remains, but her head, hands and feet, a ghastly end for any human being.

Jehu's attention now turns to Samaria, where Ahab's seventy sons are living. He sends a letter to the elders of Samaria, telling them to install a new king whom he will fight, and bring down. The elders are afraid of Jehu's power, and respond with a surrender to his wishes. Jehu then demands the heads of the sons of Ahab, which are delivered in baskets and piled up at the gates of Jezreel. Jehu admits his part in this, but makes it clear that the elders of Samaria have turned on Ahab's house. Jehu now finishes the job by wiping out all of Ahab's family and hangers-on in Jezreel.

In the process of liquidating Ahab's house, Jehu comes across Ahaziah of Judah's relatives, and puts them down as well. Then, on his way to Samaria, Jehu encounters more of Ahaziah's relatives, coming to greet Joram. They are also dispatched without mercy.

Eventually, Jehu comes to Samaria and finds Ahaziah hiding there, and he kills him, having his body returned to Jerusalem to be buried in the tombs of the Kings with David, out of respect for Jehoshaphat his father's memory.

Joining with his friend, Jehonadab whom he has met on the way to Samaria, and who expresses his willingness to join in the fray, Jehu goes to Samaria to finish the job of wiping the memory of Ahab and his descendants from the land. A terrible act of prophetic fulfilment of Elijah's words.

Day 163

The Era of Joash in Judah

2 Chron.22.10 – 12 (mirrored in 2 Kings 11.1) ; 2 Kings 10.18-28, 30, 29 & 31; 2 Chron. 23.1-15 (mirrored in 2 Kings 11.4-16); 2 Kings 11.21;12.1 (mirrored in 2 Chron. 24.1); 2 Chron. 23.16-21 (mirrored in 2 Kings 11.17-20) 2 Kings 12.2-3 (mirrored in 2 Chron.24.2)

Athaliah's Coup in Judah With her son Ahaziah of Judah killed by Jehu, Athaliah now moved decisively to grab power in his stead. In the way of so many kings ascending the throne, she eliminates any rivals, killing other possible claimants to the throne. However, a quick-thinking Jehosheba, daughter of former King Jehoram of Judah, sister to dead Ahaziah and wife of Jehoiada the priest, grabs the baby prince, Joash and hides him with his nanny. They stay underground for the next six years while Athaliah rules.

In Israel

Meanwhile, the vengeance of Jehu on Israel continues. He feigns honour of Ba'al, and calls together a great assembly to worship him. When they all assemble, with the priests in their finery, having checked there are no Yahwist ministers there, and having placed guards around the temple commanded on pain of death to let no one escape, after sacrifices begin, Jehu's men attack and massacre everyone in the place, finally taking the stone of Ba'al out of the inner temple and burning it, leaving it to be used as a public toilet forever after.

This is the end of Ba'al worship in Israel, and pleases the Lord; He promises Jehu and his descendants the Israelite throne to the fourth generation. But Jehu does not stop the calf-worship at Bethel and Dan, so the nation is still badly compromised before the Lord.

In Judah

Jehoiada, after six years of Athaliah's misrule, plans and executes a coup to restore Joash to the throne, with a covenant to see the rightful king restored. With the Levites and heads of the towns, Jehoiada comes to Jerusalem, stationing his troops secretly at strategic places on the Sabbath. They then crown seven-year old Joash as King.

Athaliah hears this, and screams treason on the assembly crowning Joash and rejoicing in his survival and protection from the malevolent queen. However, she is arrested, taken out of the sanctum of the Temple, and put to death at the Horse Gate of the city.

Joash goes on to reign for forty years in Judah. Under Jehoiada's regency, they covenant with the Lord as a people, and Ba'alism is destroyed in Judah as it has been in Israel by Jehu, with the priest Mattan being slain. Jehoiada also restores the Temple order of King David, and placed Joash on the throne to popular acclaim.

Thus, as long as he was under Jehoiada's tutelage, Joash followed the Lord (YHWH) although worship still happened on the 'high places', an unauthorized practice.

Day 164

The Prophecy of Joel Joel 1.1 – 3.21

It may well be during the early years of King Joash that the prophet Joel, about whom we know only his father's name, Pethuel, prophesies, following a terrible plague of locusts. The prophet takes this opportunity to teach the people of Judah about the need for faithfulness to the Lord, and warns them of coming judgement, both in their era and in the day of the Lord which will ensue. But there is also a promise of great restoration of relationship with mankind, as God will pour out His Spirit on everyone, this prophecy being quoted on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

1.1 Joel is introduced as the son of Pethuel. Joel's name (Heb יוֹאֵל *Yo'el*) means 'Yah is God' and his father's name Pethuel (Heb פֶּתוּאֵל *Petu'el*) means 'enlarged by God.'

