

Chapter Thirteen

The conjunctive *v-* as “and” begins this new chapter, doing what it’s designed to do as pointed out so frequently, to make a close connection between events or in this instance, a continuation of the saga of Jeroboam. This time the conjunctive is re-enforced with *hineh* or “behold” which serves to draw then capture the reader’s attention to the abominable practices he initiated to offset worship of the Lord in the Jerusalem temple. Jeroboam is making a twofold play here. First, to unite the people in a form of worship that will reflect their new identity after having broken off from Juda under King Rehoboam’s rule with whips and scorpions as noted in 12.11. Second, he gives into the people’s undying penchant for worship of divinities native to Canaan, an affliction that will continue well into the future. It sounds attractive on paper but a different story when put into practice or better, after it has been implemented for a while.

Vhineh or “and behold” as noted above serves to introduce a “man of God” (*ysh ‘Elohyim*) whose identity is all the more mysterious because he remains anonymous. Actually the bulk of this chapter centers around him and another unnamed prophet who comes on the scene as if in preparation for Elijah. However, as the story unfolds, one turns out to have lied and pays for it with his life.

The same title “man of God” is used for Shemaiah in 12.22. Note that this man comes from Judah, a sign that the two kingdoms aren’t meant to be divided. Also his anonymity might be a way of protecting him from any recrimination from either or both kingdoms. As for this man’s coming from Judah, it’s effected by the *davar* of the Lord. The text reads literally “in (*b-*) the *davar* of the Lord” implying that he never left this *davar* and remains within it. Bethel is his destination, the sacred place where Abram had built an altar noted in the last chapter and where Jeroboam had placed priests “of the high places” [12.32].

When the man of God arrived in Bethel he headed straight for the altar—perhaps on the “fifteenth day in the eighth month which he (Jeroboam) had devised of his own heart” [12.33]—and found the king happily engaged in burning incense. There’s no mention of anyone else present although he may have been accompanied by some of his newly appointed priests (cf. vs. 4). Interestingly this man (a prophet, though he isn’t called such but may be labeled one) doesn’t approach Jeroboam but the altar and cries against it, *qara’* with the preposition *hal-*, literally “upon.” It’s all the more dramatic in that he does so “in (*b-*) the *davar* of the Lord.” As noted in vs. 1, already he is in this *davar* so here he’s simply extending the *davar* out from himself to or upon the altar.

The crying or *qara’* (it also means to call out) is a direct address to the altar to get its attention although it were alive. Obviously the altar doesn’t respond, let alone King

Jeroboam who isn't mentioned until vs. 4. However, he was present as noted in vs. 4. *Hineh* introduces the prophet's words followed immediately by the fact that Josiah will be born to the house of David, he as yet to be identified though of royal stock which implies King Solomon. Once king, Josiah will sacrifice the priests whom Jeroboam installed, again, those "of the high places" [12.32]. Not only that, "men's bones" shall be burned upon the altar, presumably the priests, their associates and even worshipers.

After the man of God cried out to the altar (*qara'* implying a loud voice), vs. 3 has him giving a sign that same day which suggests that he may have given the *mopheth* at time separately from his *qara'*. This noun means a miracle or prodigy usually announced as is the case at hand. "See that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles which I have put in your power" [Ex 4.21]. Note that this *mopheth* is one which the Lord himself has spoken (*davar*), that *davar* again coming from the man of God who is situated in it.

As for the contents of this sign, vs. 4 says that the altar will be torn down or *qarah* (cf. 11.31) after priests and men's bones have been burned upon it as noted in vs. 2. Nothing is said as to when this will happen, the threat intended to put King Jeroboam on notice. Indeed it did, for vs. 5 has him hearing of the prophet's "saying" or *davar*, standing right there at the altar. Perhaps he was still in the act of offering incense, too stunned to grasp what was going on. Then suddenly he stretched (*shalach*, cf. 9.7) out his hand toward the man of God as if to grasp him while commanding those nearby to lay hold of him, *taphats*. "If they have come out for peace, take them alive; or if they have come out for war, take them alive" [20.18]. However, at once King Jeroboam's hand withered away, and he was unable to draw it back. Thus he's standing there practically without an arm while the altar was being torn down. Nothing is said as to those responsible for it, perhaps some associated with the man of God or those who had been duped by King Jeroboam and now have turned against him. The same applies to his hand which despite being restored, fulfills the words of vs. 34: "And this thing became sin to the house of Jeroboam so as to cut it off and to destroy it from the face of the earth."

In vs. 6 King Jeroboam changes his mind, asking (the verb *hanah*, to answer is used) the man of God both to entreat and to pray for him, *chalah* (another meaning which is to be sick) and *palal* (cf. 8.54). "And Moses besought the Lord" [Ex 32.11]. Both passages read literally as "the face (*panym*) of the Lord." King Jeroboam's request is put in terms of the Lord associated with the man of God, that is, "the Lord your God" which is distinct from the supposed deity. As a result of the king's request, the prophet entreated the Lord, second mention of *chalah* with the phrase "the face (*panym*) of the Lord."

Obviously King Jeroboam was both grateful and wanting to return the favor despite his threat to kill the man of God. After all, if he tried laying hands on him a second time,

Jeroboam might end up with more than a withered hand. And so he extends an invitation to come to his home (actually, palace) and refresh himself, *sahad* fundamentally as to prop up, to support. “Hold me up that I may be safe and have regard for your statutes continually” [Ps 119.117]! The man of God responds brusquely and truthfully, not fearing reprisal by saying no to this invitation. After all, just a few minutes ago the king tried to kill him, so he replies by appealing to a higher authority—the highest, in fact—that he is ordered (*tsava*’, cf. 5.6) by the *davar* of the Lord (literally, ‘in or *b-* the *davar* of the Lord’) as in 13.1. Furthermore, the man of God isn’t to return to Judah the same way he had come to Bethel, this echoing the wise men who had come to see the newly born Christ when they were dealing with King Herod (cf. Lk 2.16). Such was this dramatic encounter with King Jeroboam whose response isn’t given. He figured that since the northern and southern kingdoms were divided recently, no need to aggravate the situation...at least for now.

Vs. 11 introduces another anonymous person described as an “old prophet” who lived in Bethel, presumably prior to the kingdom being split up. His sons (the Hebrew text reads ‘son’) informed him of what the man of God had done, news of this dramatic event spreading quickly. Despite his age, the prophet saddled his ass and rode off to meet him. Even though the man of God must have kept his return route to Judah a secret, the prophet was able to divine it and catch up with him. The two finally met under an oak along the way, and the prophet invited the man of God to stay with him, but he refused. Words such as “in this place” in vs. 16 show his contempt for the newly broken off northern kingdom. In his mind, the old prophet is one who had abandoned the Lord and had gone over to worship of alien gods under Jeroboam. The man of God recounts the *davar* of the Lord saying that he’s forbidden to remain in Bethel but leave at once. Thus the presence of this divine *davar* determines whether one is for or against the Lord. Next the prophet reminds his guest that the two are in fact prophets; supposedly an angel of the Lord had *davar* to him by the *davar* of the Lord, this focus upon *davar* being what’s common and special between the two men.

Insertion of the short sentence in vs. 18 is telling, “But he lied to him.” That is to say, the old prophet had lied to the man of God, but at this point he was uncertain as to his true identity. Indeed, returning to Bethel was dangerous, given what had just happened to King Jeroboam. Were the two in cahoots? Such thought must have preoccupied the man of God. And so the dialogue between the prophet and man of God continues shrouded with uncertainty and tension as to who is genuine and who isn’t.

Finally in vs. 21 the *davar* of the Lord came to the old prophet. It did more than just come but enabled him to cry out (*qara*’, cf. vs. 2) that the man of God had failed in two ways. In sum, we’re getting closer as to who is the genuine prophet. Two factors are involved. The

first is that the man of God had disobeyed the word of the Lord. The verb is *marah* which is more along the lines of rebelling. It's used with *peh* or mouth, not *davar*, suggesting the source of this *davar* which is so important to a discerning the nature of a true prophet. The second is that he hadn't kept the divine commandment given him, *shamar* and *mitsvah* (cf. 11.38 for both). Note the stress not just upon *mitsvah* but it has been *tsavah* (cf. 2.1) or commanded, the noun's verbal root.

After the old prophet had further shamed the man of God by bouncing back to him his own words about not eating nor drinking in Bethel, the conversation ends abruptly. The prophet saddles the ass of his guest in complete silence while the man of God looks on in dismay and sends him off without any further ado or exchange of words. It so happened that en route back to Judah the man of God was attacked by a lion. Passers by discovered the lion sitting by the corpse, another injury to insult, as if the lion refused to eat something unclean. At once the old prophet went with his sons (plural, unlike the singular of vs. 11) and found the lion still there. They removed the body and buried it in the grave of the prophet—and that must mean in Bethel, not the man of God's Judah—after which all engaged in mourning, the prophet even calling the dead man “my brother” in vs. 30.

The end of this rather complex story has the old prophet asking his sons to bury him next to the man of God. Despite the conflict between the two, the prophet recognized the man of God as having taken a stance against King Jeroboam, something possibly he had regretted as not having done. The dead man did cry out or *qara'* again a saying or a *davar* of the Lord against (literally ‘upon,’ *hal-*; cf. vs. 2) the altar. Included were all houses of the high places (*bamah*, cf. 11.7) in Samaria, these destined to be fulfilled. In sum, it could be said that the man of God and the old prophet represent the two split tribes. Now the old prophet could wait out his days knowing that despite this split, in the end worship of the true God will win out.

Word invariably got back to Jeroboam that the man of God and most likely his other nemesis, the old prophet, had passed away, such being the sense of vs. 33, “after this thing” or “after this *davar*.” And so there remained the single grave with two men of God representing the split kingdom of Israel, a reminder for future generations. The king persisted in his evil ways despite the dramatic episode of the altar being destroyed and his hand having dried up and later restored. He made priests from among the people. That is to say, he didn't take them from the tribe of Levi, the true priestly class in Israel. Such stubbornness reflected in Jeroboam, symptomatic for just about all Israelites, makes you pause and reflect more deeply upon the strength of this penchant for worship of alien gods really is. While stated frequently, at the same time no one seems strong or insightful enough to deal with it head on.

As a result, this thing (*davar*) turned into a sin for the house of Jeroboam which in part is the house of David, Rehoboam being the other part. King Jeroboam persisted in it for an extended period of time which at this point isn't revealed but left that way so as to keep up the suspense. Regardless, his house is destined to be cut off and destroyed, *kachad* and *samad*. The former also means to deny, to disown and to hide while the latter means to be laid waste. Ps 83.4: "They say, 'Come, let us wipe them out as a nation.'" "He (Baasha) killed all the house of Jeroboam; he left to the house of Jeroboam not one that breathed until he had destroyed it" [15.29].

1) hineh, 2) qara', hineh, 3) mopheth, 4) qarah, shalach, taphats, 6) hanah (cf. 11.39 with the alternate meaning to afflict), chalah, palal, chalah, 7) sahad, 9) tsava', 21) qara', marah, peh, shamar, mitsvah, tsavah, 32) qara', bamah, 33) kachad, samad

Chapter Fourteen

Baheth or "at that time" takes the place of the familiar conjunctive *v*- beginning a new chapter. It shows the practically simultaneous occurrence of what just transpired and the story about to unfold. *Baheth* introduces the son of Jeroboam, Abijah, who fell ill, *chalah* also as to be weak or exhausted (cf. 13.5 with another meaning of this verb). Apparently Abijah is relatively young which compels the king to seek a cure all the more. Actually he's called a *nahar* or child in vs. 3. Jeroboam does this by asking his wife whose name remains anonymous, this fitting in well with Jeroboam wanting to conceal her identity while off to see Ahijah, *shanah* also as to change or to repeat as in 18.34: "Do it a second time." Most likely his wife donned the clothes of a common peasant so as not to attract attention as well as making the journey without a bodyguard or servants, a risky proposition for a woman.

