

FIRST KINGS 12-22
&
SECOND CHRONICLES 10-20

¹Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. ²When Jeroboam son of Nebat heard of it (he was still in Egypt, where he had fled from King Solomon), Jeroboam returned from Egypt. ³They sent for him; and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and said to Rehoboam, ⁴"Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke that he placed on us, and we will serve you." ⁵He said to them, "Go away for three days, then come again to me." So the people went away.

⁶King Rehoboam took counsel with the elders who had served his father Solomon while he was still alive: "How do you advise me to answer this people?" ⁷They replied: "If you will be a servant to this people today and serve them, and speak good words to them when you answer them, then they will be your servants forever."

⁸But he disregarded the advice that the elders gave him, and consulted with the young men who had grown up with him and now served him. ⁹He said to them: "What do you advise that we answer this people who have said to me, 'Lighten the yoke that your father put on us?'" ¹⁰The young men who had grown up with him said to him, "To this people who said to you, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you must lighten it for us', you should say, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's loins. ¹¹ My father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.'"

As Solomon's son, Rehoboam inherited the throne of Judah. He had to go to Israel (Shechem) to be crowned king of the northern kingdom.

Solomon built his kingdom on taxation and forced labour. Jerusalem was his capital on the border between Judah and Benjamin. The people of these two tribes were in no position to resist the power of the state even if they wanted to. The other tribes, however, had been part of the united kingdom for only two generations. They did not intend to break away, but they were determined to use their bargaining power to get a better deal from the young king.

Jeroboam returned from exile in Egypt to lead the negotiations.

Solomon's son, Rehoboam, ignores the advice of the more experienced counsellors, and listens to those who were as inexperienced as himself. The power and wealth of the kingdom had brought advancement to these young men, and they were unaware of the price that was being paid through the overriding of the values that gave Israel its identity.

Foolishly, the young counsellors underestimate the determination of the people of Israel, and advise the king to bully them into submission.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler copies these verses (2Chronicles 10:1-11).

Jeroboam follows the advice of his young councillors.

The Deuteronomists see in this the hand of God (verse 15), who brought about in this way what he had said through the prophet from Shiloh (see 11:31-32). We are reminded of the claim that Pharaoh refused to let the people of Israel leave Egypt because God hardened his heart in order to be able to manifest his power (see Exodus 4:21). This fits with the assumption that is general throughout the Older Testament that God is the ultimate determiner of whatever decisions people make (see pages 32-33; see also 2Samuel 17:14).

Israel's response is the same as their earlier response in rejecting David's rule (see 2Samuel 20:2).

Rehoboam carries out his threat and sends Adoram (see 2Samuel 20:24) to make the yoke of forced labour even heavier. They stone him to death, and Rehoboam flees from Shechem back to Jerusalem.

The split between the northern tribes of Israel and Judah was never healed (verse 19).

The Chronicler

The Chronicler copies these verses (2Chronicles 10:12-19).

¹²Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had said, "Come to me again the third day." ¹³The king answered the people harshly. He disregarded the advice that the elders had given him ¹⁴and spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions."

¹⁵The king did not listen to the people, because it was a turn of affairs brought about by YHWH that he might fulfil his word, which YHWH had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam son of Nebat.

¹⁶When all Israel saw that the king would not listen to them, the people answered the king, "What share do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, O David." So Israel went away to their tents.

¹⁷But Rehoboam reigned over the Israelites who were living in the towns of Judah. ¹⁸When King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was taskmaster over the forced labour, all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam then hurriedly mounted his chariot to flee to Jerusalem.

¹⁹Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

Jeroboam is king of Israel

20When all Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel.

There was no one who followed the house of David, except the tribe of Judah alone.

21When Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, one hundred eighty thousand chosen troops, to fight against the house of Israel, and restore the kingdom to Rehoboam son of Solomon. 22But the word of God came to Shemaiah the man of God: 23Say to King Rehoboam of Judah, son of Solomon, and to all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people, 24"Thus says YHWH, You shall not go up or fight against your kindred the people of Israel. Let everyone go home, for this thing is from me." So they heeded the word of YHWH and went home again, according to the word of YHWH.

Not unexpectedly Israel made Jeroboam king (verse 20). This detail is not mentioned by the Chronicler (though see 2Chronicles 5:17; 13:1)

The house of David rules only the tribe of Judah (verse 20). It is clear from verse 21 that the small tribe of Benjamin which borders on Jerusalem is considered part of Judah.

Rehoboam determines to take military action, but is persuaded otherwise by the prophet Shemaiah who declares that the split is YHWH's doing (verse 24). Shemaiah appears only in this scene.

The Hebrew 'elep, translated 'thousand' in verse 21, probably referred to a military unit, based on the number of fighting men a family could contribute.

It is essential that we remember that the account of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel that we find in the remaining chapters of Kings is written from the perspective of the Deuteronomists in Judah after the fall of Israel. A careful reading of the texts reveals indications that Israel, not Judah, was the dominant state in Canaan. This fits with the archeological evidence gathered since the 1980's. The topography of Judah meant that it could never rival the north in agriculture. It had a much smaller population and fewer developed urban centres.

The 'Golden Age' of 'unification' of the north and south under David and Solomon is an invention of seventh century Judah, and is an expression, not of historical fact, but of the ambitions of King Josiah of Judah. Israel was the dominant power, and Judah became significant only when Israel collapsed, and refugees from the north streamed south. It was only then that Jerusalem became a significant urban centre and that larger satellite towns developed.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler copies straight from 1Kings (2Chronicles 11:1-4).

The Chronicler is not interested in what happened in the northern kingdom, Israel.

He omits the account of Jeroboam on the opposite page and substitutes a section on Rehoboam (2Chronicles 11:5-23, see pages 90-91).

As described by the Deuteronomists, the first thing that Jeroboam does is to set up two of Israel's ancient shrines as places for cult. Obviously the people of Israel cannot continue to go to the temple in Jerusalem without coming under the power of Rehoboam. Genesis associates Jacob with Shechem (see Genesis 35:4). It was at Shechem that Joshua formed the tribal confederacy (see Joshua 24:1, 25). We have just heard that Rehoboam went to Shechem to be made king over all Israel (see 1Kings 12:1). Peniel is associated with Jacob when he first entered the promised land (see Genesis 32:31).

The calves of gold perform the same function as the cherubim in the Jerusalem temple (see 1Kings 8:3-13). They represent the throne of the invisible YHWH. However it is here that the agenda of the Deuteronomists reveals itself. Throughout their writings they insist on having one central place for religious cult (obviously the temple). They declare Jeroboam's action a 'sin' (verse 30). They write in such a way to bring to mind the Canaanite bulls of Baal, as well as the story of the golden calf which Aaron built for the people when they despaired of Moses ever coming down from the mountain (see Exodus 32; also Deuteronomy 9:21). Jeroboam's words in verse 28 echo Aaron's words in Exodus 32:4.

The Deuteronomists find another criticism in Jeroboam's actions: he appointed priests who were not Levites (verse 31; forbidden by Deuteronomy 18:1-8). In the Exodus story it was the Levites who rallied to Moses' call and slaughtered the unfaithful Israelites (see Exodus 32:25-29).

For the Deuteronomists YHWH's rejection of Israel (made clear by its destruction two hundred years later) started here (see 2Kings 17:16).

²⁵Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim, and resided there; he went out from there and built Peniel.

²⁶Then Jeroboam said to himself, "Now the kingdom may well revert to the house of David. ²⁷If this people continues to go up to offer sacrifices in the house of YHWH at Jerusalem, the heart of this people will turn again to their master, King Rehoboam of Judah; they will kill me and return to King Rehoboam of Judah."

²⁸So the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold. He said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." ²⁹He set one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. ³⁰And this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one at Bethel and before the other as far as Dan.

³¹He also made houses on high places, and appointed priests from among all the people, who were not Levites.

³²Jeroboam appointed a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the festival that was in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar; so he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made. ³³He went up to the altar that he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, in the month that he alone had devised; he appointed a festival for the people of Israel, and he went up to the altar to offer incense.

⁵Rehoboam resided in Jerusalem, and he built cities for defense in Judah.

⁶He built up Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa, ⁷Beth-zur, Soco, Adullam, ⁸Gath, Mareshah, Ziph, ⁹Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah, ¹⁰Zorah, Aijalon, and Hebron, fortified cities that are in Judah and in Benjamin. ¹¹He made the fortresses strong, and put commanders in them, and stores of food, oil, and wine. ¹²He also put large shields and spears in all the cities, and made them very strong. So he held Judah and Benjamin.

¹³The priests and the Levites who were in all Israel presented themselves to him from all their territories. ¹⁴The Levites had left their common lands and their holdings and had come to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons had prevented them from serving as priests of YHWH, ¹⁵and had appointed his own priests for the high places, and for the goat-demons, and for the calves that he had made.

¹⁶Those who had set their hearts to seek YHWH God of Israel came after them from all the tribes of Israel to Jerusalem to sacrifice to YHWH, the God of their ancestors. ¹⁷They strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and for three years they made Rehoboam son of Solomon secure, for they walked for three years in the way of David and Solomon.

The Chronicler

In verses 6-10 the Chronicler indulges his penchant for lists.

On page 89 we read in 1Kings that Jeroboam appointed priests who were not Levites (see 1Kings 12:31; also 13:33). The Chronicler has the Levites from the north coming to Jerusalem. He notes the calves that Jeroboam erected (see 1Kings 12:28-30) and throws in 'goat demons' (satyrs) for good measure (verse 15). The Chronicler's bias in favour of Judah is obvious. The kingdom of Israel can do nothing right.

He also paints a picture of people from Israel who wanted to remain faithful to the covenant coming south with the Levites and strengthening Judah.

The Chronicler

‘Mahalath’(verse 18) is said to be a granddaughter of king David through one of David’s sons, Jerimoth. Her mother is named as Abihail, a daughter of David’s brother, Eliab (see 1Samuel 17:13). Verse 18 is the only time Mahalath, Jerimoth and Abihail are mentioned in the Bible. The Chronicler is keen to provide a strong pedigree for Rehoboam’s children.

On ‘Maacah daughter of Absalom’(verse 21) see 1Kings 15:2, where her son, Abijah (called ‘Abijam’) is also mentioned.

¹⁸Rehoboam took as his wife Mahalath daughter of Jerimoth son of David, and of Abihail daughter of Eliab son of Jesse. ¹⁹She bore him sons: Jeush, Shemariah, and Zaham. ²⁰After her he took Maacah daughter of Absalom, who bore him Abijah, Attai, Ziza, and Shelomith. ²¹Rehoboam loved Maacah daughter of Absalom more than all his other wives and concubines (he took eighteen wives and sixty concubines, and became the father of twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters).

²²Rehoboam appointed Abijah son of Maacah as chief prince among his brothers, for he intended to make him king. ²³He dealt wisely, and distributed some of his sons through all the districts of Judah and Benjamin, in all the fortified cities; he gave them abundant provisions, and found many wives for them.

¹While Jeroboam was standing by the altar to offer incense, a man of God came out of Judah by the word of YHWH to Bethel ²and proclaimed against the altar by the word of YHWH, and said, "O altar, altar, thus says YHWH: 'A son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name; and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who offer incense on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.'"

³He gave a sign the same day, saying, "This is the sign that YHWH has spoken: 'The altar shall be torn down, and the ashes that are on it shall be poured out.'"

⁴When the king heard what the man of God cried out against the altar at Bethel, Jeroboam stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, "Seize him!" But the hand that he stretched out against him withered so that he could not draw it back to himself. ⁵The altar also was torn down, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign that the man of God had given by the word of YHWH.

⁶The king said to the man of God, "Entreat now the favour of YHWH your God, and pray for me, so that my hand may be restored to me." So the man of God entreated YHWH; and the king's hand was restored to him, and became as it was before.

⁷Then the king said to the man of God, "Come home with me and dine, and I will give you a gift." ⁸But the man of God said to the king, "If you give me half your kingdom, I will not go in with you; nor will I eat food or drink water in this place. ⁹For thus I was commanded by the word of YHWH: You shall not eat food, or drink water, or return by the way that you came." ¹⁰So he went another way, and did not return by the way that he had come to Bethel.

Bethel was at the extreme south of Israel just near the border with Judah. It had a long history as a sacred shrine reaching back to Jacob's dream there (Genesis 28:10-22). For anyone who favoured the temple in Jerusalem it was seen as a threat.

A stranger from Judah laying claim to being a prophet ('a man of God', verses 1 and 18) announces that a future king of Judah, namely Josiah (a favourite of the Deuteronomic School), will slaughter the priests at Bethel (verse 2). This happens 300 years later (see 2Kings 23:15-20).

The story is full of mystery. Whoever was ultimately responsible for it, its impact is to put the northern kingdom on notice.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler omits the whole of 1Kings 13.

The story gets stranger. Enter an 'old prophet'(verse 11), who seeks out the 'man of God' and invites him to come back to Bethel and receive hospitality.

The man of God responds as he had earlier responded to Jeroboam. YHWH has told him not to accept hospitality from schismatic Northerners (verse 16; repeating verse 9).

Now another strange twist. The old prophet of Bethel deceives the man of God from Judah, claiming that he has been told by YHWH to bring him back with him (verse 18). The 'prophets' of the northern kingdom cannot be trusted any more than their leaders! At least that seems to be the point made by the Deuteronomists.

The man of God falls for the deception. In so doing he ends up disobeying God's command, and he is killed by a lion (verse 24).