1.2 – 12 Joel is bringing his word in the context of a recent plague of locusts. These flying insects devour everything in their path, and this one has been particularly unprecedented. Joel uses terms in Hebrew in 1.4 which describe the various stages of the locust's life-cycle, increasing in its power as it goes.

This has led to devastation, a shock to those who have been resting and carousing, but there is also a suggestion that the worship of the Lord has been neglected which has means the people have been off-guard. (1.9) This has led to a wide sense of despair among the people. (1.12)

1.13- 20 Joel now calls for mourning before the Lord because of the slack spiritual state of Judah. Certainly, in the times of Ahaziah and Athaliah which preceded Joash's reign, the worship of Judah was full of idolatry and fertility cults. A fast is called for, and a seeking of the Lord (YHWH) to restore their spiritual life as a nation.

In 1.15, Joel repeats a term which we have encountered in Obadiah already – the 'day of the Lord' (Heb יוֹם יְהוָה *yom Adonai (YHWH)*) which is here linked to devastation and destruction (Heb שׁוֹד *shod*) from the Most High (Heb שְׁדַי *Shaddai*), quite a poetic construction for the consequences of going astray.

Joel cries out to the Lord for relief, because, like fire in the fields, the locusts have consumed everything.

2. 1- 11 Joel continues in his apocalyptic (uncovering, lid-lifting) style, likening the experience of the cloud of locusts invading to the coming judgement of God. He is very evocative in his description of how the insects advance, like an inferno, blackening the sky.

2.12-17 Joel calls for repentance from the people, for them to return (Heb שׁוּב *shuv*) to the Lord. He reminds them of the Lord's self-declared character, with the words to Moses from Ex.34.6 of his compassion and favour, and his *chesed* obligation to them. The Lord is waiting to rescue them!

Because of this, an emergency is declared, this is urgent enough to leave your wedding night for, to even bring the babies with you. There is to be a crying out to God, a turning to him. This would historically be initiated with the reforms of Jehoiada's regency on behalf of King Joash.

2.18-27 The good news is, in response to this seeking His face, that the Lord will bring again prosperity in His land, and restore what the locusts have eaten as well as much needed rain, so that Judah will know that God is faithful to His covenant and that they will not be ashamed.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, Joel chapter 2 ends at v.27, with verse 28 – 32 forming a separate, short chapter 3.

2.28 – 32 When this restoration occurs, God is looking for the opportunity to re-establish close relationship with His people, something He is constantly looking to achieve throughout the story of this adventure. Joel gives a powerful prediction of an experience of God's Spirit which will transcend gender, class and age, where not just powerful Kings and *Right-wiser* Judges, but all humankind will know the Lord. There also seems to be a quite universal vision here, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Heb. יִמָּלֵט *yimmalet* from root *malat* meaning to rescue or to cause to escape.) It is this vision which Peter recalls on the day of Pentecost, and proclaims as fulfilled in the wake of Jesus' death and resurrection.

3.1- 17 (Hebrew Bible 4.1-17) The international aspect of Joel's word becomes clearer here. In this final analysis of the day of the Lord, the nations who have oppressed Israel

will be repaid for their mistreatment of God's people. There is a play on words in the name Jehoshaphat here, for not only is Jehoshaphat the name of the valley and the name of the Godly King of Judah, but it means 'the Lord has judged'.

This judgement implicates Tyre and Sidon and the Greeks, who will be brought to justice for their oppression. There is in this a definite future aspect to come.

In that day of the Lord, nations will be presented with a decisive vision of the Lord's power and His protective hand on Israel. There will be portents in the skies, and a stop to invasion of the land by foreigners.

3.18-21 (Hebrew Bible 4.18-21) In that day, there will be prosperity for Israel, and a stream flowing out of the house of the Lord, a theme later echoed in Ezekiel 47 and in the Revelation of John, but for those who oppress Judah, only terror and destruction.

Joel closes with a statement , **וַיֵּהָרֶה שְׂכֵן בְּצִיּוֹן** *V'Adonai shokhen be'Tsiyon* – and the Lord is dwelling in Zion, - among his people.