And so this woman—presumably a queen being her official title—headed off to Shiloh to meet the prophet Ahijah who had confronted Jeroboam on the road when he foretold the dividing of Israel, this prompting King Solomon to seek his death (cf. 11.29+). Before leaving, Jeroboam tries to sooth her with Ahijah having told him that he'd be king. In addition to this, she's to bring what amounts to a modest gift of bread and honey. After all Ahijah is a prophet living a rather Spartan existence who wouldn't be insulted by such a gift. If it were too sumptuous, he might refuse to see her outrightly.

She followed her husband's wish and arose, the verb *qum* (cf. 12.15) as in vs. 1 indicative of her willingness to leave in a moment's notice. After all, it's a matter of life and death for their son. Once in Shiloh she came to Ahijah's house, approaching it with a mixture of dread and urgency. By now the prophet had become quite old and was unable to see which must have relieved the woman...falsely as it turns out. The conjunctive *v*- beginning vs. 5

(‘and’) shows the close connection between the woman’s intent to inquire (*darash*) and the Lord speaking to Ahijah who informs him of her identity beginning with *hineh* or “behold.” The verb *darash* fundamentally means to tread, this fitting in well with the woman’s desperation. “There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the Lord.” In the verse at hand *darash* is used with *davar*, literally as “to inquire a word” of Ahijah. As for *davar*, the Lord bids the prophet to *davar* in a way that’s appropriate and which won’t be revealed until the two actually meet.

Vs. 5 continues with a second sentence saying that King Jeroboam’s wife pretended to be another woman, *nakar* noted in 8.41 as a verbal root. Also it means to alienate as well as to acknowledge. Despite being completely blind, Ahijah recognized her immediately as soon as he heard the sound of her feet, this because he was informed by the Lord (*davar* not mentioned but presumed). Ahijah gets right to the point saying that he’s charged with some grievous tidings, the verb *shalach* (cf. 13.4) meaning to be sent along with the adjective *qasheh* (cf. 12.13) which means hard as well as heavy. Also the preposition ‘*el-*’ is prefaced to “you” reading literally as “to you” which makes the threatening heaviness all the more burdensome just by his words.

Vs. 7 has Ahijah speaking with the woman, the familiar “thus says the Lord” as he had done on the road (cf. 11.31) and continues through vs. 11. It might seem a lot for him to remember but then again, it comes from the Lord which is a wholly different way of retaining any *davar* he has uttered. She has no choice but to listen and impart the Lord’s *davar* to her husband, starting with him having been divinely chosen. This is put as having been exalted (*rum*; cf. 11.27 for another use but not noted there) from among the people, *betok* (cf. 6.13) suggesting from their very center or middle. Such *rum* is synonymous with *nagyed* (cf. 1.35 but not noted there) or being a leader, this term usually associated with a prince. Thus *rum* and *nagyed* are opposite to *qarah* or tearing as in 11.31 with regard the symbolic meaning of Ahijah’s new garment.

The second half of vs. 8 has the conjunctive *v-* translated more forcefully as “and yet,” words that frightened Jeroboam’s wife and will do the same to him because they introduce what the Lord is really after which by no means is favorable. As with King Solomon before him, the Lord is to tell Jeroboam that he is being compared with David who had kept (*shamar*) the divine commandments or *mitsvah* (for both, cf. 13.21), followed the Lord with his whole heart (*halak* and *lev*, cf. 11.31 and 12.33 respectively) and had done what was right (*yashar*, cf. 11.33) in his eyes.

The conjunctive *v-* introducing vs. 9 is comparable to that of vs. 8 just mentioned in that it introduces damning evidence against King Jeroboam. That is to say, the evil (*rah*, cf. 11.6) he committed was beyond that of his two predecessors on the throne. Chief among such

rah is having made both other gods and molten images or *masekah*, Gods made of some kind of metal similar to the gold calf fashioned by Aaron: “And he received the gold at their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a molten calf” [Ex 32.4]. As was the case then, Jeroboam’s actions had angered the Lord, *kahas* meaning to irritate or provoke. “Provoking me to anger with their sins” [16.2]. Similarly or worse, he had cast the Lord behind his back implying that at the same time he faced these images. Something similar is recorded in Neh 9.26: “Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets.”

Vs. 10 comes off with the Lord’s decision introduced in a both formal and threatening fashion as “therefore behold” (*hineh*). It consists of the following three parts:

- 1) To bring evil or *rah* (cf. vs. 9) literally “to (*el-*) the house of Jeroboam,” this being a direct way of putting it.
- 2) Cut off or *karath* (cf. 11.16) every male from Jeroboam’s house which usually involves an extended family consisting of officials, etc. “Male” is rendered colorfully and in a derogatory fashion as “him who pisses against the wall.”
- 3) Will utterly consume Jeroboam’s house, this presumably after having cut off everyone “who pisses against the wall.” *Bahar* is the verb meaning to consume with fire and resembles 21.21: “I will utterly sweep you away and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond of free, in Israel.” To make this even worse, such *bahar* will be like burning dung.

After having taken care of Jeroboam and his house, the Lord doesn’t stop there. Anyone belonging in the city—presumably Tirzah as in vs. 17—will be eaten by dogs. A similar fate awaits those in the countryside; they will be eaten by birds. And so this prophecy uttered by Ahijah to Jeroboam’s wife about restoring health to their child comes to a bitter end leaving the woman at a loss for words. She arrived expecting a miracle and goes away with a promise of an impending destruction that will be complete. Vs. 11 concludes with the far from consoling “the Lord has *davar* it.”

The prophet continues speaking but not as mouthpiece of the Lord through vs. 16 telling the woman first to arise and then return home, *qum* in the opposite manner her husband Jeroboam asked in vs. 2. As soon as she returns there, the sound of her very feet will cause her son Abijah to die, this reminiscent of Peter’s words to Sapphira: “Hark, the feet of those that have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out” [Acts 5.9]. Later in vs. 17 when she sets out to Tirzah one can only imagine her thoughts along the way. She had come on her own unaccompanied which made the trip all the worse, perhaps tarrying along the way as much as she could so her son could live.

In vs. 13 the entire nation of Israel—northern and southern kingdoms—will mourn for the recently deceased Abijah, the verb being *saphad* (cf. 13.29 but not noted there) or to sing mournful songs. Although unknown to virtually everyone, this child represented the possibility of a reconciliation between the two kingdoms. With this in mind, the utter contempt shown by the Lord as being pleased by the child's death can be quite disturbing. The words of vs. 13 “in him there is found something pleasing to the Lord” are rendered literally as “because it was found in him a good *davar* to the Lord.” So when the Lord sets his mind to do something, he's ruthless about it.

To resolve the situation concerning both Jeroboam's apostasy and the divided kingdoms in vs. 14, Ahijah continues with the Lord saying to his wife that he will raise up a new king, the verb *qum* with the added *lu* or “to himself” or a king who will be the Lord's personal possession. Apparently this new king who remains anonymous is a fully grown man because the verse says that today (*hayom*) he will cut off (*karath*, cf. vs. 10) the house of Jeroboam. So once this new king is installed and Jeroboam is out of the way, the Lord will smite Israel, *nakah* (also as to strike) which comes true in the words of 15.29: “And as soon as he (Baasha) was king, he killed all the house of Jeroboam.”

In vs. 14 this *nakah* is synonymous with uprooting Israel, *natash* (cf. 8.57)...not just that but from a land that's good, *'adamah* (cf. 9.7) applicable more to earth or soil with the preposition *mehal*, literally as “from upon.” Dt 1.25 has a reference to this land but uses *'erets*, land more along the lines of territory compared with the physical land though that can apply as well: “And they (spies sent by Joshua into Canaan) took in their hands some of the fruit of the land and brought it down to us and brought us word again, and said, ‘It is a good land which the Lord our God gives us.’” As for this *natash* or uprooting, it will mean that the people will go into exile beyond the Euphrates River; at least it doesn't mean their destruction.

The reason for all this is more obvious, getting back to Jeroboam's apostasy: the people have made (*hasah*, cf. 11.33) Asherim which a footnote in the RSV describes as “wooden poles, symbols of the Canaanite fertility goddess Asherah...as a temptation to the Israelites.” Emphasis upon *hasah* suggests the same making or fashioning that Aaron had done with the golden calf mentioned earlier. As for the prohibition against Asherim, cf. Dt 12.3: “You shall tear down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and burn their Asherim with fire.” The prophet Ahijah concludes his harsh words to the (queen) wife of Jeroboam with mention of the king's sins, the noun and verb mentioned together for greater affect and again the verb with regard to Israel.

Vs. 17 begins with a momentous conjunctive *v-* translated as “then” with regard to Jeroboam's wife leaving Ahijah and making that journey back home alone with full

knowledge of what was about to happen. *Qum* (cf. vs. 14) is used again as “arise,” something she could barely do but had to. The suddenness of it all rings true with her not simply entering her house and before greeting Jeroboam but her feet touching the threshold. Chances are as she got close to home she removed her disguise (cf. vs. 5) so as to be recognized. Once those on the other side of the ill-fated threshold caught sight of her, including a nurse or maid most likely holding little Abijah, knew something was up just by the expression on her face. Once inside over the threshold and an instant before her son’s death, she must have wished not to have returned home but stay away even if it meant for the rest of her life.

Regardless of hindsight, the entire nation of Israel mourned for Abijah, *saphad* used as in vs. 13, this in accord with the *davar* of the Lord which came through the prophet Ahijah. Jeroboam was devastated, knowing full well that he had jeopardized both his wife and child. Nevertheless, he doesn’t seem to have been moved by the *davar* of the Lord, for vs. 19 presents him moving on pretty much as nothing had happened. This verse begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as “now” with regard to the remaining deeds or *davar* of Jeroboam being recorded in a register dealing with the kings of Israel. Despite Jeroboam veering off into apostasy and favoring high places, he reigns for twenty-two years, a fact that must have galled Ahijah exceedingly despite him prophesying the death of Abijah. As for his wife, we have no further information although his son Nadab ruled in his place meaning that the couple had more than one child.

Vs. 21 begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as “now” and shows a shift from the tragedy of both Jeroboam’s son and wife to Rehoboam who is called specifically Solomon’s son. It turned out that he, along with King Jeroboam, lived longer than expected, given the division of the kingdom into two. Apparently any attempts at assassination were prevented. As for Rehoboam, he lasted seventeen years...seventeen years of ruling with whips and scorpions according to 12.11. Vs. 21 also points out the importance of Jerusalem with regard to the Lord, thereby intimating the fate of the northern kingdom. That is to say, the Lord himself had chosen Jerusalem as the place to put his name. Without mentioning it, this infers the temple built by King Solomon.

We have what appears as a passing mention of King Rehoboam’s mother, Naamah. More importantly, she’s an Ammonitess suggesting that she is one of the multitude of wives associated with King Solomon. That, in turn, leads to the fact that she had a role in turning away his heart (cf. 11.3) from worship of the Lord to native Canaanite divinities. And so one verse contains Jerusalem (i.e., the temple) and the infamous high places noted in vs. 23. The profusion of the latter comes out more strongly by addition of pillars and Asherim (cf. vs. 16). Mention of them being on every high hill and under every green tree gives the impression of a full invasion or take-over of Israel; more specifically, it’s a re-possession of

the land and the alien invaders (the Israelites) now living upon it, having converted these invaders.