So it is not the northern prophet who is punished for his deception. It is the southern man of God who trusted the prophet, and in doing so disobeyed God!

If this is all strange, there is more to come.

11Now there lived an old prophet in Bethel. One of his sons came and told him all that the man of God had done that day in Bethel; the words also that he had spoken to the king, they told to their father. **12**Their father said to them, "Which way did he go?" And his sons showed him the way that the man of God who came from Judah had gone. **13**Then he said to his sons, "Saddle a donkey for me." So they saddled a donkey for him, and he mounted it. **14**He went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an terebinth. He said to him, "Are you the man of God who came from Judah?" He answered, "I am." **15**Then he said to him, "Come home with me and eat some food." **16**But he said, "I cannot return with you, or go in with you; nor will I eat food or drink water with you in this place; **17**for it was said to me by the word of YHWH: You shall not eat food or drink water there, or return by the way that you came." **18**Then the other said to him, "I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of YHWH: Bring him back with you into your house so that he may eat food and drink water." But he was deceiving him. **19**Then the man of God went back with him, and ate food and drank water in his house. **20**As they were sitting at the table, the word of YHWH came to the prophet who had brought him back; **21**and he proclaimed to the man of God who came from Judah, "Thus says YHWH: Because you have disobeyed the word of YHWH, and have not kept the commandment that YHWH your God commanded you, **22**but have come back and have eaten food and drunk water in the place of which he said to you, 'Eat no food, and drink no water,' your body shall not come to your ancestral tomb." **23**After the man of God had eaten food and had drunk, they saddled for him a donkey belonging to the prophet who had brought him back. **24**Then as he went away, a lion met him on the road and killed him. His body was thrown in the road, and the donkey stood beside it; the lion also stood beside the body.

The northern shrines are under a curse

²⁵People passed by and saw the body thrown in the road, with the lion standing by the body. And they came and told it in the town where the old prophet lived. ²⁶When the prophet who had brought him back from the way heard of it, he said, "It is the man of God who disobeyed the word of YHWH; therefore YHWH has given him to the lion, which has torn him and killed him according to the word that YHWH spoke to him."

²⁷Then he said to his sons, "Saddle a donkey for me." So they saddled one, ²⁸and he went and found the body thrown in the road, with the donkey and the lion standing beside the body. The lion had not eaten the body or attacked the donkey. ²⁹The prophet took up the body of the man of God, laid it on the donkey, and brought it back to the city, to mourn and to bury him. ³⁰He laid the body in his own grave; and they mourned over him, saying, "Alas, my brother!"

³¹After he had buried him, he said to his sons, "When I die, bury me in the grave in which the man of God is buried; lay my bones beside his bones. ³²For the saying that he proclaimed by the word of YHWH against the altar in Bethel, and against all the houses of the high places that are in the cities of Samaria, shall surely come to pass."

³³Even after this event Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way, but made priests for the high places again from among all the people; any who wanted to be priests he consecrated for the high places. ³⁴This matter became sin to the house of Jeroboam, so as to cut it off and to destroy it from the face of the earth.

When news of the killing comes to the old prophet he recognises that what has happened is of God. Disobedience cannot go unpunished (verse 26).

'The lion had not eaten the body or attacked the donkey' (verse 28).

The old prophet knows that God's word must be respected. He sees that the curse uttered by the man of God from Judah 'shall surely come to pass' (verse 32), and so he makes sure that the one who was the vehicle for this revelation is buried in an honourable way (verse 30).

However strange the story, it is full of divine foreboding. Once again the cult of Israel is named as 'sin' (verse 34; see 12:30).

We have been told that it was God's will that Israel separate from Judah (12:24). God's promise to Jeroboam resembles that given to David himself (see 11:37-38).

The kingdom of Israel lasted only two hundred years. The Deuteronomists trace its failure back to its cult. It is this judgment that is behind this strange anecdote, and it will continue to haunt Israel.

What ultimately prevails is God's will, however incomprehensible and strange it may appear to us..

For the first time we hear of Jeroboam's son, Abijah. When Abijah falls sick Jeroboam sends his wife to consult with the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh (verse 2).

The Chronicler

The Chronicler omits this section on Jeroboam (1Kings 14:1-20)

¹At that time Abijah son of Jeroboam fell sick. ²Jeroboam said to his wife, "Go, disguise yourself, so that it will not be known that you are the wife of Jeroboam, and go to Shiloh; for the prophet Ahijah is there, who said of me that I should be king over this people. ³Take with you ten loaves, some cakes, and a jar of honey, and go to him; he will tell you what will happen to the child."

⁴Jeroboam's wife did so; she set out and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Ahijah. Now Ahijah could not see, for his eyes were dim because of his age. ⁵But YHWH said to Ahijah, "The wife of Jeroboam is coming to inquire of you concerning her son; for he is sick. This is what you will say to her." When she came, she pretended to be another woman. ⁶But when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet, as she came in at the door, he said, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam; why do you pretend to be another? For I am charged with heavy tidings for you."

Jeroboam's house is rejected

⁷Go, tell Jeroboam, 'Thus says YHWH, the God of Israel: I exalted you from among the people, made you leader over my people Israel, ⁸and tore the kingdom away from the house of David to give it to you; yet you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commandments and followed me with all his heart, doing only that which was right in my sight. ⁹You have done evil above all those who were before you and have gone and made for yourself other gods, and cast images, provoking me to anger, and have thrust me behind your back. ¹⁰Therefore, I will bring evil upon the house of Jeroboam. I will cut off from Jeroboam every male, both bond and free in Israel, and will consume the house of Jeroboam, just as one burns up dung until it is all gone.

¹¹Anyone belonging to Jeroboam who dies in the city, the dogs shall eat; and anyone who dies in the open country, the birds of the air shall eat; for YHWH has spoken.'

¹²Therefore set out, go to your house. When your feet enter the city, the child will die. ¹³All Israel will mourn for him and bury him; for he alone of Jeroboam's family will come to the grave, because in him there is found something pleasing to YHWH, the God of Israel, in the house of Jeroboam. ¹⁴Moreover YHWH will raise up for himself a king over Israel, who will cut off the house of Jeroboam today, even right now!

Ahijah was the one through whom God revealed his determination that Jeroboam be king of Israel (see 11:29-39). This time he is the vehicle for God's indictment. We are given so little of Jeroboam's life, and are left with the impression that the Deuteronomists are against Jeroboam because he set up shrines in opposition to the temple.

The Deuteronomists held out great hopes for King Josiah, who was like David, the good king to whom YHWH made a commitment that his descendants would sit on the throne for ever.

Having experienced the destruction of Samaria and the fall of the northern kingdom, they trace this back to Israel's first king, Jeroboam, the antithesis of David. Jeroboam is rejected because he was 'not like David' (verse 8). Israel fell because its kings behaved like Jeroboam. Through Ahijah, YHWH declares that he will 'consume the house of Jeroboam' (verse 10).

Jeroboam's son will die (verse 12). This will be a sign that YHWH will 'raise up for himself a king over Israel, who will cut off the house of Jeroboam' (verse 14). YHWH is behind the coup, and not for the first time (see 1 Samuel 16:1-3; 1 Kings 11:29-39).

This speech anticipates the Assyrian assault on Israel, the collapse of the kingdom (721BC) and the dispersing of its people (see 2Kings 17:5-40).

This is the first mention of Tirzah, Jeroboam's capital (verse 17). Tirzah [תִּרְצַח] derives from the Hebrew word for 'to be beautiful' [רָצַח]

The reference to 'the Annals of the Kings of Israel' (verse 19) reminds us that the Deuteronomists are drawing on court records (see page 19), but also that it is not their intention to copy these records. Rather, they are offering an interpretive commentary, focusing on what YHWH is doing in the history of his people.

Jeroboam is said here to have reigned for 22 years, from c. 931-910BC.

¹⁵“YHWH will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water; he will root up Israel out of this good land that he gave to their ancestors, and scatter them beyond the Euphrates, because they have made their Asherah poles, provoking YHWH to anger. ¹⁶He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he committed, and because he caused Israel to sin.”

¹⁷Jeroboam's wife got up and went away, and she came to Tirzah. As she came to the threshold of the house, the child died. ¹⁸They buried him and all Israel mourned over him, according to the word of YHWH, which he spoke by his servant the prophet Ahijah.

¹⁹Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, how he warred and how he reigned, are written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel.

²⁰The time that Jeroboam reigned was twenty-two years; then he slept with his ancestors, and his son Nadab succeeded him.

²¹Rehoboam son of Solomon reigned in Judah. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city that YHWH had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put his name there. His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonite.

²²Judah did what was evil in the sight of YHWH; they provoked him to jealousy with their sins that they committed, more than all that their ancestors had done. ²³For they also built for themselves high places, pillars, and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every green tree; ²⁴there were also male prostitutes in the land. They committed all the abominations of the nations that YHWH drove out before the people of Israel.

²⁵In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, King Shishak of Egypt came up against Jerusalem; ²⁶he took away the treasures of the house of YHWH and the treasures of the king's house; he took everything. He also took away all the shields of gold that Solomon had made; ²⁷so King Rehoboam made shields of bronze instead, and committed them to the hands of the officers of the guard, who kept the door of the king's house. ²⁸As often as the king went into the house of YHWH, the guard carried them and brought them back to the guardroom.

²⁹Now the rest of the acts of Rehoboam, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? ³⁰There was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually.

³¹Rehoboam slept with his ancestors and was buried with his ancestors in the city of David. His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonite. His son Abijam succeeded him.

Rehoboam reigned in Judah 'seventeen years' (verse 21), c. 931-915. The notice concerning his mother recalls an earlier comment:

King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which YHWH had said to the Israelites, "You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you; for they will surely incline your heart to follow their gods"; Solomon clung to these in love.

– 1Kings 11:1

This was seen as a significant factor in Solomon's infidelity to the covenant. Judah's infidelity is highlighted (see verses 22-24). It includes the practice of male prostitution [שְׂרֵטָה, qādēš; see Deuteronomy 23:17-18]. Since there is no evidence of temple prostitution as a practice in any of the cultures of the Ancient Near East, we need to be careful in interpreting the meaning of qādēš in this context.

According to an inscription on a monument in Karnak, Pharaoh Shoshenq I (Shishak, verse 25) attacked over 150 towns in Israel-Judah. Earlier we learned that Jeroboam had taken refuge in Egypt. Was the Pharaoh reminding him that he, not Jeroboam, was still in control? If we are correct in beginning Rehoboam's reign in 931, this campaign would have been in 926.

On 'the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah' see page 19. The Chronicler refers to 'the records of the prophet Shemaiah and of the seer Iddo' (see page opposite, verse 15).

¹When the rule of Rehoboam was established and he grew strong, he abandoned the law of YHWH, he and all Israel with him.

Verse 1 is a summary of 1Kings 14:21-24. Verses 2-9 expand on 1Kings 14:25-26 and speak of the prophet Shemaiah, who was the one who told Rehoboam not to wage war against Israel (see 1Kings 12:22-24 = 2Chronicles 11:2-4).

²In the fifth year of King Rehoboam, because they had been unfaithful to YHWH, King Shishak of Egypt came up against Jerusalem ³with twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand cavalry. A countless army came with him from Egypt—Libyans, Sukkiim, and Ethiopians. ⁴He took the fortified cities of Judah and came as far as Jerusalem. ⁵Then the prophet Shemaiah came to Rehoboam and to the officers of Judah, who had gathered at Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said to them, “Thus says YHWH: You abandoned me, so I have abandoned you to the hand of Shishak.” ⁶Then the officers of Israel and the king humbled themselves and said, “YHWH is in the right.” ⁷When YHWH saw that they humbled themselves, the word of YHWH came to Shemaiah, saying: “They have humbled themselves; I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance, and my wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. ⁸Nevertheless they shall be his servants, so that they may know the difference between serving me and serving the kingdoms of other lands.” ⁹So King Shishak of Egypt came up against Jerusalem; he took away the treasures of the house of YHWH and the treasures of the king’s house; he took everything. He also took away the shields of gold that Solomon had made; ¹⁰but King Rehoboam made in place of them shields of bronze, and committed them to the hands of the officers of the guard, who kept the door of the king’s house. ¹¹Whenever the king went into the house of YHWH, the guard would come along bearing them, and would then bring them back to the guardroom. ¹²Because he humbled himself the wrath of YHWH turned from him, so as not to destroy them completely; moreover, conditions were good in Judah.

Verses 10-11 copy 1Kings 14:27-28. Verse 12 is an addition. Verse 13 copies 1Kings 14:21.

¹³So King Rehoboam established himself in Jerusalem and reigned. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign; he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city that YHWH had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel to put his name there. His mother’s name was Naamah the Ammonite. ¹⁴He did evil, for he did not set his heart to seek YHWH.

¹⁵Now the acts of Rehoboam, from first to last, are they not written in the records of the prophet Shemaiah and of the seer Iddo, recorded by genealogy? There were continual wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam.

¹⁶Rehoboam slept with his ancestors and was buried in the city of David; and his son Abijah succeeded him.

Verse 15 expands on 1Kings 14:29-30. Verse 16 copies 1Kings 14:31-32.

¹Now in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam son of Nebat, Abijam began to reign over Judah. ²He reigned for three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Maacah daughter of Abishalom.

³He committed all the sins that his father did before him; his heart was not true to YHWH his God, like the heart of his father David.