Day 165

The Reigns and Demise of Jehu of Israel (814BC), Jehoahaz of Israel (798BC) and Joash of Judah(796BC)

2 Chron.24.3 – 5; 2 Kings 12.4 – 5; 2 Kings 10.32-35; 2 Kings 13.1-2; 2 Kings 12.6-16; 2 Chron.24.6- 22; 2 Kins 13.3 – 4, 7; 2 Chron.24.23-24; 1 Kings 12.17,18; 2 Kings 13.8-20a; 2 Kings 12.20, 21a, 19; 2 Chron.24.25-27a

Joash in Judah

Jehoiada the priest at this point is still involved in Joash's life, and arranges marriages for him with two wives. Joash also gives instruction for the temple to be restored to its original glory, with taxes due from the people, but the Levites do not act quickly to take them in.

Jehu in Israel

Because of their continuing idolatry, the Lord reduces the territory of northern Israel. Hazael, the Syrian king encountered earlier by Elisha, causing him to weep at the damage he would inflict on the Lord's people, now takes all the land east of Jordan from the Israelites, a terrible loss for Israel.

After twenty eight years of his reign, Jehu dies and is buried in Samaria. He is succeeded by his son Jehoahaz, who carries on the worship of the idol calves of Jereboam.

The Repair of the Jerusalem Temple

In the year of Jehu's death, Joash of Judah takes personal control of the temple repairs which the Levites have failed to organize. The Temple had been desecrated by Athaliah and the Ba'alists, and needed to be restored.

Joash now orders the monies being paid to the Levites to be diverted to the Temple – it seems that the priests were worried about their income! But they agree to this, and Jehoiada sets up a great collection chest at the entry of the Temple, which the people

gladly contribute to. With this money, the priority is to pay stonemasons and carpenters, rather than to replace furnishings of the building.

One interesting fact is to be noted in 2 Kings.12.15; the workmen entrusted with this work were so honest, that they were not asked to give accounts for the money they used!

The money left over was then used to replace the Temple furnishings. While Jehoiada is alive, the Temple is then restored to its original worship rhythm.

Joash of Judah Strays after Jehoiada's Death

2 Chr.24.17 – 22 Jehoiada appears to have lived way beyond the usual age, and dies at one hundred and thirty, and because of his regency to Joash, is buried in the tombs of the Kings. However, the tragedy is that as soon as the Godly man is off the stage, other advisors mislead Joash into idolatry, and the Temple is once again left to rack and ruin, and Joash refuses to listen to the prophets of the Lord. Ba'al and Asherah are back again, too.

The culmination of this rebellion is seen in the ordering by Joash of the execution of Zechariah, Jehoiada's son, because of his bold prophecy against Judah, warning of the Lord's displeasure with them. With his dying words, Zechariah call on the Lord for vindication against Joash.

Jehoahaz of Israel seeks the Lord

In an opposite turn of circumstances, because of the oppression of the Kings of Syria, Hazael and his son Ben-Hadad, Jehoahaz calls on the Lord (YHWH) who has compassion on Israel. The Israelite army has been almost wiped out by the Syrians, reduced to a few thousand soldiers and a tiny number of horse.

Syria attacks Judah

Having reduced Israel to the ground, the Syrians now take on Judah, invading and killing leaders of the nation, even though the Syrians have a smaller army, because the Lord's hand is against the Judeans.

Joash now takes drastic action to stave off total wipeout by Hazael of Syria. He takes all the treasures of the Lord's temple and buys peace with the enemy, who backs off from Jerusalem.

Jehoash of Israel Comes to the Throne

In 798BC, Jehoahaz dies in Samaria, succeeded by his son Jehoash, who continues Jereboam's rebellion against the Lord.

When Elisha the prophet is on his deathbed, Jehoash goes to see him, and mourns over the reduced state of Israel's fighting forces. Elisha gets the King to fire arrows symbolizing victory over the Syrians, which he says will occur at Aphek. Elisha then instructs Jehoash to take these arrows and strike the ground with them, which he does three times. Elisha is disappointed at this, since each time of striking the ground would be a victory for Israel over the Syrians. Now, Israel will only see triumph three times.

Elisha now dies and is buried.

The Assassination of Joash of Judah.

In an ignominious end to his life, Joash, wounded in the battle with the Syrians, is murdered in his bed by his officials, probably supporters of Jehoiada, his regent, in revenge for Joash's execution of the prophet Zechariah, Jehoiada's son. He is refused burial in the tombs of the Kings, which is sad considering his promising beginnings under Jehoiada's guidance.

The rise and fall of Joash of Judah speak of the importance of good moral and spiritual anchors to hold the government of a nation. When there is a lack of Godly foundation, the ship of a nation is blown about on the waves of whim and political intrigue.