One more insult-to-injury is to be noted: male prostitutes (for a prohibition, cf. Dt 23.17) are added and acted in accord with abominations from other countries. This is the only use of *tohevah* in First Kings; Second Kings has two (16.3 and 21.2), the first being quoted here, close to the verse at hand: “He even burned his son as an offering according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.” So despite specific mention of the Lord having driven these abominable practice out (*garash*, cf. 2.27), they sprung up just as quickly and resiliently as ever.

Vs. 25 has Shishak of Egypt invading Jerusalem, that is, not long after King Rehoboam was on the throne. The concluding words of vs. 26 sum it up pretty well: “he took away everything” but doesn’t seem to have laid waste to the city. This had weakened the nation put in terms of Rehoboam having made shields of bronze to replace to stolen ones of God made by King Solomon. In sum, it’s a way of describing the ever increasing difficulty between Rehoboam and his rival Jeroboam which vs. 30 puts literally “all the days” for continually. A final dig at Rehoboam and Judah doing “what was evil in the sight of the Lord” [vs. 22] is mention of his mother Naamah the Ammonitess. Translation? The continuation of the abominations in conflict with worship of the Lord.

1) chalah, 2) shanah, 4) qum, 5) hineh, darash, nakar, 6) shalach, qasheh, 7) rum, betok, 8) qarah, shamar, mitsvah, halak, lev, yashar, 9) rah, masekah, kahas, 10) hineh, rah, karath, bahar, 12) qum, 13) saphad, 14) qum, karath, natash, ‘adamah, 15) hasah, 17) qum, 18) saphad, 24) tohevah, garash

Chapter Fifteen

By now we’ve gone through four kings, David, Solomon, Rehoboam and Jeroboam, the latter two pretty much taken together because they reigned simultaneously. All in all they span three generations of Israelites, most of whom are within living memory. Although this royal lineage began with David, the kingship actually was instituted with Saul. He’s not even mentioned in First and Second Kings, but surely the memory of his descent into madness was in the forefront of many people. It remained underground and unfortunately turned out to be a not inaccurate model for some kings who followed. Now in the present chapter as well as the next we follow the succession of further, lesser known monarchs, each of whom is sized up in terms of doing either evil or good in the sight (eyes) of the Lord.

As a reminder, this descent into the chaos of two kingdoms and successive kings and wars results from the prophet Nathan's curse levied against David for arranging the death of Uriah and taking his wife Bathsheba: "Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife" [2Sam 12.10]. Indeed this verse is more than a reminder...it's more a summary of First and Second Kings. However, both the chapter at hand and the one that follows give a sense, not clear yet, that something has to give. Movements in that direction were made through a lesser prophet here and there whose roles are preparatory stages for the emergence of Elijah and Elisha. They will dominate much of the remainder of First Kings and spill over into Second Kings.

Chapter Fifteen begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as "now" to show the continued albeit depressing account of the two divided kingdoms. With regard to King Jeroboam, his son Abijam took over. Vs. 3 describes him as walking in "all the sins which his father did" which means following in his footsteps. Similarly his heart (*lev*, cf. 14.8) wasn't "wholly true to the Lord," the adjective *shalem* (cf. 11.4; related to *shalom*) being used. If this weren't bad enough, Abijam is compared to the gold standard, King David, whose heart was such although *shalem* isn't applied to him directly.

In vs. 4 David is mentioned in the context of a lamp being set in Jerusalem, *nyr* (cf 11.36) also as a candle which signifies presence. This *nyr* carries over to David's son Solomon though not mentioned here possibly out of embarrassment of more recent events that brought about the division between two kingdoms. In fact this son is credited with having established Jerusalem, *hamad* (cf 8.11) being the verb which fundamentally means to stand in a permanent sense compared with *qum* which one might expect in this context.

In vs. 5 this *hamad* or constancy with regard to Jerusalem ties in with King David by reason of him having done what is right (*yashar*) in the eyes of the Lord as stated in 14.8. Next we come across a rather unexpected caveat, if you will. After noting that David didn't turn aside (*sur*) from what the Lord had commanded (*tsava'*, cf. 13.9) him, vs. 14 uses *sur* in the opposite sense. That is to say, "the high places were not taken away." The verse at hand mentions the matter central to all the distress and trouble being recounted, namely, the "matter (*davar*) of Uriah" which is brought up so often in these notations. Actually it gives good perspective on all these depressing accounts of misrule and apostasy before we encounter the prophets Elijah and Elisha.

Vs. 6 is yet another bearing-out of the Uriah tragedy prophesied by Nathan, namely, that war existed between Rehoboam and Jeroboam throughout "his life," this referring to Jeroboam as in vs. 1. As for King Abijam, he lacks mention of what now has become the criterion of having done good or evil in the eyes of the Lord. He's brushed aside as quickly as possible that we may move on.

Next in line comes Asa who reigned a whopping forty-one years in Jerusalem, he being credited with having done right in the Lord's eyes, *yashar* (cf. vs. 5) and, of course, being compared with King David. Such *yashar* takes the form of putting away cult prostitutes and idols, *qadesh* and *gilulym*. The former is related closely to the adjective meaning holy or set apart and has two other references in First Kings, 14.24 and 22.46. As for the latter, cf. 21.26: "He (Ahab) did very abominably in going after idols as the Amorites had done." Note that both the *qadesh* and *gilulym* are associated with "his fathers" as had been mentioned earlier and are significant insofar as King Asa put a break on these practices. Given the propensity of Israel toward apostasy, we can count on it making a come back.

Next Asa makes a bold move. He removed his mother Maacah from being queen mother or *gevyrah*, a noun found in 11.19. It's bold in that such a woman traditionally plays the role of a power broker behind the scenes; invisible yet controlling most of what's going on which involves appointments and setting policy. Just the term "queen mother" evokes an aura of mystery and intrigue. In fact, Maach sets the stage for the more treacherous Jezebel.

As for King Asa, he removed Maach because of her affinity for an abominable image or *mipletseth* in honor of Asherah, a Canaanite goddess for whom Asherim were made as noted in 14.15. He went at it with full zeal, first cutting it down and then burning it in the Kidron Brook for all to behold and to take warning. Nevertheless, the high places or *bamah* noted in 13.32 remained. This proves that totally uprooting idol worship native to Canaan was a Mission Impossible task. In fact, not long afterwards King Ahab made an Asherah as recounted in 16.33. Despite Asa's valiant efforts his heart (*lev*, cf. vs. 3) remained literally "with (*him-*) the Lord" throughout his life. His noble effort at maintaining true worship of the Lord concludes with him bringing into the temple both his father's votive gifts and his own, the word being *qodesh* or that which is holy (cf. 8.10). The *qodesh* of his father Jeroboam most likely belonged to Canaanite deities whereas those of Asa belonged to the Lord. Hopefully by placing the two together the latter would win out, symbolically to start off with, and hopefully with time a standard. Vs. 16 pretty much sums up the hostile state of affairs that has existed for some time, that is, the division of the two kingdoms. Also the conjunctive *v-* translated as "and" contributes a sense of weariness of this constant warfare. Actually it's more a state of hostility than an open confrontation of armies. *Milchamah* (cf. 8.44) is the noun for war, more or less a general term. The situation at hand involves kings Asa and Baasha, Judah and Israel respectively. It devolves further and further in accord with what had been said so often in this document, a tragic spin-off of Nathan's prophecy. Actually it seems destined to last as long as the monarchy.

Syria is dragged into the strife by Asa until his son Jehoshaphat took over along with Nadab in Israel. While nothing is said as to summing up the former except for having diseased feet, the latter is singled out for having done evil in the Lord's sight as well as having been no better than his father. If this weren't bad enough, vs. 26 puts it tersely that in addition to having walked in his father's evil ways, "in his sin which made Israel to sin." In other words, the initial sin of King David spread far beyond the monarchy and infected the entire nation or nations...Judah and Israel.

And so on and on it goes from vs. 27 to the completion of this chapter as well as beyond. The infectious nature of sin continues with Baasha killing the entire house of Jeroboam which is put vividly as not leaving one breathing person alive, the noun being *neshamah*. While the hostility noted above with regard to vs. 16 continues to devolve, one constant remains, that being the *davar* of the Lord ('according to the *davar* of the Lord'). If it weren't present, chances are we'd see the annihilation of the people or worse, being subsumed by the Canaanite deities.

As for this *davar*, it was given by Ahijah in 14.10-11: "for the Lord has *davar* it." Again Jeroboam's sin is brought up in vs. 30 or more specifically, for having provoked the Lord, *kahas* (cf. 14.11).

As expected with regard to King Baasha, Chapter Fifteen concludes with him having committed evil in the Lord's eyes, walked in the ways of Jeroboam and sadly, caused Israel to sin. Now the final act of what had been laid out is set for the next chapter before the appearance of Elijah, one of or if not, the most famous prophet of them all.

3) lev, shalem, 4) nyr, hamad, 5) yashar, sur, tsava', 9) yashar, qadesh, gilulyim, 13) gevyrah, mipletseth, 14) bamah, lev, 15) qodesh, 16) milchamah, 29) neshamah, 30) kahas

Chapter Sixteen

As for the conjunctive *v-* beginning this new chapter, aptly it's translated as "and," by that meaning yet more of the dreary state of affairs that had preceded it. In fact, the conjunctive helps us get through what remains to be done as quickly as possible. At this point what sustains us is knowledge that the prophets Elijah and Elisha are about to make their appearance. The downside, however, is King Ahab whom as vs. 33 says is the worse monarch to come along. In addition we have his ruthless wife Jezebel.

Vs. 1 has the *davar* of the Lord coming to Jehu against (*hal-*, literally 'upon') Baasha with the expected condemnation lasting through vs. 5. The *davar* is given in a prophetic

fashion; we don't know that Jehu was such until vs. 7. Baasha must have known of Jehu, that he was prone to divine inspiration, and either summoned him for an audience or given the boldness of prophets, Jehu may have walked right into the royal court demanding to see the king. Any royal official would be hard pressed to deny someone with prophetic capabilities whether they were favorable or unfavorable.

Rum (cf. 14.9) is the verb for exalted in vs. 2 with regard to Baasha whom the Lord brings from dust or *haphar* which signifies dryness or barrenness all the way up to king or leader, *nagyd* being a general word usually applied to a prince (cf. 1.35 but not noted there). Despite this exaltation Baasha has walked in the way (*derek*, cf. 11.33) of his predecessor, Jeroboam. So it turns out that Jeroboam has become a template for everything a king shouldn't do. Vs. 2 echoes the words of 15.30 causing Israel to fall into sinful ways while at the same time he's provoking the Lord, *kahas* (cf. 15.30). The result of this is predicable, almost boringly so. The sin of one man copying that of another as just commented upon has far reaching ramifications. Vs. 4 specifies this by saying that all belonging to Baasha either in the city or in the field shall die, dogs and birds consuming them.