⁴Nevertheless for David's sake YHWH his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem; ⁵because David did what was right in the sight of YHWH, and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.

⁶The war begun between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continued all the days of his life.

⁷The rest of the acts of Abijam, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? There was war between Abijam and Jeroboam. ⁸Abijam slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in the city of David. Then his son Asa succeeded him.

Jeroboam's son, Abijam, reigned in Judah 'for three years'(verse 2), c. 915- 913. His name means 'My father is Yamm'(Canaanite god). The Chronicler changes his name to Abijah ('my father is YHWH'). This is the first time we have been introduced to either Maacah or her father Abishalom.

The judgment of Abijam by the Deuteronomists is standard. The only thing saving the dynasty from total rejection is God's loyalty to David, who, except for his murder of Uriah (see 2Samuel 11-12), remained true to YHWH. The war between Judah and Israel continued (verse 6). Again, the reader is referred to the royal archives (verse 7; see 14:29).

The Chronicler (2Chronicles 13:1-23)

The Chronicler's interest throughout is on Judah. The section on Abijam ('Abijah') is expanded, and we hear the king claiming that it is Judah, not Israel, that has the true kingdom (verses 5, 8), the true shrine, priesthood and cult (verses 10-12). Unlike the Deuteronomists, the Chronicler does not criticise Abijam or Judah, and he has Abijam claim: 'YHWH is our God and we have not abandoned him'(verse 10). YHWH ensures the victory of Judah (verses 15-18).

¹In the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam, Abijah began to reign over Judah. ²He reigned for three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Micaiah daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. Now there was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. ³Abijah engaged in battle, having an army of valiant warriors, four hundred thousand picked men; and Jeroboam drew up his line of battle against him with eight hundred thousand picked mighty warriors. ⁴Then Abijah stood on the slope of Mount Zemaraim that is in the hill country of Ephraim, and said, "Listen to me, Jeroboam and all Israel! ⁵Do you not know that YHWH God of Israel gave the kingship over Israel forever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt?

– 2Chronicles 13:1-7

Salt was used to symbolise preservation (see Leviticus 2:13) of the covenant.

⁶Yet Jeroboam son of Nebat, a servant of Solomon son of David, rose up and rebelled against his lord; ⁷and certain worthless scoundrels gathered around him and defied Rehoboam son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and irresolute and could not withstand them. ⁸“And now you think that you can withstand the kingdom of YHWH in the hand of the sons of David, because you are a great multitude and have with you the golden calves that Jeroboam made as gods for you. ⁹Have you not driven out the priests of YHWH, the descendants of Aaron, and the Levites, and made priests for yourselves like the peoples of other lands? Whoever comes to be consecrated with a young bull or seven rams becomes a priest of what are no gods.

¹⁰But as for us, YHWH is our God, and we have not abandoned him. We have priests ministering to YHWH who are descendants of Aaron, and Levites for their service. ¹¹They offer to YHWH every morning and every evening burnt offerings and fragrant incense, set out the rows of bread on the table of pure gold, and care for the golden lampstand so that its lamps may burn every evening; for we keep the charge of YHWH our God, but you have abandoned him. ¹²See, God is with us at our head, and his priests have their battle trumpets to sound the call to battle against you. O Israelites, do not fight against YHWH, the God of your ancestors; for you cannot succeed.”

¹³Jeroboam had sent an ambush around to come on them from behind; thus his troops were in front of Judah, and the ambush was behind them. ¹⁴When Judah turned, the battle was in front of them and behind them. They cried out to YHWH, and the priests blew the trumpets. ¹⁵Then the people of Judah raised the battle shout. And when the people of Judah shouted, God defeated Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah. ¹⁶The Israelites fled before Judah, and God gave them into their hands. ¹⁷Abijah and his army defeated them with great slaughter; five hundred thousand picked men of Israel fell slain. ¹⁸Thus the Israelites were subdued at that time, and the people of Judah prevailed, because they relied on YHWH, the God of their ancestors.

¹⁹Abijah pursued Jeroboam, and took cities from him: Bethel with its villages and Jeshanah with its villages and Ephron with its villages. ²⁰Jeroboam did not recover his power in the days of Abijah; YHWH struck him down, and he died.

²¹But Abijah grew strong. He took fourteen wives, and became the father of twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. ²²The rest of the acts of Abijah, his behavior and his deeds, are written in the story of the prophet Iddo.

On the prophet Iddo see also 2Chronicles 9:29 and 12:15. The ‘story of the prophet Iddo’ is not extant.

^{14:1}So Abijah slept with his ancestors, and they buried him in the city of David. His son Asa succeeded him.

⁹In the twentieth year of King Jeroboam of Israel, Asa began to reign over Judah; ¹⁰he reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Maacah daughter of Abishalom. ¹¹Asa did what was right in the sight of YHWH, as his father David had done. ¹²He put away the male prostitutes out of the land, and removed all the idols that his ancestors had made.

Abijam's son, Asa (verse 8), 'reigned forty-one years in Jerusalem', c. 912-871. The Deuteronomists mention Asa's bad health towards the end of his reign (see 2Kings 15:23), and the Chronicler states that this was 'in the thirty-ninth year of his reign' (2Chronicles 16:12), over a year before his death.

We are told that Asa's mother's name was 'Maacah daughter of Abishalom' (verse 10). This was stated also of Abijam in verse 2. Did Abijam have an incestuous relationship with his own mother? Or are we being told that Asa's grandmother (not mother) retained her office as queen mother when Asa became king (see verse 13, page 105)?

The beginning of the reigns of Asa and his father are dated in relation to the long reign of Jeroboam in Israel (931-910). Because of the exceptionally long reign of King Asa in Judah, the beginning of the reign of the five kings who followed Jeroboam in Israel is given in relation to the year of Asa's reign (see 15:25; 15:33; 16:8; 16:10; 16:23).

Asa is given a positive verdict by the Deuteronomists. He did away with male prostitution and removed the idols (verse 12; see 14:24), practices that were rife during the reign of his grandfather, Rehoboam (see 14:22-24).

The Chronicler

As in the case of Abijah (see pages 100-101), the Chronicler's interest in Judah is apparent here. He expands the Deuteronomists' account considerably.

¹In the days of Asa the land had rest for ten years. ²Asa did what was good and right in the sight of YHWH his God. ³He took away the foreign altars and the high places, broke down the pillars, hewed down the sacred poles, ⁴and commanded Judah to seek YHWH, the God of their ancestors, and to keep the law and the commandment. ⁵He also removed from all the cities of Judah the high places and the incense altars. And the kingdom had rest under him.

– 2Chronicles 14:1-5

This peace is seen as the consequence of the military victory of Abijah over Jeroboam (mentioned only by the Chronicler, see 2Chronicles 13:13-20, page 101).

The Chronicler

In the Chronicler's version, Asa took the opportunity of the ten years of peace to fortify the towns and build up an army.

There is a recurring problem with the Hebrew word **אֶלֶף** ['elep]. It came to mean 'thousand', but originally may have meant a fighting unit, perhaps the men of fighting age in a family.

The account of the Ethiopian war is found only in the Chronicler. Mareshah is about 45ks southwest of Jerusalem. Gerar is a further 45ks southwest of Mareshah, not far from the border with Egypt.

The Chronicler sees the victory as a victory of YHWH (see 12).

Complete annihilation was one element of the 'holy war': a way of ensuring the removal of temptation to cultural and religious compromise, as well as a way of ensuring that war would not be waged for personal gain, since the spoils of war were offered up to YHWH, the real victor, and did not advantage the king or the army.

6He built fortified cities in Judah while the land had rest. He had no war in those years, for YHWH gave him peace. 7He said to Judah, "Let us build these cities, and surround them with walls and towers, gates and bars; the land is still ours because we have sought YHWH our God; we have sought him, and he has given us peace on every side." So they built and prospered.

8Asa had an army of three hundred thousand from Judah, armed with large shields and spears, and two hundred eighty thousand troops from Benjamin who carried shields and drew bows; all these were mighty warriors.

9Zerah the Ethiopian came out against them with an army of a million men and three hundred chariots, and came as far as Mareshah. 10Asa went out to meet him, and they drew up their lines of battle in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. 11Asa cried to YHWH his God, "YHWH, there is no difference for you between helping the mighty and the weak. Help us, YHWH our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this multitude. YHWH, you are our God; let no mortal prevail against you."

12So YHWH defeated the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah, and the Ethiopians fled. 13Asa and the army with him pursued them as far as Gerar, and the Ethiopians fell until no one remained alive; for they were broken before YHWH and his army. The people of Judah carried away a great quantity of booty. 14They defeated all the cities around Gerar, for the fear of YHWH was on them. They plundered all the cities; for there was much plunder in them. 15They also attacked the tents of those who had livestock, and carried away sheep and goats in abundance, and camels. Then they returned to Jerusalem.

¹The spirit of God came upon Azariah son of Oded. ²He went out to meet Asa and said to him, “Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: YHWH is with you, while you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you abandon him, he will abandon you. ³For a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law; ⁴but when in their distress they turned to YHWH, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them. ⁵In those times it was not safe for anyone to go or come, for great disturbances afflicted all the inhabitants of the lands. ⁶They were broken in pieces, nation against nation and city against city, for God troubled them with every sort of distress. ⁷But you, take courage! Do not let your hands be weak, for your work shall be rewarded.”

⁸When Asa heard these words, the prophecy of Azariah son of Oded, he took courage, and put away the abominable idols from all the land of Judah and Benjamin and from the towns that he had taken in the hill country of Ephraim. He repaired the altar of YHWH that was in front of the vestibule of the house of YHWH. ⁹He gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who were residing as aliens with them, for great numbers had deserted to him from Israel when they saw that YHWH his God was with him. ¹⁰They were gathered at Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa. ¹¹They sacrificed to YHWH on that day, from the booty that they had brought, seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep. ¹²They entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their ancestors, with all their heart and with all their soul. ¹³Whoever would not seek YHWH, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether young or old, man or woman. ¹⁴They took an oath to YHWH with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with horns. ¹⁵All Judah rejoiced over the oath; for they had sworn with all their heart, and had sought him with their whole desire, and he was found by them, and YHWH gave them rest all around.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler introduces the reader to a prophet, Azariah, who is not mentioned outside this passage. 1Kings has nothing about him. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that it is the Chronicler who has composed this ‘prophetic word’, and that he has, as always, his contemporaries in mind, calling them to fidelity to YHWH.

Verses 8-15 expand on 2Chronicles 14:2-5, and reveal the Chronicler’s interest in the cult.

On Maacah see 1Kings 15:10, page 102.

Solomon has already been condemned for following the cult of 'Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians'(1Kings 11:5). Asherah was worshipped by the Canaanites as the consort of the god, Baal. Her cult symbol was a sacred pole (see 1Kings 14:15; 14:23; 16:33).

Unlike his grandfather, Rehoboam, who 'took away the treasures of the house of YHWH' (1Kings 14:26), Asa put resources into beautifying it (verses 14-15). The only criticism of Asa is that 'the high places (see 3:2) were not taken away'(verse 14).

The Chronicler (2Chronicles 15:16-19)

The Chronicler copies this passage from 1Kings, and concludes:

There was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa.

– 2Chronicles 15:19

The thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa was the year 878.

¹³Asa also removed his mother Maacah from being queen mother, because she had made an abominable image for Asherah; Asa cut down her image and burned it at the Wadi Kidron.

¹⁴But the high places were not taken away. Nevertheless the heart of Asa was true to YHWH all his days. ¹⁵He brought into the house of YHWH the votive gifts of his father and his own votive gifts – silver, gold, and utensils.

¹⁶There was war between Asa and King Baasha of Israel all their days. ¹⁷King Baasha of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, to prevent anyone from going out or coming in to King Asa of Judah.

¹⁸Then Asa took all the silver and the gold that were left in the treasures of the house of YHWH and the treasures of the king's house, and gave them into the hands of his servants.

King Asa sent them to King Ben-hadad son of Tabrimmon, son of Hezion of Aram, who resided in Damascus, saying, ¹⁹“Let there be an alliance between me and you, like that between my father and your father: I am sending you a present of silver and gold; go, break your alliance with King Baasha of Israel, so that he may withdraw from me.”

²⁰Ben-hadad listened to King Asa, and sent the commanders of his armies against the cities of Israel. He conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-beth-maacah, and all Chinneroth – all the land of Naphtali. ²¹When Baasha heard of it, he stopped building Ramah and lived in Tirzah.

²²Then King Asa made a proclamation to all Judah, none was exempt: they carried away the stones of Ramah and its timber, with which Baasha had been building; with them King Asa built Geba of Benjamin and Mizpah.

We have already heard that ‘there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually’(14:30). This continued between Rehoboam's son, Abijam, and Jeroboam (15:7), and now between Rehoboam's grandson, Asa, and Baasha (verse 16), of whom more shortly (see 1Kings 15:27-28, page 108).

Baasha fortifies Ramah on Israel's southern border with Judah (verse 17).

We have just learned that Asa built up the temple treasury (verse 15). Now he uses it to prosecute the war (verse 18).

Asa makes an alliance with Syria, and Syria attacks and conquers northern Israel. This causes Baasha to stop his attempt to fortify Ramah and to withdraw to Tirzah (verse 21; 14:17).

Asa carries on Solomon's practice of using forced labour to fortify Geba and Mizpah on Judah's northern border with Israel.

The Chronicler (2Chronicles 16:1-10).