Joash's story is also a warning to us of the possibility of starting well, but finishing disastrously. As John says in the Revelation, only to those who endure to the end will see the crown of life.

Day 166

Amaziah of Judah and Jehoash of Israel – a Period of Conflict

2 Kings 12.21b; 14.1,2 (mirrored in 2 Chron.24.27b; 25.1) 2 Kings 14.3-6 (mirrored in 2 Chron.25.2-4); 2 Kings 13.20b – 25; 2 Chron.25.5 – 24 (mirrored in 2 Kings 14.7-14) ; 2 Kings 14. 15 – 16,23-24 (mirrored in 2 Kgs 13,12,13)

Amaziah succeeds to the throne of Judah 796BC

Amaziah succeeds his murdered father, Joash, at the age of twenty-five. He behaves in a relatively Godly manner, but allows the unauthorised worship of the Lord (YHWH) to continue on the high places. (Heb. **בָּמֹת** *ba-mot*)

He also has his father's assassins killed, but does not take revenge on their children, in recognition of the law of Moses not to punish children for father's misdeeds.

Miracle at Elisha's Tomb in Israel

2 Kgs 13.20b- 21 This incident is one of the most surprising of the Scripture, and gives support to a whole raft of teaching on the sanctity of holy bones, so beloved of Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions. The story is of a funeral in progress during the time when Moabite raiders from the south-east attack Israel, so the terrified funeral party unceremoniously throw the corpse into Elisha's tomb. When the body touches the bones of Elisha, the man is resurrected.

This miracle of spontaneous resuscitation is hard to put into a theology of the Old Testament. But it is there, and needs to be taken seriously.

Jehoash of Israel defeats Ben-Hadad of Syria

2 Kgs.13.22-25 In accordance with the deathbed prophecy of Elisha, King Jehoash of Israel defeats Ben-Hadad of Syrian, son of Hazael, defeating him three times, and capturing back Israeli towns.

In Judah

Amaziah plans an attack on the Edomites to the south, and has an army of three hundred thousand, but for back-up he hires a hundred thousand mercenaries from Israel to ensure the Edomites' defeat. However, a man of God warns him not to use these mercenaries, or the Lord will bring them defeat. It has taken Amaziah three and a half tons of silver to pay for the services of these Israelites, but the prophet tells Amaziah God can give him far more without them. Thus they are sent home, which they greatly resent, even though they keep their silver! Amaziah then goes on to defeat Edom, killing twenty thousand of them, half of them by being thrown off a cliff.

However, in the meantime, the disgruntled Israelite mercenaries wreak havoc on Judean towns on their way home, killing three thousand people and looting as they go.

On his return from Edom, Amaziah mistakenly brings back the gods of Seir, and begins to worship them. Through a prophet, the Lord complains that Amaziah has started honouring idols who could not save the Edomites. The prophet however is silenced by the royal officials, but ends his words with a sentence of destruction on Amaziah for his idolatry.

War Between Israel and Judah

Presumably coming out of the incident with the marauding mercenaries, Amaziah of Judah now declares war on Jehoash of Israel, and Jehoash replies with a riddle, basically saying that Amaziah has become over-confident because of his victory over the Edomites. Jehoash tells him to stay at home.

Amaziah however goes ahead, and the outcome is disaster for Judah. At Beth Shemesh, Israel routs Judah's forces, captures Amaziah of Judah and brings him back to Jerusalem to witness them demolish part of the Jerusalem wall and then loot the Temple treasures, before going back to Samaria.

Amaziah's reign therefore continues ignominiously, the Lord having shown that nothing good comes of worshipping idols or pretending anything other than God is truly God.

Death of Jehoash of Israel 782BC

Jehoash dies in 782BC and is buried in Samaria, to be succeeded by his son Jereboam II. As his name suggests, he continues the rebellion of his earlier namesake.

Day 167

The Book of Jonah Jonah 1.1 – 4.11; 2 Kings 13.5-6; 14.25-27

Jonah (Heb. יוֹנָה *Yonah*, meaning a dove or pigeon) is a singular book of Scripture on many levels. Foremost, because it shows God to be not just a God of the Jews, but of all nations.

Jonah is a prophet, son of Amittai, and according to the passing reference to him in 2 Kings 14.25, is from Gath Hopher in Galilee, not far from the south-eastern end of the Sea of Galilee. The Kings reference places him at the time of the reign of Jereboam II, with a ministry between 780 and 775BC.