Vs. 5 sums up the reign King Baasha succinctly with a kind of rhetorical question found later in vs. 16. That is to say, his actions are recorded in the Book of Chronicles for anyone to read or more practically speaking, have read to them. Chances are that few, if any, bothered. At least a record was kept, embarrassing though it was. Baasha's son Elah succeeded him when Jehu the prophet comes on the scene one more time, all the while observing the *davar* of the Lord unfolding before his eyes. He couldn't do anything except issue a warning after which he had to stand down and see if it would take effect. This waiting is the most difficult part of his prophetic role even if he knew the final results well beforehand.

The devolution spoken of earlier continues to accelerate. One of Elah's commanders named Zimri assassinates his master and becomes king. The familiar refrain of following Jeroboam applies to him as recounted in vs. 19. Next in line is Omri who's singled out as having done more evil than his predecessors but apparently not outdoing the now thoroughly infamous Jeroboam. One wonders at this bewildering pace of kingly succession why the model of King David isn't applied. In so many instances he had been held up as the rock upon which all his successors were compared and judged. It's as though the author of First Kings gave up on this continuous strife and sin left him far behind.

At last we come to the final and worst king of them all, Ahab, son of Omri, destined along with his wife Jezebel to be a first class scourge. If the comparisons of previous kings made with Jeroboam weren't sufficiently bad, vs. 31 says it's a "light thing" for him to follow in

his infamous predecessor's way, *qalal* (cf. 12.4) meaning to be of little account or cursed. Closely associated with marrying Jezebel is Ahab's immediate worship of Baal as well as making an Asherah (cf. 15.13). This results in the familiar *kahas* (cf. vs. 2) or provoking the Lord far more than his predecessors.

The fast paced account of kings, corruption, murders, worship of alien gods and the like of Chapter Sixteen come to crashing end with the horrifying act of Hiel of Bethel who built Jericho at the cost of his youngest son, Segub. In other words, Segub seems to have been sacrificed after which his body was placed under Jericho's foundation in order to bring good luck...a true abomination to the Lord though this isn't mentioned explicitly.

Nevertheless, it's in accord with the *davar* of the Lord spoken by Joshua: "Joshua laid an oath upon them at that time saying, 'Cursed before the Lord be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. At the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates'" [Jos 6.26].

2) rum, haphar, nagyd, derek, kahas, 31) qalal, kahas

Chapter Seventeen

The conjunctive *v-* introducing this chapter as "now" is significant insofar as it signals a break from the downward spiral begun with King Solomon. As noted many times earlier, it began with the prophecy of Nathan about a sword not departing David's household.

"Break" may sound optimistic in light of King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, high on the list of notorious biblical characters. Nevertheless as pointed out earlier, the two major prophets Elijah and his disciple Elisha make their appearance...and none too soon.

The action begins quickly with Elijah approaching King Ahab in Gilead. He prophesies that it won't rain (nor will dew fall) for a period of time expressed as "these years." This is a more personal way of putting it for the king because it cuts into his responsibility of providing for his people. Actually it's Ahab, whose disastrous reign has precipitated this drought yet seems oblivious to the fact. It's interesting how a prophet like Elijah and others before him have the audacity to approach a dreaded monarch. They seem to be protected by the *davar* of the Lord which Elijah claims as enabling him to stand where he is, *hamad* (cf. 15.4) suggestive of taking up a position. He says there won't be any rain "except by my *davar* (and that, of course, means the Lord's)." And so this *davar* is the shield protecting all the prophets.

As for *davar*, vs. 2 has it put succinctly and literally as “And the *davar* of the Lord was to him.” That is to say, this *davar* as coming to Elijah is immediately after he told King Ahab that it won’t rain “except by my *davar*.”

We have no response from King Ahab to Elijah, but it’s clear he acted in a threatening manner. The *davar* of vs. 2 compels Elijah to leave at once (that is, Gilead) and hide by a brook called Cherith east of the Jordan River, the verb being *satar* which also implies a covering over.” Thus not only did Elijah hide, he was covered over by the divine *davar*. Lord, all my longing is known to you, my sighing is not hidden from you” [Ps 38.9].

Given Ahab’s fierce reputation, Elijah must have feared he was being followed, but the *satar* or hiding is not so much by the brook of Cherith but in the *davar* of the Lord just noted. As for this withdrawal, the NIV has an interesting footnote: “The fact that Elijah was sustained in a miraculous way while not living among his own people demonstrated that the *davar* of God was not dependent on the people, but the people were dependent on the word of God.” Elijah had plenty of water to drink and more charmingly, was supplied by ravens with food, *horev*. In Gn 8.7 such a *horev* was responsible for helping to dry up the earth: “and sent forth a raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried from the earth.” In the verse at hand, the verb *kul* (cf. 4.27) means to feed and has the broader sense of sustaining as well as holding. As for the food, most likely this sustenance came from carcasses of dead animals as intimated in vs. 6.

Note that after the Lord commanded the ravens to take care of Elijah, vs. 5 has him going and doing (*hasah*, cf. 14.15) according to the *davar* of the Lord. Actually he had it pretty good: bread and meat in the morning as well as evening. As for this nourishing, it mirrors the Lord caring for his people in the wilderness with regard to manna and quails (cf. Ex 16.13+). Chances are that Elijah had this in the forefront of his mind.

No time is given for how long Elijah spent by the brook Cherith except the vague words “after a while” in vs. 7 which reads literally “from the end of days.” Reference is to the stream drying up which implies summer. That suggests that Elijah arrived at the brook either winter or spring, total amount of time there approximately four to five months. Often one wonders what he did during that extended period of time, he living not unlike John the Baptist. As for John, surely Elijah was an important example to sustain his desert experience.

Vs. 8 reads simply that the familiar *davar* of the Lord came to Elijah, no time frame given. Throughout his duration by the brook of Cherith he didn’t have this *davar*, if you will. It might be better to say that he had no manifestation of it because for the time being there was nothing to do. More accurately, *davar* requires someone to utter a communication.

When there's no communication to utter as at this time, Elijah is experiencing silence. It's a silence that will prepare him to listen to any future instance of *davar* and to act accordingly. Thus *davar* or word-as-expression becomes more encompassing and isn't limited to just speaking.

In vs. 9 the *davar* of the Lord bids Elijah first to arise, *qum* (cf. 14.17) here meaning to leave what has become if not a comfortable but a relatively secure life style. He is to go to a place belonging to Sidon which as a footnote in the NIV says, is the very heartland from which worship of Baal had originated and subsequently translated to Israel. That is to say, we're dealing with what amounts to an invasion which unfortunately found fertile land. However, in place of being fed by ravens, the prophet is to be cared for by a widow, the same verb *kul* being used as in vs. 4. Throughout we have no name attributed to her which makes her all the more mysterious. Surely Elijah had told her how the ravens had provided for him, she finding this as applicable to her quite amusing.

The Lord says that he had commanded (*tsava'*, cf. 15.5) her to care for someone about to meet her which means she was on the look-out for a person with the air of a prophet. In fact, the divine *tsava'* involves the ability to recognize the equally divine *davar* when it is spoken, thereby allowing her and the as yet unknown prophet to recognize each other. The two met at the gate of the city which means a busy place where a whole bunch of people were milling about. The widow must have been one among many others gathering sticks as a result of that drought. At least this would narrow down the field of search for Elijah. He could eliminate most people entering or exiting the city.

So when Elijah approached the city gate and saw these widows grubbing around for wood, he was on the look-out for the one he was supposed to meet. One clue was that this widow would be doing the same for him. Finally his eyes hit upon a woman who might just fit the bill and asked for water. Given the fact that a drought was afflicting the region, few if any people were willing to spare such a precious resource as water. However, there was something that stood out concerning this widow, the manner in which she was not paying full attention to gathering sticks but waiting around for someone to approach her. This incident is reminiscent of Jesus when he said to the Samaritan woman at the well, "Give me a drink" [Jn 4.7]. As for the widow, she complied readily to Elijah's request who also asked for a piece of bread. Now it was her turn to respond. She had a handful of meal and a little oil and was gathering sticks to prepare what amounts to a modest bite to eat. Then she adds fatalistically that she and her son will die after eating it. In fact she had died already and was simply going through the motions. It was sentiment shared by the other widows...not just them but all who were going in and out of the city gate.

In response to the widow's fatalistic attitude which has come to hang over the whole population Elijah says that she isn't to fear. She is to prepare for him a small cake after which she can do the same for her and her son. At least this took her mind off her intention of her impending death as well as that of her son. Then Elijah makes a prophecy about the meal and oil not failing. To the first is the verb *kalah* as in 9.1 and to the second is *chasar*, also to lack or be without. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" [Ps 23.1]. In other words, both are to continue until the day or *yom* when the Lord sends rain. The continuous provision of meal and oil turned out, according to vs. 16, to stem from "the *davar* of the Lord" which he *davar* through Elijah.

Vs. 17 begins with the conjunctive *v-* which reads literally as "and was after these *davar*" showing that after the widow and her son had food for "many days" [vs. 15] a tragedy follows. Here she is identified as "mistress of the house," *bahalah* implying that she had a number of slaves and servants at her disposal; i.e., she wasn't exactly poor but reasonably well off. *Bahalah* has two other biblical references, both negative, 1Sam 28.7 and Nah 3.4, the former being cited here: "Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her."

This woman shifts blame for the death of her son directly on to Elijah, that in addition to this he has brought to remembrance her sin, *havon* being the noun which applies more generally to iniquity. "I was blameless before him, and I kept myself from guilt" [Ps 18.23]. In other words, sin and physical illness are tied together. Elijah quickly moved to remedy the situation by taking her son into a room apart. Throughout this incident as recounted here the conjunctive *v-* really comes to the fore...a whole series of ands depicting the quick succession of events. The prophet echos the widow's attribution of sin when crying out to the Lord whom he claims had attributed calamity to her, *rahah* also as to bring evil. "Omri...did more evil than all who were before him" [16.25].

In a dramatic, even desperate move, Elijah stretches himself out on the child three times begging...demanding...that the Lord return his soul or *nephesh* (cf. 11.37). Compare this with *neshemah* or breath in vs. 17, the two being more or less the same. All the while the mother was downstairs, listening in as closely as she could and resisting the temptation to rush upstairs. If she had done so, she would have interrupted the whole process and probably even not allow her son to be restored. As for Elijah's cry, right away the Lord responded, literally by hearing in (*b-*) his voice after which Elijah brings the child downstairs to his mother. She acknowledges that he is a man of God with the *davar* of the Lord in his mouth which is truth, 'emeth (cf. 3.6).

1) hamad, 2) satar, 4) horev, 4) kul, 5) hasah, 9) qum, kul, tsava', 13) kalah, chasar, 17) bahalah, 20) rahah, 21) nephesh, 24) 'emeth

Chapter Eighteen

The conjunctive *v-* introduces this lengthy chapter as “after” along with the phrase “many days” This is the second interval of time with regard to the *davar* of the Lord coming to Elijah, the first being in vs. 8. Actually “many days” is specified more by the addition of “in the third year” suggesting that the prophet had used the widow’s home as a base of operations. What he was doing during this time goes unspecified. After all, 17.19 mentions an upper room which he had as his own, the same room he had used to restore the child to life. During that three year interval the child must have looked up to him as a surrogate father of sorts. As for the widow, this is the last time we hear of her.

The divine *davar* bids Elijah to show himself to King Ahab, the common verb *ra’ah* (cf. 3.5) suggestive of presenting oneself not unlike a new diplomat being introduced formally to a governmental official. No doubt for Elijah it’s a dangerous game, of figuring out how to go about this without running the risk of immediate execution. We can assume that Ahab was still on the hunt for him and by now frustrated at not capturing him. As if to prevent Elijah from balking, the Lord adds that he will send rain, that being sufficient reason for Ahab to spare his life...hopefully, that is. Then there was the question of Ahab’s wife, Jezebel lurking in the background. She could step in at any moment and ruin everything.