The Chronicler copies 1Kings. He introduces his account of the war by linking back to 15:19 (see page 105). He has the war beginning ‘**in the thirtieth year of the reign of Asa**’(16:1, 867BC). He then inserts a prophetic critique of Asa:

⁷At that time the seer Hanani came to King Asa of Judah, and said to him, “Because you relied on the king of Aram, and did not rely on YHWH your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped you. ⁸Were not the Ethiopians and the Libyans a huge army with exceedingly many chariots and cavalry? Yet because you relied on YHWH, he gave them into your hand. ⁹For the eyes of YHWH range throughout the entire earth, to strengthen those whose heart is true to him. You have done foolishly in this; for from now on you will have wars.”

¹⁰Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in the stocks, in prison, for he was in a rage with him because of this. And Asa inflicted cruelties on some of the people at the same time.

– 2Chronicles 16:7-10

Once again the Deuteronomists refer the reader to the Annals of the Kings of Judah (verse 23; see 14:29; 15:7). King Asa died 871, and his son Jehoshaphat succeeded him the same year. 1Kings returns to Jehoshaphat only in 1Kings 22 (see page 133).

The Chronicler (2 Chronicles 16:11 - 17:1)

The Chronicler follows 1Kings with some variations, mainly to continue his critique of Asa begun in 2 Chronicles 16:7-10.

¹¹The acts of Asa, from first to last, are written in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. ¹²In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa was diseased in his feet, and his disease became severe; yet even in his disease he did not seek YHWH, but sought help from physicians. ¹³Then Asa slept with his ancestors, dying in the forty-first year of his reign.

¹⁴They buried him in the tomb that he had hewn out for himself in the city of David. They laid him on a bier that had been filled with various kinds of spices prepared by the perfumer's art; and they made a very great fire in his honour.

^{17:1}His son Jehoshaphat succeeded him, and strengthened himself against Israel.

²³Now the rest of all the acts of Asa, all his power, all that he did, and the cities that he built, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah? But in his old age he was diseased in his feet.

²⁴Then Asa slept with his ancestors, and was buried with his ancestors in the city of his father David; his son Jehoshaphat succeeded him.

²⁵Nadab son of Jeroboam began to reign over Israel in the second year of King Asa of Judah; he reigned over Israel two years. ²⁶He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH, walking in the way of his ancestor and in the sin that he caused Israel to commit.

²⁷Baasha son of Ahijah, of the house of Issachar, conspired against him; and Baasha struck him down at Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines; for Nadab and all Israel were laying siege to Gibbethon. ²⁸So Baasha killed Nadab in the third year of King Asa of Judah, and succeeded him.

²⁹As soon as he was king, he killed all the house of Jeroboam; he left to the house of Jeroboam not one that breathed, until he had destroyed it, according to the word of YHWH that he spoke by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite – ³⁰because of the sins of Jeroboam that he committed and that he caused Israel to commit, and because of the anger to which he provoked YHWH, the God of Israel.

³¹Now the rest of the acts of Nadab, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

The Deuteronomists spoke of Nadab earlier when they recounted the end of Jeroboam's reign (see 14:20).

Nadab's reign began 'in the second year of King Asa of Judah' (verse 25; that is, c. 910). He reigned over Israel two years (that is, from c. 910-909). We have already been told of the death of his older brother, Abijam (1Kings 14:17). The extermination of Jeroboam's dynasty is seen by the Deuteronomists as the fulfilment of the prophecy of Ahijah (1Kings 14:8-14).

Nadab was assassinated by Baasha, who murdered anyone related to the house of Jeroboam. Dynastic continuity was, of course, easier in Judah because of tribal loyalty. Things were different in Israel, with ten tribes vying for control. This is the first of a series of coups that continued to trouble Israel through the two hundred years of its existence.

The Deuteronomistic critique of Nadab follows a standard formula. Since, according to the understanding of the Deuteronomists, it was YHWH's will that Nadab have such a short reign, and since YHWH is just, Nadab must have done 'what is evil in the sight of YHWH' (verse 26).

The Chronicler

The Chronicler omits any reference to Nadab. He is interested in the kings of Israel only insofar as they relate to the kings of Judah.

He omits the whole section of 1Kings from 15:24 - 22:1.

Verse 32 repeats 1Kings 15:16, which introduced a section on Baasha's fighting against King Asa of Judah (see 1Kings 15:16-24).

Baasha seized the throne of Israel 'in the third year of King Asa of Judah'(verse 33; that is c. 909), and reigned 'twenty-four years'(verse 33); that is from c. 909 to 886.

We are introduced to another prophet, Jehu, son of Hanani. He is mentioned only in this passage (though see 2Chronicles 19:2). This is the same Hanani who is called a prophet by the Chronicler (see 2Chronicles 16:7, page 106).

The standard comment that Baasha was made king by the will of YHWH (verse 2) rings especially badly here, in light of the fact that Baasha became king through assassination (see 15:27, 29).

The Chronicler

The Chronicler omits this section on Baasha. In his account of king Asa of Judah, he has King Baasha of Israel attacking Judah 'in the thirty-sixth year of the reign of Asa'(see 2Chronicles 16:1). This contradicts the chronology here in Kings, which has Baasha dying in the twenty-seventh year of King Asa. There is no reason to prefer the Chronicler to the Deuteronomists.

³²There was war between Asa and King Baasha of Israel all their days.

³³In the third year of King Asa of Judah, Baasha son of Ahijah began to reign over all Israel at Tirzah; he reigned twenty-four years. ³⁴He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH, walking in the way of Jeroboam and in the sin that he caused Israel to commit.

^{16:1}The word of YHWH came to Jehu son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, ²"Since I exalted you out of the dust and made you leader over my people Israel, and you have walked in the way of Jeroboam, and have caused my people Israel to sin, provoking me to anger with their sins, ³therefore, I will consume Baasha and his house, and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat. ⁴Anyone belonging to Baasha who dies in the city the dogs shall eat; and anyone of his who dies in the field the birds of the air shall eat."

⁵Now the rest of the acts of Baasha, what he did, and his power, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? ⁶Baasha slept with his ancestors, and was buried at Tirzah; and his son Elah succeeded him.

⁷Moreover the word of YHWH came by the prophet Jehu son of Hanani against Baasha and his house, both because of all the evil that he did in the sight of YHWH, provoking him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam, and also because he destroyed it.

⁸In the twenty-sixth year of King Asa of Judah, Elah son of Baasha began to reign over Israel in Tirzah; he reigned two years. ⁹But his servant Zimri, commander of half his chariots, conspired against him. When he was at Tirzah, drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza, who was in charge of the palace at Tirzah, ¹⁰Zimri came in and struck him down and killed him, in the twenty-seventh year of King Asa of Judah, and succeeded him.

¹¹When he began to reign, as soon as he had seated himself on his throne, he killed all the house of Baasha; he did not leave him a single male of his kindred or his friends. ¹²Thus Zimri destroyed all the house of Baasha, according to the word of YHWH, which he spoke against Baasha by the prophet Jehu – ¹³because of all the sins of Baasha and the sins of his son Elah that they committed, and that they caused Israel to commit, provoking YHWH God of Israel to anger with their idols.

¹⁴Now the rest of the acts of Elah, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

Jeroboam's son, Nadab, succeeded his father on the throne of Israel. His reign began 'in the second year of King Asa of Judah'(see 15:25; that is, in 910), and 'reigned over Israel two years'(15:25; that is from 910 to 909). He was assassinated by Baasha who took over the throne in a coup (15:28).

History is repeating itself. Here we have Baasha's son, Elah, succeeding his father,. He began his reign 'in the twenty-sixth year of King Asa of Judah'(verse 8; that is in the year 886) and he, too, 'reigned two years'(verse 8; that is, from 886 to 885. He was killed in a military coup (verse 10).

Just as Baasha had wiped out the whole of Jeroboam's family (15:29), so Zimri 'destroyed all the house of Baasha'(verse 11). In both cases we are assured by the Deuteronomists that this was God's punishment for the failure of these kings to be faithful to the covenant (verses 12-13; see 16:7).

In the Introduction we reflected on the limitations of the image of God that was espoused by the Deuteronomist School, limited as they were to the assumption that whatever happens is willed by YHWH (see pages 32-33).

Those interested in the court records of the reign of Elah are referred to 'the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel (verse 14; see 14:9, 15:31, 16:5; sadly not extant). The Deuteronomists are content to focus on what YHWH is doing in the tumultuous history of the state of Israel.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler omits this passage. He is not interested in the kings of Israel, except insofar as they relate to the kings of Judah

Zimri claimed the throne of Israel 'in the twenty-seventh year of King Asa of Judah'(verse 15; that is in the year 885). We are told that Zimri's rule lasted 'seven days'(verse 15).

Obviously his coup (verse 10) did not have the support of the army. They favoured Omri, the army commander (verse 16). The fact that Omri's father is not named points to him being a foreign mercenary. When they besieged Tirzah, Zimri committed suicide.

The brevity of his reign highlights the standard nature of the formula of the Deuteronomists. Zimri must have moved fast in destroying the house of Baasha (verse 11). The Deuteronomists accuse him of 'causing Israel to sin'(verse 19). Once again they refer the reader to the Annals of the Kings of Israel (verse 20).

When a rebel came to kill a later queen, she refers back to Zimri's treachery (see 2Kings 9:31).

Not everyone favoured Omri (perhaps because he was not an Israelite; see verse 16). A struggle broke out between Omri's supporters and the supporters of Tibni – a struggle that appears to have lasted 4 years (885-881). Omri emerged victorious from the struggle (verse 22).

The Chronicler

This passage, too, is omitted by the Chronicler.

¹⁵In the twenty-seventh year of King Asa of Judah, Zimri reigned seven days in Tirzah. Now the troops were encamped against Gibbethon, which belonged to the Philistines, ¹⁶and the troops who were encamped heard it said, "Zimri has conspired, and he has killed the king"; therefore all Israel made Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel that day in the camp. ¹⁷So Omri went up from Gibbethon, and all Israel with him, and they besieged Tirzah. ¹⁸When Zimri saw that the city was taken, he went into the citadel of the king's house; he burned down the king's house over himself with fire, and died – ¹⁹because of the sins that he committed, doing evil in the sight of YHWH, walking in the way of Jeroboam, and for the sin that he committed, causing Israel to sin.

²⁰Now the rest of the acts of Zimri, and the conspiracy that he made, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel?

²¹Then the people of Israel were divided into two parts; half of the people followed Tibni son of Ginath, to make him king, and half followed Omri. ²²But the people who followed Omri overcame the people who followed Tibni son of Ginath; so Tibni died, and Omri became king.

²³In the thirty-first year of King Asa of Judah, Omri began to reign over Israel; he reigned for twelve years, six of them in Tirzah.

²⁴He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver; he fortified the hill, and called the city that he built, Samaria, after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill.

²⁵Omri did what was evil in the sight of YHWH; he did more evil than all who were before him.

²⁶For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam son of Nebat, and in the sins that he caused Israel to commit, provoking YHWH, the God of Israel, to anger by their idols.

²⁷Now the rest of the acts of Omri that he did, and the power that he showed, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? ²⁸Omri slept with his ancestors, and was buried in Samaria; his son Ahab succeeded him.

Verse 23 states that Omri ‘began to reign over Israel’ in the ‘thirty-first year of King Asa of Judah’ (that is, in the year 881). It also states that he reigned for twelve years. In 16:29 we are informed that his son, Ahab, began his reign in the ‘thirty-eighth year of King Asa of Judah’ (that is in 874). The ‘twelve years’ of Omri’s reign must be calculated from 885, when ‘all Israel made Omri, the commander of the army, king over Israel’ (that is, when the army rose up against Zimri). The implication is that the struggle between Omri and the supporters of Tibni lasted 4 years, and that Omri took over uncontested control only in 881, four years after his soldiers declared him king. The twelve years of his reign are calculated from 885 to 874.

The judgment against him is standard. Only his most significant achievement is named: the building of Samaria (verse 24) as a royal city, free, like Jerusalem (see 2Samuel 5:9), from tribal connections. He transferred the royal residence from Tirzah to Samaria. This is quite symbolic. Tirzah is on the eastern slopes and faces inward to the Jordan. Samaria is on the western slopes and faces outward to the Mediterranean.

Omri is the first king of Israel to be named in the Assyrian records. The ‘house of Omri’ is named on the stele of King Mesha of Moab. It was Omri who took Israel onto the world stage. Symbolic of this was the arrangement for the crown prince, Ahab, to marry the Phoenician princess, Jezebel.

It was Omri who created the first real kingdom of Israel. It was probably he who was responsible for the massive constructions at Megiddo, Hazor, Jezreel and Gezer (constructions once attributed to Solomon). He built up a complex bureaucratic organisation and extensive maritime trade. He had a standing army, and archives.

At home he made peace with Judah by accepting the loss of that part of the territory of Benjamin that had been annexed by King Asa of Judah (see 1Kings 15:22). He also ensured the loyalty of his Canaanite subjects by permitting Canaanite religious practices (something the Deuteronomists condemn him for in verses 25-26). Once again they refer the reader to ‘the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel’ for further information concerning Omri’s reign.

Omri's son, Ahab, reigned in Israel 'twenty-two years', from 874 ('the thirty-eighth year of King Asa') to 853 (see page 136). This assumes he was co-regent for a short period prior to his father's death. For the account of his death we have to await 1Kings 22:37-40. The intervening chapters are given over to a number of folk legends about the prophets Elijah and his disciple, Elisha.