God's call on Jonah is to go to Nineveh, the ancient capital of the Assyrian Empire. Nineveh is an ancient city, first mentioned in Scripture as founded by Asshur in Genesis 10.11 (Asshur being the ancestor of the Assyrians.) Nineveh stood east of the great River Tigris, in modern Iraq. The prophet's mission thus placed would be in the reign of an unknown king of Assyria, some time between the reigns of Shalmaneser III (860-824BC) and Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727BC).

The book of Jonah also demonstrates the inward-looking, parochial nature of Israel's existence. Called into being as a vehicle of God's touch upon the nations, she is disobedient to God's missional call upon her, and Jonah is a sign of this intransigence towards God's purpose for her. Jonah would rather refuse the Lord's call than see Him pardon a sinful nation, even though Israel herself at this stage is living in sin and rebellion.

Jonah's Call

When God calls Jonah, therefore, telling him to go to Nineveh and declare its sin in public there, Jonah runs in the other direction, taking a ship from the port of Joppa towards Tarshish, possibly in Spain. Probably Jonah's initial emotion is fear, for Assyria is known at this time as one of the cruelest regimes on earth, and prophets have a habit of being killed by those they bring correction to. In that sense, Jonah's action is very human and self-protective.

On the boat, while he is asleep, a violent storm blows up, which causes the seasoned sailors to call out to their gods. Jonah is told to rise and seek rescue for them from his God, but Jonah reveals that he is so out of sorts with His deity, that it is because of Jonah's disobedience to Him that this storm has happened. After trying to avoid sacrificing him to the sea, they throw him overboard.

The Big Fish

The image of Jonah in the whale is one of the most evocative of the Bible. The debate over whether this is fact or myth misses the point of the story. God rescues Jonah, and Jonah cries out to the Lord. Jonah repents, and is delivered, but sent on his original mission again. The vehicle of his rescue could be a whale or a fish, since the writers of the Scriptures would not have had insight into the difference between mammal and non-mammal, thus it is not incorrect to suggest a whale took Jonah.

What is key in this story is the prayer of Jonah. He sees himself as good as dead, and employs themes which have echoes of Psalms. It is a powerful description of the experience of a man who is facing death looking for deliverance from the Lord. In the closing phrases of his prayer for deliverance, (2.8) Jonah appeals to the covenant obligation, the *chesed* of the Lord, of which those who appeal to other gods know nothing. He promises to change his ways and obey the Lord if the Lord will save him.

Jonah is then vomited out onto the beach.

Jonah Recommissioned.

In 3.1, God repeats His call to Jonah, and this time Jonah goes. Amazingly, when the King of Nineveh hears of the impending destruction God is threatening, he calls a fast and repents with his people.

In 3.10, God repents of the evil He had intended against them. This terminology used of God shakes us up on two counts; first, that God could repent, could be sorry for His intentions, and second, that God would intend evil against anyone. However, this has more to do with God not fitting in with our theology than about the integrity of Scripture.

The Lord evidently has the power to alter the course of history if He so desires. He changes His mind, in response to the prayer of the Assyrian people, when they acknowledge Him. Surely this is how God responds to mankind who turn and follow Him?

And on the issue of whether God can do evil, there is no doubt that the alternative outcome for Nineveh would have been catastrophic, and therefore to suggest this would have been a good result would be foolish. Thus, God's purpose can include doing harm as well as rescuing and saving. All has to be seen in the light of God's eternal purpose to restore relationship between Himself and His creation, which will include removing that which is defective and destructive.

In Nineveh's case, however, God is able to turn from harm to bless.

Jonah's Complaint.

Jonah now takes the Lord to task for His compassion on the Ninevites! Knowing the essential compassionate and favouring nature of God's heart, Jonah knew there was a chance of Nineveh being saved. Jonah actually says this is why he headed for Tarshish! It demonstrated how little man really understands of the true purpose of God, which is to restore and rescue, not to destroy.

Jonah is so morose, that he asks to die. But the Lord gives Jonah an object lesson in compassion. Jonah gets very attached to a plant which grows up and gives him shelter from the burning sun, and when it perishes, the Lord shows him how attached he has become to this creature, therefore how much more the Lord would be compassionate towards those who bear, after all, His image.

It is of note that Jesus likens Himself in Luke 11.32 to Jonah, in that as Jonah preached the good news of God's rescue to Nineveh, Jesus is also revealing good news to His own generation, and He is greater than Jonah.

Further, to those Scribes and Pharisees who seek a sign from Jesus in Matt 12.38ff, He gives only the sign of Jonah, whose imprisonment in the fish is a foreshadowing of His own death and resurrection.