Elijah sets out for Samaria where the famine was severe, *chazaq* meaning strong in the sense of having a stranglehold. “And his illness was so severe that there was no breath in him” [17.17]. Wisely he decided to visit Obadiah who was in charge of the royal household (*bayth*, cf. 12.16). By reason of his position he would be privy to information other officials did not have. Both the **RSV** and **NIV** have in parentheses a second sentence beginning in vs. 2 and running through vs. 4, a kind of footnote too important not to leave out, for it speaks of Obadiah’s character. Despite his closeness to king and queen, he revered the Lord, *yare’* (9.2) being the verb usually meaning to fear...not just that but greatly, *me’od* (cf. 10.2) suggestive of excessiveness. This devotion is situated within the context of Jezebel having cut off (*karath*, cf. 14.14) prophets faithful to the Lord; Obadiah had hidden some one hundred of them in cave. No reference to this is given, but it’s enough to give insight into Jezebel’s character which will manifest itself fully later on.

In vs. 5 Ahab requests Obadiah to be on the watch for grass to feed his horses and mules (i.e., not his people), this because of the famine which doesn’t seem to be letting up. While Obadiah is to search out for springs of water as well as valley, a rather desperate measure at this stage, Ahab is to go in another direction all by himself. Obadiah must have wondered about this. Was his master really embarking on a spying mission, probably at

the instigation of his wife Jezebel? Was he going to circle around and see if Obadiah would lead him to these prophets?

Regardless of Ahab's intent, Elijah met Obadiah, not by chance but by reason of their common devotion to the Lord. Perhaps this meeting came about by Elijah having contacted one of the hidden prophets who in turn informed their protector. Even though Elijah realized that Ahab hadn't relented in his search, he asked Obadiah to say that he is around, ready to meet him. What really shows the obsessed determination of Ahab to find Elijah is that he made every kingdom or nation swear an oath. This is more than an obsession. It's the working of someone who really was acting out of fear. Once again, Jezebel is assumed to be a large part of this. Ahab knew of Elijah's power to bring on a drought (cf. 17.1). More than that, the king was fearful that the prophet would destroy his precious idols. And so a lengthy discussion ensues about the risks involved, Obadiah also concerned for his own safety. Finally Obadiah relented and went off to inform his master about Elijah wanting to meet him. It's to be done quickly, for vs. 15 says that Elijah is insistent on this, "today."

Vs. 17 begins with the conjunctive *v-* which has an ominous sense about it translated as "when," that is, Ahab catching sight of Elijah. Not only did the king go out but rushed out to meet him as noted in the previous verse. Right away the king calls him a "troubler of Israel," the participle *hakar* suggestive of stirring up some kind of insidious plot. "A man who is kind benefits himself, but a cruel man hurts himself" [Prov 11.17]. Without missing a beat, the prophet fires back that it's Ahab who is responsible for this *hakar* and gives the reason, namely, that he has forsaken the Lord's commandments, *hazav* (cf. 12.13) also as to abandon. Not only that, the king has taken this *hazav* a step further, by following the Baals which infers the sinister influence of his wife Jezebel. It's interesting how thus far she remains unmentioned, lurking in the background, ready to leap into action which she does in the not distant future.

In vs. 19 Elijah offers a proposal which he does partly in order to save his life, for if Ahab wanted to, he could slay him on the spot and be done with it. However, his proposal sounds attractive, a way to rid himself of this troubler before "all the people of Israel" [vs. 20]. Thus he'd have the nation as a collective witness and effect a wholesale conversion to worship of Baal. This would be a great opportunity to dispatch Elijah easily. As for Ahab, there's no mention of him being present. In fact, in vs. 41 Elijah bids him to go up to Mount Carmel after the dramatic event had unfolded there. As for the proposal, it consists of gathering "all Israel" at Mount Carmel along with the multitude of prophets who adhere to Baal and Asherah. The verb *qavats* involves collecting...a sorting, if you will...as in 11.24. Such phrases as "all Israel" and the like aren't to be taken literally but may suggest

a representation of the twelve tribes, still quite a multitude. Note too Elijah adds those who eat at Jezebel's table or those intimately connected with her.

Vs. 20 depicts this *qavats* or gathering which on the surface sounds like it was done quickly but must have taken some time to get word out and assemble the people or representatives of the twelve tribes on Mount Carmel. Actually it was Ahab who did this at Elijah's request which makes it official. Some if not many went out of fear as well as curiosity. Once everyone was in place—the prophets of Baal and Asherah along with “all Israel”—Elijah addresses them in dramatic though direct form as intimated by the verb *nagash*. “They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life” [4.21]. Next Elijah threw out a rhetorical question in mocking form, that is, how long will the people keep limping with two different opinions? The verb is *pasach* which also connotes a halting motion as well as to pass over. It has six other biblical references, some of which are famously associated with the Passover: “And when I see the blood, I will pass over” [Ex 12.13].

In the verse at hand, Elijah sees clearly that the people are divided between two opinions, being able to read on their faces this *pasach* or halting/limping which he surmises is half-hearted. The noun *sepipym* is the noun for opinion, found only here. Even this fact is suggestive of their ambiguity. Because *pasach* is so familiar to the Israelites—central to their original belief—you can't help but wonder if they associated it with their pathetic *pasach* on display before Elijah. As to his request the people did not answer a *davar* which must have incensed Ahab though we have no information about his response.

After presenting the lopsided odds—Elijah being the only prophet confronting four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal—he gives the go ahead for the contest to begin. Throughout all this Elijah is the one giving orders of what to do, egging on his opponents by allowing them to have the upper hand. All this, of course, is done with the intent to deceive them. The drama gets underway by preparing the sacrifices with the prophets of Baal calling upon their gods while Elijah does the same with regard to the Lord. To this the people chimed in by saying literally “it is a good *davar*.” Next the prophets called upon Baal from morning until noon, asking for a response to their prayers which consists in igniting the bull on the altar. No response came which caused Elijah to mock them, *hatal* being the verb which also means to deceive. “Or can you deceive him as one deceive a man” [Job 13.9]?

Next Elijah launches into what a footnote in the **RSV** says is “one of the sharpest satires on paganism ever penned.” He bids the prophets of Baal to cry out (*qara'*, cf. 13.32) literally “in a great voice.” Baal is either musing, has gone aside, on a journey or asleep. As for the verb *syach* (musing), a primary meaning is to talk with oneself. “Attend to me and answer

me; I am overcome by my trouble” [Ps 55.2]. Vs. 28 has then crying out yet again (*qara'*), only this time the prophets inflicting themselves with sword cuts which was in accord with a practice familiar to them. Then noon arrived implying that their intercession to Baal had intensified virtually from sunrise.

Vs. 29 describes the prophets' frenzied worship and self-infliction as they raved on, *nava'* being the verbal root for prophet and alternately means to prophesy. The idea behind this verb is an incessant bubbling up...a near crazed trance...under the influence of some power beyond human control. So within this context, the prophets...the *nave'*...are *nava'*. They continue with this in the sight of the people, Elijah and of course, King Ahab or until the time of making an oblation (*minchah*, cf. 11.25 but noted there), presumably at evening. Vs. 29 continues with the ominous words, “there as no voice, no one answered, no one heeded.” Everyone, including the prophets themselves, had a pretty good idea that Baals weren't going to respond as the evening sacrifice inexorably approached. In the midst of all this the stature of Elijah grew steadily.

The conjunctive *v-* translated as “then” which begins vs. 30 again shows the fast paced action going on, attention now shifting to Elijah who begins by summoning the people to draw near (*nagash*) to him. Now it was his turn to demonstrate whether the Lord will respond after the manner of what the prophets of Baal. As for this *nagash*, the prophets were very curious as to what will happen next. Chances are they were too stunned to jeer Elijah as he began to repair the altar that had fallen into ruin; a footnote to the NIV says that Jezebel might have been responsible for this. *Haras* is the verb which means to destroy. “Take your father's bull...and pull down the altar of Baal which your father has” [Judg 6.25].

Vs. 41 intimates that King Ahab was looking on and must have been mortified but powerless to do anything. At this critical moment the people were teetering on the edge of either going with Baal or the Lord. If they went with the Lord, right away they'd rush at Ahab and kill him along with Jezebel. *Rapha'* is the verb for repair and fundamentally means to heal or make whole. “They have healed the wound of my people lightly” [Jer 6.14]. This *rapha'* consists of taking twelve stones which are representative of the twelve tribes of Israel, an important gesture to show that the division between northern and southern kingdoms.

The verb *rapha'* as to heal as a deeper meaning here with Elijah's gesture involving two elements which must have been familiar to many present. First Joshua taking twelve stones from the Jordan River as recounted in Jos 4.1-5: “take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder according to the number of the tribes of Israel” [vs. 5]. Secondly, the *davar* of the Lord had come to Jacob and changed his name to Israel which brings to mind the

actual event in Gn 32:28: “Your name shall no more be called Jacob but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.”

Once the altar had been restored, Elijah goes through the motions of cutting up the bull and pouring water over it three times. In other words, everything was drenched thoroughly and on purpose. Then came the time of oblation at evening as was the case with the prophets’ oblation in vs. 29. Perhaps the time of his oblation was the day after, given this apparent conflict. Now Elijah offers a prayer with the sun setting towards the west or into the Mediterranean, the twilight atmosphere adding to the drama. He claims to have done “all these things” or all these *davar* at the *davar* of the Lord. Interestingly at the end of his prayer Elijah says that the Lord has turned back (*savav*, cf. 8.14) the hearts (*lev*, cf. 15.14) of the people. After the disgraceful performance by the prophets of Baal and even before Elijah’s offering, essentially the people have been converted. The only thing required was a manifestation of it. Surely the significance of the restored altar in and by itself played an important role.

Vs. 38 is the most awe-inspiring verse in this chapter, how fire the Lord swooped down and licked up the offering which had been drenched through and through. This, of course, happened with all the people looking on, the verse conveying a tacit sense that the Lord was enjoying the whole show. As to be expected, the people acknowledge the Lord; to be more precise, they do so in a more formal way, in essence having been converted as just noted.

The conjunctive *v*- beginning vs. 40 serves to highlight the continued fast paced action where Elijah orders the people to seize the prophets of Baal after which he himself puts them to death, the verb being *shachat* which can be applied to making an offering. Note that Elijah does this at the Kishon brook, not on Mount Carmel, for that would defile the newly repaired altar to the Lord. For another meaning of this verb but not noted, cf. 10.16: “King Solomon made two hundred large shields of beaten gold.”

In vs. 41 Elijah addresses King Ahab who, as noted above, strangely hadn’t been mentioned throughout the drama that just unfolded before his eyes. As for Jezebel, she was far more shrewd and cunning than her husband, not daring to go near Mount Carmel but surely must have been informed of events there. Elijah seems to have impressed the king or at least stunned him. Then again, Ahab had to deal with the people which as vs. 39 recounts, converted to the Lord. The prophet bids Elijah to ascend Mount Carmel (he must have come down to witness Elijah slaughter the prophets at the brook Kishon) and there eat and drink. The incredible struggle just describes had taken places which seems to have lasted some days during which a fast was imposed. Now Ahab and everyone else could eat and drink. Once on the summit, the king did homage—actually he no other choice—but

in his heart had a dread of his wife Jezebel whom he'd have to inform sooner or later. As noted, she knew already. It was a matter of the two confronting each other face to face.