Ahab was following the example of Solomon when he took a Sidonian wife, Jezebel (see the criticism of Solomon in 11:1), a marriage that is part of international diplomacy. Of course, her presence required the erection of 'an altar for Baal'(verse 32), and a 'Asherah pole' [אֲשֵׁרָה, 'ašērāh], which was a cult object of the worship of Baal's consort, Asherah.

Baalism is essentially opposed to Yahwism, for it is a religion that, like all the other religions of the Ancient Near East, supports royal claims and upholds the power of the rich against the poor. Yahwism stands out in that world, for it is about a God who hears the cry of the poor, a God who revealed himself in order to liberate slaves, and who demands that rulers submit to the Torah and the demands of justice that it upholds. It is this conflict that will take up the chapters that follow in 1Kings 17-22, where we see the prophet raised up by God opposing the system that Ahab embraces.

To understand the rather enigmatic verse 34, we must go back to the story of the miraculous collapse of the walls of Jericho when Joshua and the Israelites first entered the Promised Land. Joshua declared:

Cursed before YHWH be anyone who tries to build this city — this Jericho! At the cost of his firstborn he shall lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest he shall set up its gates!

— Joshua 6:26

This curse is realised when Hiel sacrifices two of his sons, entombing their bodies in the foundations and at the gates, as an offering to appease the gods of the locality. This is an extreme example of the degradation of religious cult under Ahab.

²⁹In the thirty-eighth year of King Asa of Judah, Ahab son of Omri began to reign over Israel; Ahab son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years.

³⁰Ahab son of Omri did evil in the sight of YHWH more than all who were before him.

³¹And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, he took as his wife Jezebel daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. ³²He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. ³³Ahab also made an Asherah pole. Ahab did more to provoke the anger of YHWH, the God of Israel, than had all the kings of Israel who were before him.

³⁴In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho; he laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of YHWH, which he spoke by Joshua son of Nun.

¹Now Elijah the Tishbite, who resided in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As YHWH the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."

²The word of YHWH came to him, saying,

³"Go from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the Wadi Cherith, which is east of the Jordan.

⁴You shall drink from the wadi, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there." ⁵So he went and did according to the word of YHWH; he went and lived by the Wadi Cherith, which is east of the Jordan.

⁶The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and he drank from the wadi. ⁷But after a while the wadi dried up, because there was no rain in the land.

Throughout the Books of Samuel and Kings we have met a number of prophets. In 1Samuel 10:5-13 and again in 1Samuel 19:20-24 we met 'a band of prophets'. In 1Samuel 2:27-36 an unnamed 'man of God' foretold the end of the priestly ministry of the family of Eli. In 1Kings 13 another unnamed 'man of God' came from Judah to Bethel to speak against the sanctuary there (see 1Kings 13). In the same story we heard of 'an old prophet' in Bethel.

The main prophet in the First Book of Samuel is Samuel himself, who, besides being a judge and a priest, is also called 'a trustworthy prophet of YHWH'(1Samuel 3:21), and 'a man of God'(1Samuel 9:6).

Apart from Samuel there have been others who have briefly entered the scene to communicate a specific judgment of God. There is the prophet Gad who told David not to stay in the stronghold of Adullam (see 1Samuel 22:5). Gad reappears in 2Samuel 24:11-18. Another prophet, Nathan, declared that YHWH did not want David to build a temple (see 2Samuel 7:1-17). He appears again with a message condemning David for his treatment of Uriah (see 2Samuel 12:1-25). Nathan was also part of the conspiracy that succeeded in getting Solomon to reign after David (see 1Kings 1).

There is the 'prophet Ahijah' from Shiloh who revealed to Jeroboam that it was God's will that he lead the northern tribes to break away from Judah (see 1Kings 11:29-39; see 12:15). Later he had a message from God for Jeroboam that YHWH had rejected him (see 1Kings 14:1-18). A prophet called Jehu spoke out against King Baasha of Israel (see 1Kings 16:7).

The Deuteronomists interrupt the sad tale of the infidelity of the kings of Israel to introduce the prophet Elijah (his name means 'YHWH is my God'), who, like Samuel, demonstrates the powerful intervention of God, who is the real determiner (as they saw it) who controls the movements of history. The kings think they are shaping history, but not so, declare the Deuteronomists.

Elijah announced God's punishment in the form of a drought (verse 1) – a demonstration that it is YHWH (not Baal) who controls the weather. Elijah obeys YHWH and goes into the wilderness, completely dependent upon God to survive. Miraculously God cares for him, and the threatened drought arrives.

Ahab's wife, Jezebel, came from Sidon (16:31) and brought with her the cult of the gods of Sidon. Here we see YHWH sending his prophet to Sidon to reveal his glory as the God of the powerless, represented here by the widow.

Not having a husband or an adult son to afford her protection, a widow is at the mercy of others, and in a culture that looks to power, she can be, as in this case, very vulnerable indeed. In this Yahwism, when followed faithfully, is very different. YHWH has a special care for orphans and widows (see Deuteronomy 24:17-22).

Elijah's words to her include the words: 'Do not be afraid' (verse 13) - words that occur 62 times in the Older Testament and 18 times in the Newer Testament. In almost every case they are an assurance of God's saving providence, and open the way to hope.

It is to be expected that legends that accumulated around such a heroic figure as Elijah would grow in the telling. The conclusion of this legend expresses in an astonishing way the miraculous power of God for those who place their trust in him.

⁸Then the word of YHWH came to him, saying, ⁹"Go up to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you." ¹⁰So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." ¹¹As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." ¹²But she said, "As YHWH your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die." ¹³Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. ¹⁴For thus says YHWH the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that YHWH sends rain on the earth." ¹⁵She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. ¹⁶The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of YHWH that he spoke by Elijah.

¹⁷Some time after, the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill; his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him.

¹⁸She then said to Elijah, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!" ¹⁹But he said to her, "Give me your son." He took him from her bosom, carried him up into the upper chamber where he was lodging, and laid him on his own bed.

²⁰He cried out to YHWH, "YHWH my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I am staying, by killing her son?"

²¹Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried out to YHWH, "YHWH my God, let this child's life come into him again."

²²YHWH listened to the voice of Elijah; the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. ²³Elijah took the child, brought him down from the upper chamber into the house, and gave him to his mother; then Elijah said, "See, your son is alive." ²⁴So the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of YHWH in your mouth is truth."

Elijah, the 'man of God'(verses 18 and 24), is in such an intimate communion with YHWH that he can call on God's life-giving spirit to restore to health a boy who is on the verge of death. A prophet is expected to intercede. Here we see the power of Elijah's prayer, for it opens the way for the outpouring of divine largesse.

This is, indeed, a 'miracle' for it does two things: it arouses wonder, and it is a sign to the widow that points to the presence and action of YHWH.

A larger question arises: If Elijah has the power to bring life back to this extremely sick boy, will he be able to breathe God's life into a very sick nation?

The drought (verse 1) has led to famine (verse 2), a famine that was particularly acute in the royal city of Samaria.

We are introduced to Obadiah (a name meaning ‘servant of YHWH’), who is in charge of the king’s palace, but who is a true servant of YHWH, and is secretly resisting the killing of the prophets by Jezebel (see verses 3-4; repeated in verse 13).

Ahab is so desperate for water that he determines to go out and search for it with the help of Obadiah (verses 5-6).

The encounter between Elijah and Obadiah highlights the ruthless nature of Ahab. We hear that Ahab has been looking everywhere for Elijah, whom he blames for the drought (see 17:1).

We also learn that there are Israelites, even in high places, who do not approve of what Ahab and his wife are doing.

¹After many days the word of YHWH came to Elijah, in the third year of the drought, saying, “Go, present yourself to Ahab; I will send rain on the earth.” ²So Elijah went to present himself to Ahab. The famine was severe in Samaria.

³Ahab summoned Obadiah, who was in charge of the palace. (Now Obadiah revered YHWH greatly; ⁴when Jezebel was killing off the prophets of YHWH, Obadiah took a hundred prophets, hid them fifty to a cave, and provided them with bread and water.) ⁵Ahab said to Obadiah, “Come, let us go through the land to all the springs of water and to all the wadis; perhaps we may find grass to keep the horses and mules alive, and not lose some of the animals.” ⁶So they divided the land between them to pass through it; Ahab went in one direction by himself, and Obadiah went in another direction by himself.

⁷As Obadiah was on the way, there was Elijah; Obadiah recognized him, fell on his face, and said, “Is it you, my lord Elijah?” ⁸He answered him, “It is I. Go, tell your lord that Elijah is here.” ⁹And he said, “What is my sin, that you would hand your servant over to Ahab, to have me killed? ¹⁰As YHWH your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom to which my lord has not sent to seek you; and when they would say, ‘He is not here,’ he would require an oath of the kingdom or nation, that they had not found you. ¹¹But now you say, ‘Go, tell your lord that Elijah is here.’ ¹²As soon as I have gone from you, the spirit of YHWH will carry you I know not where; so, when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although I your servant have revered YHWH from my youth. ¹³Has it not been told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of YHWH, how I hid a hundred of YHWH’s prophets fifty to a cave, and provided them with bread and water? ¹⁴Yet now you say, ‘Go, tell your lord that Elijah is here’. He will surely kill me.” ¹⁵Elijah said, “As YHWH of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today.” ¹⁶Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

¹⁷When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?" ¹⁸He answered, "I have not troubled Israel; but you have, and your father's house, because you have forsaken the commandments of YHWH and followed the Baals. ¹⁹Now therefore have all Israel assemble for me at Mount Carmel, with the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table." ²⁰So Ahab sent to all the Israelites, and assembled the prophets at Mount Carmel. ²¹Elijah then came near to all the people, and said, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If YHWH is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." The people did not answer him a word. ²²Then Elijah said to the people, "I, even I only, am left a prophet of YHWH; but Baal's prophets number four hundred fifty. ²³Let two bulls be given to us; let them choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it; I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. ²⁴Then you call on the name of your god and I will call on the name of YHWH; the god who answers by fire is indeed God." All the people answered, "Well spoken!" ²⁵Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many; then call on the name of your god, but put no fire to it." ²⁶So they took the bull that was given them, prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon, crying, "O Baal, answer us!" But there was no voice, and no answer. They limped about the altar that they had made. ²⁷At noon Elijah mocked them, saying, "Cry aloud! Surely he is a god; either he is meditating, or he has wandered away, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened." ²⁸Then they cried aloud and, as was their custom, they cut themselves with swords and lances until the blood gushed out over them. ²⁹As midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice, no answer, and no response.

Ahab accuses Elijah of being the one who is disturbing the peace of the realm. Elijah issues a counter accusation, and challenges Ahab to a contest on Mount Carmel: 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah versus Elijah!

The narrative makes superb drama. On one of the highest points 'all Israel' is assembled to see which god is more powerful. Elijah issues the challenge: 'How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If YHWH is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him' (verse 21).

The Baal team goes first. We are meant to enjoy the ridicule poured on them by Elijah as they whip up a frenzy to no avail (verses 26-29).

Now it is Elijah's turn. Dramatically he selects twelve stones for the altar 'according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob'(verse 31).

Three times he has water poured on the altar so that there can be no natural explanation for the fire that consumes the offering (verses 33-35).

In keeping with his call as a prophet he offers prayer to YHWH to reveal his power 'so that this people may know that you, YHWH, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back'(verse 37).

God responds by sending down fire to consume the sacrifice (verse 38) and the people see for themselves that YHWH, not Baal, is God (verse 39). The prophets of Baal are discredited and pay the price. Elijah is just as violent as Jezebel (verse 4), but the Deuteronomists seem not to notice this. Violence is all right for a good cause!

³⁰Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come closer to me"; and all the people came closer to him. First he repaired the altar of YHWH that had been thrown down; ³¹Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of YHWH came, saying, "Israel shall be your name"; ³²with the stones he built an altar in the name of YHWH. Then he made a trench around the altar, large enough to contain two measures of seed. ³³Next he put the wood in order, cut the bull in pieces, and laid it on the wood. He said, "Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." ³⁴Then he said, "Do it a second time"; and they did it a second time. Again he said, "Do it a third time"; and they did it a third time, ³⁵so that the water ran all around the altar, and filled the trench also with water.

³⁶At the time of the offering of the oblation, the prophet Elijah came near and said, "YHWH, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your bidding. ³⁷Answer me, YHWH, answer me, so that this people may know that you, YHWH, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back."

³⁸Then the fire of YHWH fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and even licked up the water that was in the trench.

³⁹When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, "YHWH indeed is God; YHWH indeed is God."

⁴⁰Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; do not let one of them escape." Then they seized them; and Elijah brought them down to the Wadi Kishon, and killed them there.

It is YHWH, not Baal, who makes rain

⁴¹Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of rushing rain." ⁴²So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; there he bowed himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees. ⁴³He said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." He went up and looked, and said, "There is nothing." Then he said, "Go again seven times." ⁴⁴At the seventh time he said, "Look, a little cloud no bigger than a person's hand is rising out of the sea." Then he said, "Go say to Ahab, 'Harness your chariot and go down before the rain stops you.'" ⁴⁵In a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind; there was a heavy rain. Ahab rode off and went to Jezreel. ⁴⁶But the hand of YHWH was on Elijah; he girded up his loins and ran in front of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

The fruit of the victory is rain, and the ending of the drought. We are encouraged to hope that Ahab has learned his lesson and will now look to YHWH.