Elijah told Ahab to look out over the sea, the reason for which isn't given right away. Not only this, he was to do it seven times. Nevertheless, Ahab obeyed; he had to even if he didn't want to do so out of fear of the people still milling around on Carmel. Then at the seventh time Ahab looked out over the ocean he saw a small cloud rising up which made Elijah warn him to escape, for it signaled the coming of heavy rain. Thus the drought which Elijah had predicted as lasting an indefinite but surely "these years" in vs. 1 was at an end. Obviously he thought of the widow and her son. Now their unbroken supply of meal and oil would no longer be needed.

Chapter Eighteen concludes on a somewhat triumphant note for Elijah. He had predicted the drought, gave the widow and her son a constant supply of food during this drought, waged a dramatic struggle with some four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal on a mountain top, brought an end to the drought and more important for the long run, seemed to have converted King Ahab. Indeed as vs. 46 says literally, the "hand of the Lord was to (*el-*) Elijah." This divine hand enabled him to run before the king on his chariot with the approaching storm behind them both. While very impressive, both Elijah and Ahab had Jezebel up front waiting for them.

2) ra'ah, chazaq, 3) bayth, yare', me'od, 4) karath, 17) hakar, 18) hazav, 19) qavats, 21) nagash, pasach, sepipym, 27) hatal, qara', syach, 28) qara', 29) minchah, 30) nagash, haras, rapha', 37) savav, lev, 40) shachat

Chapter Nineteen

The conjunctive *v-* translated as "and" reveals both a sense of immediacy and foreboding. Immediacy in that it comes after Ahab rode back to Jezreel as quickly as possible and foreboding in that Jezebel steps onto stage. In his excitement tinged with a certain naivete Ahab informs his wife about what Elijah had done, including having slain the prophets of Baal. She could have stomached the first (destroying the prophets' altar, etc.) but the second? After all, according to 18.19 they were among those who ate at her table and must have been trusted confidants. Noticeably Ahab isn't mentioned as partaking of that table. The two seemed to have independent lives which overlapped here and there.

Vs. 2 begins with the conjunctive *v-* translated as "then" which shows the lightning-like response of Jezebel to Elijah. The concluding verse of the last chapter finds him at the gates of Jezreel, so he's nearby though most likely in hiding. Nevertheless, Jezebel is

confident that a letter will reach him which, it might be added, possibly was written in the presence of her husband in order to shame him. Furthermore, she may have given this letter to one of his bodyguards so as to intimidate him all the more. As for Elijah, no need to deal with him right now. The right time will come shortly. Jezebel penned the shortest and harshest letter she could muster, namely, that by this time tomorrow she'll make Elijah's life (*nephesh*, cf. 17.21) as those of the prophets he had slain. A footnote in the NIV parallels what amounts to a curse as found in 1Sam 3.17: "May God do so to you and more also if you hide anything from me of all that he told you."

The conjunctive *v*-beginning vs.3 translated as "then" reveals the intense, immediate terror that fell upon Elijah causing him to rise (*qum* suggestive of a near paralysis brought on by fear; cf. 17.9) and flee for his life (*nephesh*, cf. vs. 2). To say that the prophet was afraid (*yare'*, cf. 18.3) from what he had read is an understatement. When Elijah hastened to Beer-sheba he left his servant there, another indication of his intense anxiety. God only knows what happened to him. Despite the dramatic picture we have of Elijah on Mount Carmel, what we expect of a first-class prophet, a mere letter from Jezebel shows the immense dread she was capable of inspiring.

Elijah didn't feel sufficiently safe in Beer-sheba but took a day's journey into the wilderness, *midbar* (cf. 9.18 but not noted there), the verbal root of which is *davar*...one could call it a place of speaking where one is alone with God doing the *davar*. Having sought shelter under a tree not so much from the sun but from sheer exhaustion, Elijah asks for death. Surely thoughts of being by the brook Cherith came to his mind, that is, when he had fled King Ahab (cf. 17.3). In this case, however, there were no ravens to bring him food, but it turned out far better for him. During his bout of anxiety Elijah claimed to be no better than his fathers. Chances are that later in a not so dissimilar circumstance Jonah recalled his words: "Therefore now, O Lord, take my life from me, I beseech you, for it better for me to die than to live" [Jon 4.3].

Exhausted, Elijah fell asleep under the broom tree after which an angel touched him, *nagah* (cf. 6.27 but not noted there) also meaning to strike, so this was more than a simple pat on the back. It must have occurred during the day because the angel provided him with food and water after which he went right back to sleep...not out discourtesy for not having thanked the angel but from simple exhaustion. Now his role of prophesying meal and oil for the widow and her son is reversed, he being on the receiving end. Apparently the angel remained nearby, for he touched Elijah a second time, bidding to eat and drink more in preparation for a journey. Note the homey touch in an attempt to console Elijah: a cake baked on hot stones plus a jar of water. The two must have had a conversation although it isn't recorded, for Elijah was instructed (the text doesn't say outright) to go to Horeb, "the mount of God." The journey took the symbolic form of forty days and forty night which can be understood as a long time or well as being a sacred journey...a

pilgrimage...which was apt, given that the destination is Horeb where God had revealed himself to Moses. Obviously during his passage there Elijah entertained thoughts of Moses and the Israelites.

The conjunctive *v-* of vs. 9 as “and” intimates that mention of the forty day/night pilgrimage to Horeb in the previous verse until Elijah reached a cave was in a sense outside the bounds of space and time. He found himself transported there on the strength of one meal and drink offered by the angel in vs. 8, this normally being impossible across the Sinai desert. As for the cave, it seems to be at or around the base of Horeb, for vs. 11 has the Lord telling Elijah to ascend the mountain. Perhaps even Moses himself had taken refuge there, his presence filling that place. As for the verb *lun* for “lodge,” it means to spend the night as a passing guest. “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning” [Ps 30.5].

As soon as Elijah settled in (if one could do so in a cave), he didn’t have to wait long. First the *davar* of the Lord came and lingered a bit as a foretaste of that “still small voice” in vs. 12. Then the *davar* asked almost as though the Lord suddenly came across an unwelcomed guest, if not an intruder, “What are you doing here?” It startled Elijah, thinking that he would be welcomed with open arms as a prophet of the Lord. After all, he was acting presumptuously, Horeb being the Lord’s special turf and to him, no Moses after his cowardly response to Jezebel. In his defense Elijah blurted out that he was “very jealous” for the Lord, *qana’* being tinged with a sense of anger as well as zeal and used twice for emphasis. “And I will be jealous for my holy name” [Ezk 29.35]. He doesn’t manifest any awe or respect but comes across as pretty much self-centered, more concerned about himself.

Elijah shows his self-concern in what can be taken as a kind of speech, that is, Israel had forsaken (*hazav*, cf. 18.18) her covenant, killed the prophets and throws in the kicker, that he alone has survived. While true, it’s meant to appease the Lord and reaffirm his loyalty despite having fled Jezebel in shame, something he couldn’t shake off. The Lord listened and didn’t get into an argument. Instead, he told Elijah leave his cave and go to the top of the mountain. This came as a great relief, for he thought something like “Would I become a second Moses to the people of Israel, if not greater?”

Note that when Elijah reached the summit the Lord was waiting for him which is put as “before the Lord.” However, from what follows Elijah doesn’t seem to grasp the divine presence due to his self-centered attitude which needs to be shaken out of himself. Now the Lord decides to engage in something designed to impress him. He passes Elijah by (*havar*, cf. vs. 19 for a parallel sense of this verb) not unlike Moses: “I will make all my goodness *havar* before you and will proclaim before you my name “The Lord” [Ex 33.19]. In the verse at hand, what ensued was a wind (*ruach*, cf. 10.5) so strong that it rent the

mountains; however, the Lord was not in this wind. Immediately afterwards came an earthquake and fire with the same results. So we have a situation where the Lord *havar* Elijah so quickly that it's imperceptible, immense physical manifestations being the result. All this must have reminded Elijah of the fire from the Lord which came down and consumed his burnt offering on Mount Carmel. However, these were residual effects, if you will, of the *havar* of the Lord.

After the dramatic events on top of Mount Horeb there came a "still small voice." This phrase consists of the noun *qol* which is found next in vs. 13 as coming from the Lord. The two words modify it are *damamah* and *daq*, noun and adjective. The first means silence or stillness as pertaining to wind and has two other biblical references (Job 4.16 and Ps 107.29), the latter quoted because it has a similar application: "He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed." As for *daq*, it means that which is fine (as in dust particles), slender or thin. "But the multitude of your foes shall be like small dust." With this image in mind, it's almost as though the residual effects of wind, earthquake and fire were left floating in the air as minute particles.

Elijah heard the voice which compelled him to wrap his face in his mantle or *'adereth*, a wide garment, which meant he covered himself completely, not just put it up against his face. This is the same garment Elijah would soon cast over Elisha (cf. vs. 19). He, in turn, would assume the role of prophet right after Elijah was taken up into heaven on a chariot (cf. 2Kg 2.13). In the verse at hand Elijah goes to the cave's entrance, having been sheltered there that he might hear more clearly the still small voice, not difficult, given the complete silence of the desert. Then for a second time a voice (*qol*, cf. vs. 12) not specifically identified as the Lord's addresses him as to what he was doing there. As soon as Elijah heard it, he knew right away it was from the Lord who wanted to remind him that he was on his own sacred turf and not to speak presumptuously. As the Lord expected, this didn't sink in. Without missing a beat, Elijah blurted out as he had done a short time ago that he was jealous for the Lord, that Israel had forsaken the prophets, he being the sole survivor. So while telling the truth essentially speaking and despite his call as a prophet, Elijah was as obstinate and hard of hearing as the people of Israel had been throughout their history.

In vs. 15 things take a turn for the unexpected. Despite the manifestation of Elijah's close-mindedness, the Lord isn't fazed because he has in mind something much larger. His prophet set in motion a process where the people of Israel reconsidered their relationship with the Lord after the powerful divine display on Mount Carmel. However, that incident leaves us with a certain ambivalence. Will they stay with the Lord or once the excitement dies down and Jezebel starts to wield her influence, will they revert to the worship of Baal? That's what hangs in the balance.

The unexpected turn consists in the Lord having Elijah going to Damascus with the intent of anointing Hazael as king of Syria followed immediately by anointing Jehu as king over Israel. Despite both being arch-enemies, Elijah concurs to being an instrument of the Lord apparently without asking questions as to why this is so. Perhaps he was too embarrassed by his experience on Mount Horeb to ask the Lord. He was, to be sure in a delicate position of dealing with two arch enemies. In addition to these two rival monarchs, Elijah is to anoint someone hitherto unknown to become prophet in his place, Elisha. Again, no questioning on Elijah's part, his obedience to the Lord working in his favor. Note that the formal process of anointing (*mashach*, cf. 2.34) applies equally to kings and to prophets. Although Elijah was sent for this purpose, but it turned out that a delegate of Elisha is the one who did the anointing as recounted in Chapter Nine of Second Kings.

As for the hostile relationship between Hazael and Jehu, if a subject of one tries to make good his escape to the other, he will be put to death. Thus a vicious cycle is established which seems inescapable, all brought about by Israel's unfaithfulness to the Lord who saw clearly through the people's superficial conversion on Carmel. On the plus side, the Lord will spare seven thousand in Israel who haven't gone over to Baal, again inferring the influence of Jezebel. As for worship of Baal, it's put in terms of kissing him, that is, a mouth kissing an image of some kind.