The wind is the wind that blew across the waters of chaos at the beginning of creation (Genesis 1:2). YHWH is the Creator: the God of nature and the Lord of history, blessing his people with rain. The one who can bring life to a widow's son can bring life to a people and a country. If we want life, we look, not to Ahab or to the pagan gods, but to Israel's God.

There is a Jezreel (a word which means 'YHWH sows') in Judah (see 1Samuel 25:43). The Jezreel mentioned here in verse 45 is at the eastern end of the transverse valley north of the mountains of Ephraim-Manasseh. It was mentioned during the preparations for Saul's battle against the Philistines at Gilboa (see 1Samuel 29:1). It was mentioned again in the description of one of the administrative sections set up by Solomon (1Kings 4:12). Ahab's father, Omri, built Samaria as a royal city (16:24). It was his capital and that of Ahab (16:32-33). Jezreel, with its warmer climate, appears to have been the place of his winter palace.

Elijah has challenged the throne and killed its large band of prophet supporters. If the last scene (verses 41-44) opened up the hope that Ahab would be converted, our hopes are immediately dashed. He was hunting for Elijah earlier (see 18:10). The hunt is on again. Jezebel wants him dead (verses 1-3).

Elijah leaves Israel and seeks refuge in Judah. From there he heads south to the wilderness of Horeb. With all his bombast he longs for an encounter with the one in whom he has placed his trust. Where better to have this than in the place where Moses first encountered YHWH, at Horeb. In despair he falls asleep, and in so doing opens himself to the mysterious influence of God. As once before (see 17:6), so now, he is nourished by God, and on the strength of that divine nourishment he journeyed 'forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God' (verse 8). The 'angel' recalls scenes with Hagar (Genesis 16:7-13; 21:17-19; see also Psalm 91:11-13). We are meant to recall Moses encounter with God on Mount Horeb:

Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

– Exodus 24:18

Will God grant a similar grace to Elijah? God's last instruction to Elijah was to present himself to Ahab (18:1). God asks him what is he doing at Horeb. Elijah's justification before God for his flight is that he has been absolutely devoted to YHWH, and that this has brought him to the point where he is utterly alone. The victory gained at Carmel was ineffectual 'for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away' (verse 10; repeated verse 14).

¹Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ²Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow."

³He was afraid and fled for his life. He came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah and left his servant there. ⁴He himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, YHWH, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." ⁵Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, "Get up and eat." ⁶He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. ⁷The angel of YHWH came a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." ⁸He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. ⁹At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

Then the word of YHWH came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁰He answered, "I have been very zealous for YHWH, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

11He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before YHWH, for YHWH is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before YHWH, but YHWH was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but YHWH was not in the earthquake; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but YHWH was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" ¹⁴He answered, "I have been very zealous for YHWH, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." ¹⁵Then YHWH said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you will anoint Hazael as king over Aram. ¹⁶Also you will anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you will anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. ¹⁷Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. ¹⁸Yet I will provide seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

In their presentation of this legend, the Deuteronomists are drawing on the mysterious encounter with God granted to Moses. Moses had asked to see God, who replied:

See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen."

– Exodus 33:21-23

God could not show his face to Moses, but he did give him the Torah, which is the way to encounter God by following God's will (= seeing God's back).

Elijah's hopes are encouraged when he experiences the power of the wind and the earthquake, recalling the thunder and lightning, the impenetrable cloud and the violent shaking of the mountain, experienced by Moses at Horeb (see Exodus 19:16-18). However, to Elijah's and our surprise, YHWH is not revealed in this expected way. The noise gives way to an eerie silence (verse 12). Elijah knows that, like Moses, he cannot see God's face, so 'he wrapped his face in a mantle' (verse 13). At the same time he senses the presence of a mysterious encounter, so 'he stood at the entrance of the cave' (verse 13).

YHWH reiterates the question he asked earlier, and Elijah makes the same response (verses 13-14 = verses 9-10). YHWH issues another command. Elijah is to stop running and go back. Like Samuel, he is charged with the task of anointing kings and prophets (verses 15-16). Once again, YHWH is the authority behind a coup which brings a dynasty to an end (see 15:29; 16:12).

Elijah has complained that he is the only one left who is faithful to YHWH (19:10 = 19:16). YHWH assures him that this is not so (verse 18).

In obedience to YHWH's command, Elijah calls Elisha to join him. He does this, not by 'anointing' him (see verse 16), but by throwing his mantle over him.

Elisha responds, but not before he has said farewell to his parents and preparing a feast for the community. Elijah has received no message to oppose this idea. He leaves the decision to Elisha. By slaughtering his own oxen he demonstrates dramatically that he is leaving his old life behind (compare Matthew 8:21-22).

¹⁹So he set out from there, and found Elisha son of Shaphat, who was plowing. There were twelve yoke of oxen ahead of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle over him. ²⁰He left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." Then Elijah said to him, "Go back again; for what have I done to you?" ²¹He returned from following him, took the yoke of oxen, and slaughtered them; using the equipment from the oxen, he boiled their flesh, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out and followed Elijah, and became his servant.

¹King Ben-hadad of Aram gathered all his army together; thirty-two kings were with him, along with horses and chariots. He marched against Samaria, laid siege to it, and attacked it. ²Then he sent messengers into the city to King Ahab of Israel, and said to him: "Thus says Ben-hadad: ³Your silver and gold are mine; your fairest wives and children also are mine." ⁴The king of Israel answered, "As you say, my lord, O king, I am yours, and all that I have." ⁵The messengers came again and said: "Thus says Ben-hadad: I sent to you, saying, 'Deliver to me your silver and gold, your wives and children'; ⁶nevertheless I will send my servants to you tomorrow about this time, and they will search your house and the houses of your servants, and lay hands on whatever pleases them, and take it away."

⁷Then the king of Israel called all the elders of the land, and said, "Look now! See how this man is seeking trouble; for he sent to me for my wives, my children, my silver, and my gold; and I did not refuse him." ⁸Then all the elders and all the people said to him, "Do not listen or consent." ⁹So he said to the messengers of Ben-hadad, "Tell my lord the king: All that you first demanded of your servant I will do; but this thing I cannot do." The messengers left and brought him word again. ¹⁰Ben-hadad sent to him and said, "The gods do so to me, and more also, if the dust of Samaria will provide a handful for each of the people who follow me." ¹¹The king of Israel answered, "Tell him: One who puts on armour should not brag like one who takes it off." ¹²When Ben-hadad heard this message – now he had been drinking with the kings in the booths – he said to his men, "Take your positions!" And they took their positions against the city.

Elijah has just been instructed to anoint Hazael king of Aram (19:15). This chapter focuses on Ben-hadad, the man whom Hazael will later murder and replace (see 2Kings 8:7-15). It is the second time Ben-hadad has featured in the narrative. On an earlier occasion he accepted an alliance with Asa, king of Judah, and led a successful military campaign in northern Israel (see 1Kings 15:18-20).

As the head of an alliance of Aramean city-states, he besieges Samaria, the royal city built by Omri (see 1Kings 16:24), and issues an ultimatum to Ahab. Ahab appears to accept his demands, but nothing happens. When Ben-hadad repeats his demands, Ahab calls a council of elders (verse 7). They veto the king's policy of appeasement (verse 8). Ahab informs Ben-hadad that he is not in a position to comply with Ben-hadad's demands. After both kings use blustering words, the Aramean alliance goes ahead with the siege.

An unnamed prophet emerges who tells Ahab that YHWH will give him victory (verses 13-14). This is unexpected as, up to this point, Ahab has appeared as the weaker party in the conflict. Elijah does not feature in this scene, but, once again, we are being made aware of the fact that it is YHWH, not the kings of this world, who is controlling events. This is what it means to 'know that I am YHWH'(verse 13).

Ahab obeys the prophet, musters his crack troops and 'all the people of Israel seven thousand'(verse 15). Are these the seven thousand spoken of earlier as not having given in to Baal (19:18)?

Ben-hadad who had been drinking (verses 12 and 16) managed to escape, but the Israelites 'defeated the Arameans with a great slaughter'(verse 21).

¹³Then a certain prophet came up to King Ahab of Israel and said, "Thus says YHWH, Have you seen all this great multitude? Look, I will give it into your hand today; and you shall know that I am YHWH." ¹⁴Ahab said, "By whom?" He said, "Thus says YHWH, By the young men who serve the district governors." Then he said, "Who will begin the battle?" He answered, "You."

¹⁵Then he mustered the young men who serve the district governors, two hundred thirty-two; after them he mustered all the people of Israel, seven thousand. ¹⁶They went out at noon, while Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the booths, he and the thirty-two kings allied with him. ¹⁷The young men who serve the district governors went out first. Ben-hadad had sent out scouts, and they reported to him, "Men have come out from Samaria." ¹⁸He said, "If they have come out for peace, take them alive; if they have come out for war, take them alive."

¹⁹But these had already come out of the city: the young men who serve the district governors, and the army that followed them. ²⁰Each killed his man; the Arameans fled and Israel pursued them, but King Ben-hadad of Aram escaped on a horse with the cavalry. ²¹The king of Israel went out, attacked the horses and chariots, and defeated the Arameans with a great slaughter.

A second victory

22Then the prophet approached the king of Israel and said to him, "Come, strengthen yourself, and consider well what you have to do; for in the spring the king of Aram will come up against you."

23The servants of the king of Aram said to him, "Their gods are gods of the hills, and so they were stronger than we; but let us fight against them in the plain, and surely we will be stronger than they. **24**Also do this: remove the kings, each from his post, and put commanders in place of them; **25**and muster an army like the army that you have lost, horse for horse, and chariot for chariot; then we will fight against them in the plain, and surely we will be stronger than they." He heeded their voice, and did so.

26In the spring Ben-hadad mustered the Arameans and went up to Aphek to fight against Israel. **27**After the Israelites had been mustered and provisioned, they went out to engage them; the people of Israel encamped opposite them like two little flocks of goats, while the Arameans filled the country.

28A man of God approached and said to the king of Israel, "Thus says YHWH: Because the Arameans have said, 'YHWH is a god of the hills but he is not a god of the valleys,' therefore I will give all this great multitude into your hand, and you will know that I am YHWH." **29**They encamped opposite one another seven days. Then on the seventh day the battle began; the Israelites killed one hundred thousand Aramean foot soldiers in one day. **30**The rest fled into the city of Aphek; and the wall fell on twenty-seven thousand men that were left. Ben-hadad also fled, and entered the city to hide.

Once again we are left in no doubt that it is YHWH who is engineering matters between Aram and Israel. It is the prophet, not the king, who gives the orders (verse 22).

The king of Aram reveals his ignorance of the power of YHWH, thinking that YHWH's power is limited to the hill country (verses 23-26).

In the spring, the season for battles, Ben-hadad chooses to engage the army of Israel at Aphek, a few kilometres northeast of Mount Carmel. He has by far the superior force and is victorious.

Enter another unnamed 'man of God' (verse 28), who conveys to Ahab the news that YHWH cannot stand by and have the king of Aram doubt his power, and so is determined to give victory to Israel (verse 28).

The army of Aram is massacred, and Ben-hadad flees and attempts to hide in Aphek (verses 29-30). The victory of the smaller force of Israel over the Arameans demonstrates that it is a victory of Israel's God, YHWH.

³¹His servants said to him, "Look, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are loyal kings; let us put sackcloth around our waists and ropes on our heads, and go out to the king of Israel; perhaps he will spare your life."

³²So they tied sackcloth around their waists, put ropes on their heads, went to the king of Israel, and said, "Your servant Ben-hadad says, 'Please let me live.'" And he said, "Is he still alive? He is my brother." ³³Now the men were watching for an omen; they quickly took it up from him and said, "Yes, Ben-hadad is your brother." Then he said, "Go and bring him." So Ben-hadad came out to him; and he had him come up into the chariot. ³⁴Ben-hadad said to him, "I will restore the towns that my father took from your father; and you may establish bazaars for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria." The king of Israel responded, "I will let you go on those terms." So he made a covenant with him and let him go.

Ben-hadad sees that his only chance is to presume that Ahab will see that it is to his advantage to honour old covenants and spare his life. This is the meaning of 'loyal' [חֶסֶד, ḥesed] in verse 31. His judgment proves right. They make a covenant [בְּרִית, b'rit], Israel receives back the cities taken earlier (see 1Kings 15:18-20), and Ben-hadad is spared.

The final verses of the chapter (verses 35-43) see an unnamed member of a company of prophets set out to confront Ahab. He wants to appear as a wounded veteran. The first person refuses to strike him and, since in doing so he is resisting God's will, he is eaten by a lion (compare 13:24-28)! The second person is quick to learn the lesson and obliges by beating the prophet up as requested. The ruse organised by the prophet to trick the king is based on the חֶרֶם [ḥerem], the requirement to give all the spoils of war to God (see 1Samuel 15). Ahab fails to comply and must pay the price

³⁵At the command of YHWH a certain member of a company of prophets said to another, "Strike me!" But the man refused to strike him. ³⁶Then he said to him, "Because you have not obeyed the voice of YHWH, as soon as you have left me, a lion will kill you." And when he had left him, a lion met him and killed him. ³⁷Then he found another man and said, "Strike me!" So the man hit him, striking and wounding him. ³⁸Then the prophet departed, and waited for the king along the road, disguising himself with a bandage over his eyes. ³⁹As the king passed by, he cried to the king and said, "Your servant went out into the thick of the battle; then a soldier turned and brought a man to me, and said, 'Guard this man; if he is missing, your life will be given for his life, or else you will pay a talent of silver.'" ⁴⁰While your servant was busy here and there, he was gone." The king of Israel said to him, "So will your judgment be; you yourself have decided it." ⁴¹Then he quickly took the bandage away from his eyes. The king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. ⁴²Then he said to him, "Thus says YHWH, 'Because you have let the man go whom I had devoted to destruction, therefore your life will be for his life, and your people for his people.'" ⁴³The king of Israel set out toward home, resentful and sullen, and came to Samaria.