In vs. 19 Elijah departs "from there" which seems at odds with having been at a place called Abel-meholah, the home of Elisha. At odds in the sense that Elijah had been anointed prophet-to-be there and now comes across him plowing a field. Immediately Elijah passes by (*havar*, cf. vs. 11) and casts over Elisha his mantle, this '*adereth* being the very same garment with which he had covered himself when approaching the cave's entrance (cf. vs. 13).

As with all these verses, vs. 20 begins with the conjunctive *v-* to show the quick paced action at hand. Elisha asks to kiss his parents before going off on an unknown mission with Elijah to which he responded, "Go back again; for what have I done to you?" This unexpected question seems to be a kind of test. However, it failed to stymie Elisha who proceeded to slay his twelve oxen, a way of manifesting his resolve. Not only did he accomplish that, he gave the meat to his people.

2) *nephesh*, 3) *qum*, *nephesh*, *yare'*, 4) *midbar*, 5) *nagah*, 9) *lun*, 10) *qana'*, *hazav*, 11) *havar*, *ruach*, 12) *qol*, *damamah*, *daq*, 13) '*adereth*, *qol*, 15) *mashach*, 19) *havar*, '*adereth*

Chapter Twenty

As expected, this new chapter begins with the conjunctive *v-* which isn't translated in the RSV and as "now" in the NIV. The intention, as often the case, is to show a close connection between what seems two disparate events which here is the contest on Mount Carmel and the invasion of Ben-hadad of Syria. Sandwiched in between them—in between the conjunctive *v*— is King Ahab. Naturally he was overcome by what he had witnessed and backed off from an attempt to kill Elijah. Then we have the ever present, even menacing presence of his wife, Jezebel. As for Elijah, he passes off the scene until 21.17 though his place is taken, if you will, by three anonymous prophets who help save the day for King Ahab.

Ben-hadad, king of Syria (cf. 15.18) had assembled a huge alliance of thirty-two kings made all the more impressive by adding horses and chariots, the super-weapons of the day. He besieges Samaria and sends messengers to King Ahab asking for silver gold and worse, wives and children as booty. Apparently he gives no other condition as to whether or not he'll spare anyone else. To make sure Ahab complies, Ben-hadad's messengers will search out every nook and cranny within the short time span of twenty-four hours. Obviously Ahab was in a precarious position and assembled the city elders telling them that Ben-hadad is seeking trouble, *rahah* (cf. 17.2) also meaning evil. Their advice? Do not comply with these demands. Some back and forth went on but with no resolution except war.

With disaster looming, from out of the blue a prophet appears, this suddenness communicated by the expression "behold" or *hineh* (cf. 14.10). Nothing is said of this mystery-man; if it were Elijah, we would know about it. Elisha is another possibility but then again, nothing...not even the merest association with these two prophets. As noted above, Elijah doesn't appear until 21.17. And so the fate of Israel rests in the hands of this prophet. At such a critical point, no one cares about his identity. As long as he can deliver.

In vs. 13 the prophet confidently tells King Ahab that the multitude he sees from on top the city gates will be given into his hands. *Hamon* is the noun for "multitude" which connotes sound or noise, very appropriate for the present circumstance. It's easy to imagine this *hamon* or tumultuous sound emanating from the Syrian camp which was in besiege mode. "For there is a sound of the rushing of rain" [18.41]. This anonymous mystery-man reveals his authenticity when he adds typical of true prophets, "and you shall know (*yadah*, cf. 8.60) that I am the Lord."

In response to the claim of victory "this day," King Ahab asks "By whom?" He wants to know who actually will bring about the defeat of Ben-hadad. The response is through servants of governors of the districts." Then without hesitation and full of anxiety Ahab adds another question, "Who shall begin the battle?", the response being a direct "You."

This was sufficient in Ahab's eyes who right away mustered his men. At noon or when the sun was hottest, they left the city and with the added help of reinforcements from Samaria, slew the Syrians. This caused Ben-hadad to flee. While the prophet and Ahab working in conjunction managed to pull off a resounding defeat, this was no time to rest. The prophet told Ahab to strengthen himself, *chazaq* (cf. 18.2) and make plans for the future. Ben-hadad is sure to return in the spring.

As predicted, King Ben-hadad returned in an attempt to take the land of Samaria. Some of his underlings pointed out the strength of the Israelites in terms of gods. That is to say, these gods belong to the hills which made them stronger than the Syrians so recently defeated. To counter this, the king ordered removal of his fellow kings for real commanders of the assembled forces. In that way, a fight on the plain or level ground will give the Syrians the upper hand...or so they thought.

In vs. 26 Ben-hadad besieges the city of Aphek just as he had done with the unidentified city of Samaria which opens this chapter. However, the Israelites mustered themselves (*paqad*, cf. 11.28) well in advance and demonstrated their confidence in victory by leaving the safety of the city and going out before the Syrians. Despite this incredibly bold move, the Israelites are compared to two little flocks of goats. Then in vs. 28 a "man of God"—a second such person—comes on the scene who may or may not be the same anonymous prophet in vs. 13, irrelevant in light of the renewed crisis at hand. Nevertheless he proves himself true by saying that the Lord will deliver the Syrians into the hands of King Ahab. Again as in vs. 13 and more importantly, he will know (*yadah*, cf. vs. 13) that I am the Lord." After a pause of seven days while each side tried to size the other one up the battle took place with Israel achieving yet another stunning defeat.

Somehow King Ben-hadad made good a second escape and fled into the city of Aphek, more specifically into an inner chamber, *cheder* (cf. 1.15). This reads literally as "a chamber within a chamber." While taking refuge unbeknown to the Israelites, his servants encouraged him to surrender because their kings are noted for being merciful, literally as "kings of mercy" or *chesed* (cf. 8.22). Apparently Ben-hadad took their advice and presented himself to King Ahab clothed in a kind of penitential garb, his servants included.

What the servants communicated to their master cowering in a hidden chamber proved to be true. To Ben-hadad's extreme relief Ahab calls him his brother while others were looking on with the intent of finding an omen, this being rendered by the verb *nachash* which means to hiss or whisper as well as to practice enchantments. "And they divinization and sorcery and sold themselves to do evil in the slight of the Lord, provoking him to anger" [2Kg 17.17]. While doing this, others who probably were servants of Ben-hadad saw in Ahab's face a positive sign, for he asked him to come out of hiding and join him in his

personal chariot. Ben-hadad didn't waste a moment, telling Ahab that he intends to restore cities which his father had taken, etc. And so the king of Israel agreed, after which the two made a covenant, allowing Ben-hadad to go free.

The remaining verses of this chapter concern yet another unidentified prophet, this being the third incident. He belongs to a fellowship loosely called "sons of the prophets" who bids a fellow member to strike him dead. He refused, after which a lion attacked and killed him as predicted. Then the prophet approached a second man who struck him but without dealing a mortal blow. Finally in an act of desperation this "certain man" as he's called in vs. 35 waits for King Ahab to pass by and after taking off a bandage from his eyes used as a disguise, rebukes him soundly for having spared Ben-hadad. Ahab had agreed to have his enemy "devoted to destruction" or *cherem* which implies dedicating to the Lord. *Cherem* is used famously by Joshua with regard to Jericho: "And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction" [Jos 6.17].

And so Chapter Twenty concludes on a somber note with Ahab leaving this unidentified prophet and returning home resentful and sullen, *sar* and *zaheph*. The former has two other biblical references, 21.4 and 5 whereas the latter one, 21.4. To his credit he didn't slay the man which just might bring him bad luck. No matter, it came his way. Ahab's condition now sets the stage for Jezebel to come out of the shadows and exercise her almost diabolical role over her husband.

7) rahah, 13) hineh, hamon, yadah, 22) chazaq, 28) paqad, yadah, 30) cheder, 31) chesed, 33) nachash, 42) cherem, 43, sar, zaheph

Chapter Twenty-One

The RSV translates the conjunctive *v*- beginning this chapter as "now" whereas it reads literally as "and was after these things" or *davar*. In other words, the exhausted and haggard King Ahab barely had an interval of rest. Now he has to deal with a more personal matter compared with the larger issue of Syria. A neighbor of the king named Naboth had a vineyard close to the royal palace. To date there seemed to be no problem, the two parties barely paying attention to each other. One day perhaps simply on a whim or to relieve his anxiety King Ahab decided to extend his vegetable garden by annexing his neighbor's vineyard. Naboth refused, claiming that it was a paternal inheritance or *nachalah* (cf. 12.16); perhaps it extended way before Israel had a king, that is, prior to Saul. He declined despite being offered what seems to be a fair sum of money. Admittedly Naboth had a lot of courage to do this with the ruler of his country and awareness of the king's cunning wife.

After Naboth declined the offer, Ahab became vexed and sullen, *sar* and *zaheph* as noted in 20.43, indicative of the same slump he had experienced after being rebuked for having let go Ben-hadad of Syria. In other words, his deep-seated depression hadn't gone away but reappeared as manifested by taking no food and laying on his bed face to the wall. Now the perfect stage is set for his manipulative wife Jezebel to come in and take over which she does promptly and ruthlessly.

Jezebel asks why Ahab's spirit or *ruach* (cf. 19.11) was in such a condition, obviously well aware of the reason. It was her way worming herself into the situation and take advantage of her husband. If she could do this now at his weakest, it'd be one easy step to get control of the nation of Israel and bend it to her will. After listening to Ahab air his complaint Jezebel comes off with a rebuke: "Do you now govern Israel?" Then she bids him to take food while she goes off to present him with Naboth's vineyard. Apparently Ahab was too stunned and afraid of his wife to do anything. His initial offering to purchase the land was fair enough but to snatch it away was something else. At least this incident shows Ahab had a conscience compared with his wife.

Jezebel proceeded to do what she does best, work behind the scenes ultimately for her own advantage, not at all interested in whether her husband is paying attention. He was unable to intervene even if he desired. She writes a whole slew of letters to leaders of the city, using the royal seal which means Ahab has approved them. In fact, she had a fast proclaimed (*tsum*, cf. vs. 12) while asking Naboth to be set "on high among the people." *R'osh* is the noun here, literally "at the head (or top) of the people." Usually a fast is associated with a religious event or some existential threat to the nation, the reason for which isn't spelled out for the people in general. Only officials were privy as to Jezebel's intentions. They had to comply or face either death or expulsion. So with Naboth front and center, he becomes the culprit whose traitorous deed will be made known. Chances are Naboth was well respected among his peers which made everyone wonder why he had been singled out. Obviously this would draw a crowd out of curiosity.

Once everyone had assembled, Jezebel arranged for two unsavory characters to level a charge against Naboth. The phrase *beney-belyhal* is used, "sons of Belial," this term later personified as the devil. Based ever so loosely on his refusal to give up the vineyard, these two claimed that Naboth had "cursed God and the king." "I will not set before my eyes anything that is base" [Ps 101.3]. Everyone knew these two as scoundrels but were powerless to do anything about it because Jezebel was in the background; not present but certainly had her network of spies among the people. As for the verb "curse," its *barak* which more familiarly means to bless (cf. 8.56). The fundamental idea behind this verb is to bend the knee as a form of worship or giving assent. "For the wicked boasts of the

desires of his heart, and the man greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord” [Ps 10.3].