¹Later the following events took place: Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of King Ahab of Samaria. ²And Ahab said to Naboth, "Give me your vineyard, so that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house; I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money."³But Naboth said to Ahab, "YHWH forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance."

⁴Ahab went home resentful and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him; for he had said, "I will not give you my ancestral inheritance." He lay down on his bed, turned away his face, and would not eat.

⁵His wife Jezebel came to him and said, "Why are you so depressed that you will not eat?" ⁶He said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard for it'; but he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'"

⁷His wife Jezebel said to him, "Do you now govern Israel? Get up, eat some food, and be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

Ahab wants to extend his winter residence in Jezreel and opens up a negotiation with Naboth whose vineyard abuts onto the royal grounds. Ahab offers to Naboth a better vineyard, or money if he prefers, if Naboth will give him the vineyard. Naboth reminds the king that he is not free to meet the king's request as it is his 'ancestral inheritance' [נַחֲלַת אֲבוֹתָי, nah^alat 'abōtāy].

Ahab concedes the point, but goes home 'resentful and sullen' (verse 4; see 20:43).

Jezebel has no such scruples. The system of government that she is used to in Sidon sees land as a commodity to which the crown has a privileged claim. She tells her husband to act like a king. If he wants the vineyard he has a right to it.

Israelite law supported the right of a person to maintain ownership of his ancestral land. This was based on the principle that the land belonged to YHWH, and therefore to whomever YHWH had given it. However, this was not always respected. If, for example, a person was unable to repay a debt, his land could be taken from him. Even here, however, attempts were made to honour original ownership. These included the law of Jubilee which required that after forty-nine years (7x7), the land must be returned (see Leviticus 25:8-22).

Jezebel sets up a situation in which witnesses will falsely claim that Naboth has ‘cursed God and the king’(verse 10; see Exodus 22:28). Such is the degradation in Israel that ‘the men of his city (Jezreel), the elders and the nobles who lived in his city’(verse 11), fall in behind the demands made in the name of the king. They have no trouble in finding two people willing to perjure themselves, so Naboth is condemned and killed.

Ahab is happy to obey his wife, and takes possession of the vineyard.

⁸So she wrote letters in Ahab’s name and sealed them with his seal; she sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who lived with Naboth in his city. ⁹She wrote in the letters, “Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth at the head of the assembly; ¹⁰seat two scoundrels opposite him, and have them bring a charge against him, saying, ‘You have cursed God and the king.’ Then take him out, and stone him to death.”

¹¹The men of his city, the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. Just as it was written in the letters that she had sent to them, ¹²they proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the assembly. ¹³The two scoundrels came in and sat opposite him; and the scoundrels brought a charge against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, “Naboth cursed God and the king.” So they took him outside the city, and stoned him to death. ¹⁴Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, “Naboth has been stoned; he is dead.”

¹⁵As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, “Go, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead.” ¹⁶As soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab set out to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

¹⁷Then the word of YHWH came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying: ¹⁸Go down to meet King Ahab of Israel, who rules in Samaria; he is now in the vineyard of Naboth, where he has gone to take possession. ¹⁹You shall say to him, "Thus says YHWH: Have you killed, and also taken possession?" You shall say to him, "Thus says YHWH: In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth, dogs will also lick up your blood."

²⁰Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" He answered, "I have found you. Because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the sight of YHWH, ²¹I will bring evil on you; I will consume you, and will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel; ²²and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha son of Ahijah, because you have provoked me to anger and have caused Israel to sin. ²³Also concerning Jezebel YHWH said, 'The dogs will eat Jezebel within the bounds of Jezreel.' ²⁴Anyone belonging to Ahab who dies in the city the dogs shall eat; and anyone of his who dies in the open country the birds of the air will eat."

²⁵(Indeed, there was no one like Ahab, who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of YHWH, urged on by his wife Jezebel. ²⁶He acted most abominably in going after idols, as the Amorites had done, whom YHWH drove out before the Israelites.)

²⁷When Ahab heard those words, he tore his clothes and put sackcloth over his bare flesh; he fasted, lay in the sackcloth, and went about dejectedly. ²⁸Then the word of YHWH came to Elijah the Tishbite: ²⁹"Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son's days I will bring the disaster on his house."

Jezebel thinks that royal authority is absolute, and Ahab is happy to go along with her. But they are both wrong. It is YHWH whose power is absolute, and he makes this clear through his prophet Elijah. The king thinks he can take possession of the vineyard. The 'word of YHWH' (verse 17) makes it clear that it is 'the vineyard of Naboth' (verse 18).

YHWH will wipe out Ahab's dynasty, as he wiped out the dynasty of Jeroboam (1Kings 13:34; 14:10-14) and the dynasty of Baasha (1Kings 16:3-4).

The threat against Jezebel echoes that against the house of Jeroboam (14:11), and against the house of Baasha (16:4).

Verses 25-26 are an explanatory editorial addition. Ahab's action to gain land is the reason why his dynasty is driven from the land, as happened to the Amorites. Those reading this in exile would link it to the judgment of God expressed in 2Kings 17:5-8.

It was known that Ahab died as king and that the throne was handed on to his son. Hence verses 27-29.

The Chronicler

The Deuteronomists go straight on to speak of the death of Ahab. The account includes mention of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah (see 1Kings 22). He is introduced by the Deuteronomists without explanation, so the Chronicler inserts this chapter here.

In 870 when Jehoshaphat succeeded to the throne of his father Asa (see page 107), Ahab was in the fourth year of his reign in Israel (see 1Kings 22:41; page 141).

The reason for Jehoshaphat's success in consolidating his rule in Judah is given by the Chronicler as his loyalty to YHWH, in contrast to what was happening in Israel (verse 4).

His devotion to YHWH is shown in his sending his officials, as well as Levites, to teach the Torah throughout the land. The phrase 'book of the law of YHWH' (verse 9) appears to be a retrojection into the ninth century of the situation at the time of the Chronicler.

¹Asa's son Jehoshaphat succeeded him, and strengthened himself against Israel. ²He placed forces in all the fortified cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim that his father Asa had taken. ³YHWH was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the earlier ways of his father; he did not seek the Baals, ⁴but sought the God of his father and walked in his commandments, and not according to the ways of Israel. ⁵Therefore YHWH established the kingdom in his hand. All Judah brought tribute to Jehoshaphat, and he had great riches and honour. ⁶His heart was courageous in the ways of YHWH; and furthermore he removed the high places and the sacred poles from Judah.

⁷In the third year of his reign he sent his officials, Ben-hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah.

⁸With them were the Levites, Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tob-adonijah; and with these Levites, the priests Elishama and Jehoram. ⁹They taught in Judah, having the book of the law of YHWH with them; they went around through all the cities of Judah and taught among the people.

¹⁰The fear of YHWH fell on all the kingdoms of the lands around Judah, and they did not make war against Jehoshaphat. ¹¹Some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents, and silver for tribute; and the Arabs also brought him seven thousand seven hundred rams and seven thousand seven hundred male goats. ¹²Jehoshaphat grew steadily greater. He built fortresses and storage cities in Judah. ¹³He carried out great works in the cities of Judah.

He had soldiers, mighty warriors, in Jerusalem. ¹⁴This was the muster of them by ancestral houses: Of Judah, the commanders of the thousands: Adnah the commander, with three hundred thousand mighty warriors, ¹⁵and next to him Jehohanan the commander, with two hundred eighty thousand, ¹⁶and next to him Amasiah son of Zichri, a volunteer for the service of YHWH, with two hundred thousand mighty warriors. ¹⁷Of Benjamin: Eliada, a mighty warrior, with two hundred thousand armed with bow and shield, ¹⁸and next to him Jehozabad with one hundred eighty thousand armed for war. ¹⁹These were in the service of the king, besides those whom the king had placed in the fortified cities throughout all Judah.

The Chronicler

The picture painted by the Chronicler puts Judah under Jehoshaphat as a significant player on the world stage.

The king of Israel (in fact, Ahab, though he is not named till verse 39) wants to retake Ramoth-gilead from Aram. He 'requests' the help of King Jehoshaphat of Judah, who complies, but suggests that they first enquire of YHWH (verse 5). To discover this the king of Israel gathers four hundred prophets who tell him to go ahead (verse 6). Jehoshaphat wants a 'prophet of YHWH'(verse 7).

Micaiah is summoned (verse 9). In the meantime the king's prophets continue to support his desires, including Zedekiah (verse 11).

The Chronicler

In 2Chronicles 18:1-11, the Chronicler copies the story as found in 1Kings. His introduction is different.

¹Now Jehoshaphat had great riches and honour; and he made a marriage alliance with Ahab. ²After some years he went down to Ahab in Samaria. Ahab slaughtered an abundance of sheep and oxen for him and for the people who were with him, and induced him to go up against Ramoth-gilead.

– 2Chronicles 18:1-2



¹For three years Aram and Israel were without war. ²But in the third year King Jehoshaphat of Judah came down to the king of Israel. ³The king of Israel said to his servants, "Do you know that Ramoth-gilead belongs to us, yet we are doing nothing to take it out of the power of the king of Aram?" ⁴He said to Jehoshaphat, "Will you go with me to battle at Ramoth-gilead?" Jehoshaphat replied to the king of Israel, "I am as you are; my people are your people, my horses are your horses."

⁵But Jehoshaphat also said to the king of Israel, "Inquire first for the word of YHWH." ⁶Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred of them, and said to them, "Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-gilead, or shall I refrain?" They said, "Go up; for YHWH will give it into the hand of the king." ⁷But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there no other prophet of YHWH here of whom we may inquire?" ⁸The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is still one other by whom we may inquire of YHWH, Micaiah son of Imlah; but I hate him, for he never prophesies anything favourable about me, but only disaster." Jehoshaphat said, "Let the king not say such a thing." ⁹Then the king of Israel summoned an officer and said, "Go quickly and fetch Micaiah son of Imlah." ¹⁰Now the king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah were sitting on their thrones, arrayed in their robes, at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets were prophesying before them. ¹¹Zedekiah son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron, and he said, "Thus says YHWH: With these you shall gore the Arameans until they are destroyed." ¹²All the prophets were prophesying the same and saying, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead and triumph; YHWH will give it into the hand of the king."

¹³The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, "Look, the words of the prophets with one accord are favourable to the king; let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favourably." ¹⁴But Micaiah said, "As YHWH lives, whatever YHWH says to me, that I will speak." ¹⁵When he had come to the king, the king said to him, "Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?" He answered him, "Go up and triumph; YHWH will give it into the hand of the king." ¹⁶But the king said to him, "How many times must I make you swear to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of YHWH?" ¹⁷Then Micaiah said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep that have no shepherd; and YHWH said, 'These have no master; let each one go home in peace.'" ¹⁸The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy anything favourable about me, but only disaster?" ¹⁹Then Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of YHWH: I saw YHWH sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven standing beside him to the right and to the left of him. ²⁰And YHWH said, 'Who will entice Ahab, so that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?' Then one said one thing, and another said another, ²¹until a spirit came forward and stood before YHWH, saying, 'I will entice him.' ²²'How?' YHWH asked him. He replied, 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then YHWH said, 'You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do it.' ²³So you see, YHWH has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; YHWH has decreed disaster for you."

Unlike the other so-called 'prophets' who belong to a company in service of the king, Micaiah is a genuine prophet, and declares 'Whatever YHWH says to me, that I will speak'(verse 14).

When questioned he says in effect: 'Believe what you want to. You have made up your mind already'(verse 15). Ahab senses that Micaiah is playing with him and demands 'the truth'(verse 16).

Micaiah's 'vision' is ominous. The sheep (the army) are scattered, and the shepherd (the king) is no more (verse 17). These words anticipate the fall of the northern kingdom and the exile of its people.

Micaiah, the seer, sees into the council of the gods. It is YHWH's will that Ahab go to battle (a battle where he will be killed). One of the spirits present at the divine assembly offers to carry out YHWH's will by deceiving the prophets into encouraging Ahab to undertake the venture. YHWH approves of the plan.

(This is consistent with a theology that works from the preface that God controls everything that happens.)

The Chronicler

In 2Chronicles 18:12-22, the Chronicler copies this passage from 1Kings.

Zedekiah the palace prophet is not going to stand by and be overruled by Micaiah. The king orders Micaiah to be imprisoned. 'Joash, the king's son' (verse 26) is mentioned only here. He may be another, otherwise unknown, son of Ahab, or he may be a 'son' in the sense of servant.

Micaiah has the last word.

The Chronicler

In 2Chronicles 18:23-27, the Chronicler copies this passage from 1Kings.

²⁴Then Zedekiah son of Chenaanah came up to Micaiah, struck him on the cheek, and said, "Which way did the spirit of YHWH pass from me to speak to you?" ²⁵Micaiah replied, "You will find out on that day when you go in to hide in an inner chamber." ²⁶The king of Israel then ordered, "Take Micaiah, and return him to Amon the governor of the city and to Joash the king's son, ²⁷and say, "Thus says the king: Put this fellow in prison, and feed him on reduced rations of bread and water until I come in peace.'" ²⁸Micaiah said, "If you return in peace, YHWH has not spoken by me." And he said, "Hear, you peoples, all of you!"

²⁹So the king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah went up to Ramoth-gilead. ³⁰The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "I will disguise myself and go into battle, but you wear your robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle. ³¹Now the king of Aram had commanded the thirty-two captains of his chariots, "Fight with no one small or great, but only with the king of Israel." ³²When the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, "It is surely the king of Israel." So they turned to fight against him; and Jehoshaphat cried out. ³³When the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, they turned back from pursuing him. ³⁴But a certain man drew his bow and unknowingly struck the king of Israel between the scale armour and the breast-plate; so he said to the driver of his chariot, "Turn around, and carry me out of the battle, for I am wounded." ³⁵The battle grew hot that day, and the king was propped up in his chariot facing the Arameans, until at evening he died; the blood from the wound had flowed into the bottom of the chariot. ³⁶Then about sunset a shout went through the army, "Every man to his city, and every man to his country!" ³⁷So the king died, and was brought to Samaria; they buried the king in Samaria. ³⁸They washed the chariot by the pool of Samaria; the dogs licked up his blood, and the prostitutes washed themselves in it, according to the word of YHWH that he had spoken. ³⁹Now the rest of the acts of Ahab, and all that he did, and the ivory house that he built, and all the cities that he built, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel? ⁴⁰So Ahab slept with his ancestors; and his son Ahaziah succeeded him.

There are indications throughout this narrative that it is the king of Israel who is the dominant authority here (see the comments on page 133). Ahab does his best to avoid being recognised by the enemy (verse 30). The king of Aram acts as pawn in YHWH's plan by telling his troops that all he wants is Ahab dead (verse 31). Then, apparently by chance (but clearly directed by YHWH), Ahab is struck with an arrow and dies (verses 34-35).

From an Assyrian inscription, we know that this battle took place in the sixth year of the reign of Shalmaneser III of Assyria, that is in 853. The dogs lick Ahab's blood, as was prophesied by Elijah (see 1Kings 21:19), though at Samaria (verse 38), not Jezreel.

The failure of the combined armies of Israel and Judah is all the more surprising when we realise that during the reign of Shalmaneser Israel had the largest army in the Middle East. Is it any wonder that the Deuteronomists saw in this defeat the hand of God?

The Chronicler

In 2Chronicles 18:28-34, the Chronicler copies 1Kings 29-35. He expands on 1Kings 22:32.

Jehoshaphat cried out, and the YHWH helped him. God drew them away from him.

– 2Chronicles 18:31

Since the Chronicler is interested in the kings of Israel only insofar as they appear in the actions of the kings of Judah, and since he has no interest in Ahab, or in the prophecy of Elijah he omits 1Kings 22:35-40.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler continues his treatment of Jehoshaphat, adding this passage to the record of the kings as presented in 1Kings.

The prophet Jehu spoke out against Baasha of Israel (see 1Kings 16). Here he is speaking to Jehoshaphat as he makes his way back to Jerusalem, saying that God is unhappy with him for allying himself with Ahab (verses 1-3).

Then comes a record of Jehoshaphat's reforms (verses 4-11), which concern teaching and the administration of justice. The Chronicler's interest in Levites and in the cult stand out in this passage.

The expression 'chief priest' [כֹּהֵן הָרִאשִׁון, *kōhēn hārō's*, verse 11] is a post-exilic term.

¹King Jehoshaphat of Judah returned in safety to his house in Jerusalem. ²Jehu son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him and said to King Jehoshaphat, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate YHWH? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from YHWH. ³Nevertheless, some good is found in you, for you destroyed the sacred poles out of the land, and have set your heart to seek God."

⁴Jehoshaphat resided at Jerusalem; then he went out again among the people, from Beer-sheba to the hill country of Ephraim, and brought them back to YHWH, the God of their ancestors. ⁵He appointed judges in the land in all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, ⁶and said to the judges, "Consider what you are doing, for you judge not on behalf of human beings but on YHWH's behalf; he is with you in giving judgment. ⁷Now, let the fear of YHWH be upon you; take care what you do, for there is no perversion of justice with YHWH our God, or partiality, or taking of bribes."

⁸Moreover in Jerusalem Jehoshaphat appointed certain Levites and priests and heads of families of Israel, to give judgment for YHWH and to decide disputed cases. They had their seat at Jerusalem. ⁹He charged them: "This is how you shall act: in the fear of YHWH, in faithfulness, and with your whole heart; ¹⁰whenever a case comes to you from your kindred who live in their cities, concerning bloodshed, law or commandment, statutes or ordinances, then you shall instruct them, so that they may not incur guilt before YHWH and wrath may not come on you and your kindred. Do so, and you will not incur guilt. ¹¹See, Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of YHWH; and Zebadiah son of Ishmael, the governor of the house of Judah, in all the king's matters; and the Levites will serve you as officers. Deal courageously, and may YHWH be with the good!"

¹After this the Moabites and Ammonites, and with them some of the Meunites, came against Jehoshaphat for battle.

²Messengers came and told Jehoshaphat, “A great multitude is coming against you from Edom, from beyond the sea; already they are at Hazazon-tamar” (that is, En-gedi). ³Jehoshaphat was afraid; he set himself to seek YHWH, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah.

⁴Judah assembled to seek help from YHWH; from all the towns of Judah they came to seek YHWH. ⁵Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of YHWH, before the new court, ⁶and said, “YHWH, God of our ancestors, are you not God in heaven? Do you not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations? In your hand are power and might, so that no one is able to withstand you. ⁷Did you not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel, and give it forever to the descendants of your friend Abraham? ⁸They have lived in it, and in it have built you a sanctuary for your name, saying, ⁹“If disaster comes upon us, the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house, and before you, for your name is in this house, and cry to you in our distress, and you will hear and save.’

¹⁰See now, the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, whom you would not let Israel invade when they came from the land of Egypt, and whom they avoided and did not destroy— ¹¹they reward us by coming to drive us out of your possession that you have given us to inherit.

¹²O our God, will you not execute judgment upon them? For we are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.”

The Chronicler

Chapter 20:1-30 is another illustration of Jehoshaphat’s devotion to YHWH, and the reward of such devotion.

It is likely that ‘Meunites’ refers to people from Mā‘on, a town in Moab or Edom. The forces attacking from the south are already at En-gedi, half-way along the western shore of the Dead Sea.

Knowing that he is ‘powerless’(verse 12) to defeat the advancing troops, Jehoshaphat turns in prayer to YHWH, who rules over ‘all the kingdoms of the nations’(verse 6).

Verse 10 is consistent with the account in the Book of Numbers of the Israelites bypassing Edom, Moab and Ammon and fighting against the Amorites in the area between the Arnon and Jabbok rivers (see Numbers 21:24) and king Og of Bashan (Numbers 21:33-35).

The Chronicler

Jehaziel, a temple singer, is inspired to utter an oracle. Asaph was a leader in the liturgy, appointed by King David (see 1Chronicles 16:5). He is named in the introduction to twelve of the psalms.

Jehaziel assures King Jehoshaphat that he doesn't have to do anything. YHWH will ensure victory (verse 17; compare Exodus 14:13-14; 1Samuel 17:47).

After worshipping God, Jehoshaphat sets off towards En-gedi in a religious procession, chanting God's praises (verses 18-21).

¹³Meanwhile all Judah stood before YHWH, with their little ones, their wives, and their children. ¹⁴Then the spirit of YHWH came upon Jahaziel son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the middle of the assembly. ¹⁵He said, "Listen, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, and King Jehoshaphat: Thus says YHWH to you: 'Do not fear or be dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's. ¹⁶Tomorrow go down against them; they will come up by the ascent of Ziz; you will find them at the end of the valley, before the wilderness of Jeruel. ¹⁷This battle is not for you to fight; take your position, stand still, and see the victory of YHWH on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.' Do not fear or be dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, and YHWH will be with you."

¹⁸Then Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before YHWH, worshipping YHWH. ¹⁹And the Levites, of the Kohathites and the Korahites, stood up to praise YHWH, the God of Israel, with a very loud voice. ²⁰They rose early in the morning and went out into the wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, "Listen to me, O Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem! Believe in YHWH your God and you will be established; believe his prophets."

²¹When he had taken counsel with the people, he appointed those who were to sing to YHWH and praise him in holy splendour, as they went before the army, saying, "Give thanks to YHWH, for his steadfast love endures forever."

²²As they began to sing and praise, YHWH set an ambush against the Ammonites, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed. ²³For the Ammonites and Moab attacked the inhabitants of Mount Seir, destroying them utterly; and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, they all helped to destroy one another.

²⁴When Judah came to the watchtower of the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; they were corpses lying on the ground; no one had escaped. ²⁵When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take the booty from them, they found livestock in great numbers, goods, clothing, and precious things, which they took for themselves until they could carry no more. They spent three days taking the booty, because of its abundance.

²⁶On the fourth day they assembled in the Valley of Beracah, for there they blessed YHWH; therefore that place has been called the Valley of Beracah to this day. ²⁷Then all the people of Judah and Jerusalem, with Jehoshaphat at their head, returned to Jerusalem with joy, for YHWH had enabled them to rejoice over their enemies. ²⁸They came to Jerusalem, with harps and lyres and trumpets, to the house of YHWH.

²⁹The fear of God came on all the kingdoms of the countries when they heard that YHWH had fought against the enemies of Israel. ³⁰And the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, for his God gave him rest all around.

The Chronicler

YHWH brings it about that the attackers turn on each other (verses 22-23).

Jehoshaphat is able to take the booty because it resulted not from military action, but from YHWH's intervention (verses 24-25).

Jehoshaphat has been mentioned in 1Kings 15:24 (see page 107), and again in 1Kings 22 when he joined King Ahab in the war against Aram (see pages 131ff). He came to the throne ‘in the fourth year of Ahab’, that is in 870, and reigned for 25 years, 870-846.

The Chronicler

The Chronicler does not mention king Ahab. Apart from that omission he copies 1Kings 22:41-43 (2Chronicles 20:31-33). In place of ‘yet the high places were not taken away, and the people still sacrificed and offered incense on the high places’ (verse 43), the Chronicler writes:

only the high places did not cease because the people had not yet set their minds intently on the God of their fathers.

– 2Chronicles 20:33

In place of verse 44, he writes:

After this King Jehoshaphat of Judah joined with King Ahaziah of Israel, who did wickedly.

– 2Chronicles 20:35

In his equivalent of verse 45, he refers to

the records of Jehu the son of Hanani which are recorded in the annals of the kings of Israel.

– 2Chronicles 20:34

He omits verses 46-47, and in place of verses 48-49 writes:

³⁶He joined him in building ships to go to Tarshish; they built the ships in Ezion-geber. ³⁷Then Eliezer son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, “Because you have joined with Ahaziah, YHWH will destroy what you have made.” And the ships were wrecked and were not able to go to Tarshish.

– 2Chronicles 20:36-37

⁴¹Jehoshaphat son of Asa began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of King Ahab of Israel.⁴²Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Azubah daughter of Shilhi.⁴³He walked in all the way of his father Asa; he did not turn aside from it, doing what was right in the sight of YHWH; yet the high places were not taken away, and the people still sacrificed and offered incense on the high places. ⁴⁴Jehoshaphat also made peace with the king of Israel.

⁴⁵Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, and his power that he showed, and how he waged war, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah?

⁴⁶The remnant of the male temple prostitutes who were still in the land in the days of his father Asa, he exterminated. ⁴⁷There was no king in Edom; a deputy was king.

⁴⁸Jehoshaphat made ships of the Tarshish type to go to Ophir for gold; but they did not go, for the ships were wrecked at Ezion-geber. ⁴⁹Then Ahaziah son of Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, “Let my servants go with your servants in the ships,” but Jehoshaphat was not willing.

⁵⁰Jehoshaphat slept with his ancestors and was buried with his ancestors in the city of his father David; his son Jehoram succeeded him.

The Chronicler

With his focus on Judah, the Chronicler has a longer introduction to the reign of Jehoram.

¹Jehoshaphat slept with his ancestors and was buried with his ancestors in the city of David; his son Jehoram succeeded him. ²He had brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat: Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azariah, Michael, and Shephatiah; all these were the sons of King Jehoshaphat of Judah. ³Their father gave them many gifts, of silver, gold, and valuable possessions, together with fortified cities in Judah; but he gave the kingdom to Jehoram, because he was the firstborn. ⁴When Jehoram had ascended the throne of his father and was established, he put all his brothers to the sword, and also some of the officials of Israel.

– 2Chronicles 21:1-4

⁵¹Ahaziah son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of King Jehoshaphat of Judah; he reigned two years over Israel. ⁵²He did what was evil in the sight of YHWH, and walked in the way of his father and mother, and in the way of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin. ⁵³He served Baal and worshipped him; he provoked YHWH, the God of Israel, to anger, just as his father had done.

Ahaziah began his reign as king of Israel ‘in the seventeenth year of King Jehoshaphat’, that is in 853. His successor Jehoram became king ‘in the eighteenth year of King Jehoshaphat’; that is in 852. ‘He reigned two years’, the year of his accession and the following year; that is from 853-852.

The Deuteronomists are content to pass the standard judgment on him.