Just about everyone knew the gossip circulating of how King Ahab wanted to annex Naboth’s vineyard, the property of both being so close to each other. Throughout these sham proceedings people knew that Ahab had been traumatized through being cursed by the third anonymous prophet for having let go their sworn enemy, Ben-hadad of Syria. In a sense he too was being condemned but conveniently left out of the picture thanks to his conniving wife. The consequence of this “trial” is well known, Naboth ended up by being stoned to death outside the city which means outside the *qahal* or community. Jezebel, of course, was absent from all this and was informed that the deed had been done. Perhaps later on the then known Saul couldn’t get this image out of his mind as he condoned and watch Stephen being stoned to death. To be identified with Jezebel, even so slightly, must have given him nightmares.

When Jezebel informed her husband that the deed had been done (Ahab possibly watching at a distance from a palace window), he didn’t delay in taking possession of Naboth’s vineyard. Ahab did this with considerable guilt coupled with an even greater fear of his wife who might turn on him at any moment.

In vs. 17 the *davar* of the Lord came to Elijah telling him to hasten to meet King Ahab who already is in Naboth’s vineyard, looking it over possibly with some misgiving. Elijah complied and confronted the king with harsh words as to his fate. That is to say, dogs will lick up his blood just as they have done with that of Naboth. As for Jezebel, Elijah had an almost morbid fear of her so confronted Ahab without her knowing it. The condemnation coming from the Lord through the prophet consists in Ahab having sold himself to what is evil in the Lord’s eyes. It may be put better as having sold himself to the real culprit of evil in his eyes, Jezebel.

Elijah continues speaking with Ahab by launching into a tirade about his fate (surely he’d never do this with Jezebel). The evil or *raha* (cf. 20.7) about to come down upon the king consists of sweeping him utterly away, *bahar* (cf. 14.10) also as to consume with fire, to exterminate in the fullest sense possible. Next comes cutting (*karath*, cf. 18.4) off every male, free or slave which means no descendants to assume the throne. Finally the Lord will make his house as that of Jeroboam and Basasha who not only had provoked the Lord to anger (*kahas*, cf. 16.31) but provoked Israel to sin. All this, of course, is directed equally at Jezebel, again revealing Elijah’s fear to confront the real source of evil even though he adds that dogs shall eat her. To top off all this condemnation, Elijah throws in that those belonging to Ahab will perish, either inside the city or outside it.

Both the RSV and NIV have vss. 25 and 26 in parentheses, a way of topping off the saga of Ahab which needs to be brought to a resolution which happens in the next chapter. The first verse is a brief note as to the evil which Ahab had done...not just that but he had sold himself to do evil in the sight (literally, eyes) of the Lord. In fairness to him, it adds that Jezebel had incited him, *suth* being the verb. “If it is the Lord who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering” [1Sam 26.19]. Then to close, vs. 26 adds that Ahab had acted abominably, *tahav* also as to act shamefully. “The Lord abhors bloodthirsty and deceitful men” [Ps 5.6]. Such *tahav* is aggravated by going after idols, *gilulym* (cf. 15.9)...not just worshiping them but actively promoting them. Again, the influence of Jezebel isn’t to be dismissed, so Ahab may be partly off the hook in this regard. Such *gilulym* were worshiped by the Amorites whom the Israelites had cast out (cf. Gn 15.6).

Vs. 27 shows as earlier instances that Ahab had a conscience, for as soon as he heard the *davar* of Elija, he put on sackcloth and went about in a dejected manner, ‘*at* being an adverb meaning softly or gently. Such a posture caught everyone’s eye, knowing that their king wasn’t ultimately responsible. ‘*At* has three other biblical references, one of which is Is 8.6: “The waters of Shiloah that flow gently.” Obviously the Lord was keeping a close eye on Ahab, for he remarks to Elijah by way of his *davar* that the king had humbled himself, *kanah* also as to subdue. “When the Lord saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the Lord came to Shemaiah” [2Chron 12.7]. This moved the Lord not to bring evil upon Ahab but to postpone it to his son. In a sense, such guilt should belong to Jezebel who doesn’t meet her fate quite yet, but the royal lineage is handed down through the father.

3) nachalah, 4) ruach, 9) tsum, ro’sh, 10) belyhal, barak, 21) rahah, bahar, karath, 22) kahash, 25) suth, 26) tahav, gilulym, 27), ‘at, 29) kanah

Chapter Twenty-Two

This final chapter begins with the expected conjunctive *v-* which is rendered as “for” and serves to connect Ahab’s humiliating rebuke by Elijah and a renewal of with war between Israel and Syria. This time Ahab makes an alliance with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah which, despite the external threat, bodes well for reunification of the two kingdoms. The fact that Ahab’s proper name isn’t used until vs. 20 may tie into his continued propensity for alien gods, the author preferring to omit it out of embarrassment.

In vs. 5 Jehoshaphat bids the king of Israel to first inquire for the *davar* of the Lord, *darash* being the verb which as noted with regard to 14.5 fundamentally means to tread, as though making constant ins and outs from the temple to offer prayers, etc. Jehoshaphat puts the request squarely to Ahab, almost to test him with regard to this *darash* of the

divine *davar*. Without missing a beat and to the dismay of Jehoshaphat, the king of Israel gathers some four hundred prophets. Chances are he opted for their consultation out of fear of Jezebel whose prophets Elijah had slain after the contest on Mount Carmel. Apparently these prophets had their base in Bethel (cf. 12.28+). The question put to them: should I, that is, Ahab, go into battle or not? Their response was not only yes but ironically done in the name of the Lord.

Jehoshaphat felt something wasn't quite right with this overwhelming consensus plus the prophets bringing in the Lord which is why he asked if there was another prophet to consult. He knew the answer but wanted to lead on Ahab who almost sheepishly mentions Micaiah. It seems his introduction is independent of Elijah and Elisha. Chances are three knew each other, but nothing is said of this. What's important is the continued struggle between the Lord and alien gods in one form or another. Despite his unsavory character, Ahab reveals a straight-forward manner which isn't devious (like his wife). He admits to not liking Micaiah because never did he prophesy anything good on his behalf. And so Micaiah is brought before the two kings all decked out and holding court at the entrance of the gate of Samaria. Perhaps they were engaged in other business such as hammering out an alliance to go against Syria or to impress the four hundred prophets in their company. Vs. 10 says that they were prophesying before the two kings which must have been quite a sight, a kind of Babel in miniature. Jehoshaphat must have been annoyed and Ahab pretty much the same but then again, Jezebel's influence, while out of the picture, was lurking in the background.

Finally Micaiah come on the scene which must have silenced the din made by these prophets. He walked in and before speaking, the messenger who went to fetch him intervened. Micaiah would concur with advice of the prophets. Then the king of Israel asked him point blank whether he and his ally should join battle with the Syrians. Micaiah answered positively. Given Ahab's previous bad luck with this prophet, he pressed him further. The response? Micaiah saw the entire nation of Israel scattered over the mountains as sheep without a shepherd. In other words, the battle will result not only in Israel's defeat but in the death of Ahab.

In vs. 19 comes right out with the true prophetic "Therefore hear the *davar* of the Lord." He proceeds with a vision of the Lord on his throne surrounded by the host of heaven, perhaps having in mind the two kings on their thrones surrounded by the four hundred prophets. The Lord asks one in his presence to entice Ahab, *patah* fundamentally meaning to spread out, to be open. "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent" [Prov 1.10]. The intent is to lure Ahab into battle where he will fall. To this question put to the heavenly host a spirit (*ruach*, cf. 21.4) comes forth for the task. This scene is reminiscent of the

“sons of God” who presented themselves before the Lord in the Book of Job. Satan is among them and is dispatched to try Job which he does with zeal and determination.

The Lord asks this spirit how he’ll go about the task and responds by saying that he will be a lying spirit...a *ruach* which is *sheqer* or a noun meaning falsehood or vanity. “Behold, the wicked man conceives evil and is pregnant with mischief and brings forth lies” [Ps 7.14]. Not only this, but it will be in the mouths of the four hundred prophets. And so Micaiah concludes his vision with the words that the Lord has spoken evil (*rahah*, cf. 21.21) literally upon you, that is, King Ahab.

Incensed, Zedekiah struck Micaiah, he being the one who had made horns of iron for the two kings, symbolic of pushing the Syrians back until they are destroyed (cf. vs. 11). Zedekiah exclaimed that he had the *Ruach* (capital ‘r;’ cf. vs. 21 of the Lord which supposedly went from him to Micaiah. The prophet of the Lord wasted no time in rebuking him after which the king ordered him to be seized and tossed into prison which didn’t bother him in the slightest. His final words to Ahab were that if he returned from battle in peace (*shalom*, cf. 5.12), it proves that the Lord hadn’t spoken (*davar*) to him.

The concluding verses of this last chapter of First Kings detail the prophecy of Micaiah. Ahab was slain in battle with Elijah’s words in 21.19 coming true, that is to say, dogs licked the blood of Ahab and harlots washed themselves in the pool of Samaria into which this blood spilled. As for Jehoshaphat, he followed in the footsteps of his father Asa (cf. 15.9-14); rather, he didn’t turn away from them while doing what was right (*yashar*, cf. 15.9) in the Lord’s eyes. At the same time the high places remained which was a perennial problem for all succeeding prophets. Most importantly, however, he made peace (*shalam*, cf. 7.51) with the king of Israel.

The remaining verses deal with the succession of Ahab’s son, Ahaziah. Ominously foreshadowing the re-emergence of Jezebel, he walked not only in the way of his father but his mother. In fact, the very last verse has him serving Baal and provoking (*kahas*, cf. 21.22) the Lord. Thus the verb *kahas* brings to full circle the prophecy by Nathan to King David about the sword never departing his house as a result of causing the death of Uriah and taking his wife Bathsheba. This set in motion a whole series of tragic events not confined to David’s reign but transmitted, at least in First Kings, to son Solomon and then on to his successors up until Ahaziah, the son of Ahab.

A few brief observations about this document on First Kings...

Much ado has been made about the conjunctive *v-* generally translated as “and” and sometimes not at all. This is noted briefly in the Introduction. It’s prefaced to practically

every new sentence as a means to show the close connection between what had just occurred and what's going on in the verse succeeding it. With this in mind, the conjunctive *v-* may be said to be instrumental, albeit in a hidden way, of handing down Nathan's prophecy through a succession of Israel's kings. If we want to extend it even further back, it can be traced to the expulsion of Adam from the Garden of Eden and the impact of that rebellion on all succeeding generations. In fact, the stage is set for Second Kings where the very first word is this conjunctive.

And so the tragedy unfolds. In time most Israelites except the prophets had forgotten about how they had been infected with this pernicious heritage. That implies they're pretty much helpless to rectify the situation. Perhaps some inquiring mind decided to go a bit further back than Nathan when Israel had asked for a king "to govern us like all the nations" [1Sam 8.5]. This really incensed the Lord who said through Samuel that "they have rejected me from being king over them" [vs. 7].

It seems, then, that this request plus Nathan's prophecy are linked intimately. In conclusion, a vague but persistent feeling is left that something has to give. Memories from the past cannot be left to fester. In this way the tiny conjunctive *v-* as an agent to transmit memories from one incident to another and from one generation to the next, needs to be broken. Things can't continue indefinitely. From the Christian point of view, many centuries later the final resolution appears with Jesus Christ who will lift Israel onto a whole new level as a template for a new Israel, the Church. Even though the Church will be affected with all sorts of tragedies, it's larger than one nation (Israel) and has the ability to rebound more readily.

5) darash, 20) patah, 21) ruach, 23) rahah, 24) ruach, 28) shalom, 43) yashar, 44) shalam, 53) kahash

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