Naaman was the commander of the Syrian army who was highly regarded by his lord, the king of Syria because it was by him (Naaman) that the LORD gave victory to Syria. While the bible does not identify in which battle Syria was victorious, let us suppose that it was the battle for Ramoth-gilead in which Ahab was mortally wounded. I think this is reasonable because the bible is the record of Israel's journey with the LORD be it good or bad. Naaman had one physical flaw: he was a leper. We are quite sensitive regarding how the ancient Israelites viewed leprosy, though I am not sure these sensitivities were shared by the nations around them. Perhaps in Syria leprosy was not as feared nor as restrictive as it was in Israel. As it happened, there was an Israelite captive in Syria, a little girl, who worked for Naaman. The compassion displayed by this little girl for Naaman indicates also that Naaman was probably a generous and kind master: “She said to her mistress, ‘Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.’” (2 Kings 5:3 ESV) Why should she care? Anyway, armed with this information, Naaman approaches the king and asks if he can go to Samaria to see this prophet. The king sends him on his way laden with wonderful gifts for Elisha, the prophet. Naaman took with him 750 lbs. of silver and 150 lbs. of gold, ten changes of clothes and, oh yes, a letter for the king of Israel.

Naaman is a true diplomat for he first seeks out the king of Israel and presents the letter from his master. The letter said: “When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy.” (2 Kings 5:6 ESV) The unnamed king of Israel is thought to be Jehoram, son of Ahab. The scripture is kind to Jehoram in that “he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, though not like his father and mother [Jezebel], for he put away the pillar of Baal that his father had made.” (2 Kings 3:2 ESV emphasis mine) So he was bad but his father was worse. Back to the letter. The Syrian king here is Ben-hadad. The bible tells us that the Israelite king (Jehoram) was quaking in his boots as the letter Naaman delivered was read. Jehoram must have been a very insecure and paranoid king. He interprets the letter literally which I don’t believe was intended. Jehoram views the letter as a prelude to war. Elisha tells Jehoram to send Naaman to him “that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel.” (2 Kings 5:8 ESV) Naaman feels secure enough to travel throughout Israel without fear (of war or anything else).

As Naaman approaches Elisha’s house, Elisha sends his servant Gehazi out to tell Naaman to go to the Jordan “and wash in the Jordan seven (!) times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.” (2 Kings 5:10 ESV) Well, Naaman was expecting some kind of a divine show and was angrily disappointed at being told to bathe seven times in the Jordan; surely there must be more, he could do that in any of the rivers of Syria. “[I could do that at home.] As he leaves in anger, his servants implore him to consider what the prophet has said, namely “your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.” Sounds reasonable. Off he goes to the Jordan and bathes seven (!) times “and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.” (2 Kings 5:14 ESV)

Naaman, with good manners, offers Elisha a gift but Elisha refused saying, “As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none.” (2 Kings 5:16 ESV) It was not an uncommon practice to offer a man of God a present for his work, or prophesy, or any other kind of service rendered. We saw this when Saul was looking for Samuel to help him locate Saul’s father’s donkeys (see 1 Samuel Chapter 9). Here Elisha refuses the gift perhaps to emphasize that the grace of God cannot be bought. With that, Naaman makes a very strange request: “two mules’ load of earth, for from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the LORD.” (2 Kings 5:17 ESV) Because Naaman knows that upon return to his homeland he will be required to “bow” down to a false god, (because the king leans on him for support)
he then asks that the Lord pardon him in this matter. Elisha sends Naaman on his way with “Go in peace.” (2 Kings 5:19 ESV) The point here is that the mercy of God extends beyond the tribes of Israel (Jacob). “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.” (Acts 10:34 ESV)

“5:14-15 a little child. The Hebrew is na’ar qaton, and there is evidently a play on the phrase na’arah qetannah (“little girl” in v. 2. The “great man” (v.1) had a problem, to which the “little girl” had the solution; but the solution involved Naaman’s becoming, like her, “a little child” – someone under prophetic authority, humbly acknowledging his new faith (I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel). He had looked to the prophet himself for a cure, in line with the words of his Israelite informant (v. 3); but the way in which the cure has been wrought has made it clear t him that Elisha’s God is a living person, not simply a convenient metaphor for unnatural prophetic powers.

“5:17 two mules’ load of earth. The earth is to be used in the construction of a mud-brick altar (cf. Ex. 20:24-25) for Naaman’s worship of the Lord.”]

2 Kings 5:20-27 Gehazi Schemes and the Lord Repays

Elisha had refused the gift offered by Naaman perhaps believing that what was freely given to him he should likewise freely give away. Gehazi, his servant, saw it differently. One could almost see the money bags “flying” away. Not to let a good opportunity go to waste, Gehazi fled after Naaman and caught up with him. Naaman asked him if all was well, which it was, but Gehazi spun some yarn about sudden visitors and that Elisha needed one talent of silver (75 lbs.) and two changes of clothes. Naaman then ordered two of his servants to carry the loot back with Gehazi but as they approached the house, Gehazi relieved Naaman’s servants of the goods and sent them on their way.

So far we have a heart for greed and one lie. It gets worse. I don’t know how long Gehazi was in Elisha’s employ, but it appears his heart had not been converted. Here Gehazi has the opportunity to watch the powerful hand of God working through his prophet Elisha; a front row seat. Things get dangerous now for Elisha asks Gehazi “Where have you been, Gehazi?” (v. 25 ESV) Gehazi responds to Elisha that he has gone nowhere. Lie number two. While we know the end of the story, still I think Gehazi would have had enough sense not to lie to Elisha – he is a prophet after all. The next words from Elisha are bone-chilling: “Did not my heart go when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Was it time to accept money and garments, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male servants and female servants?” (2 Kings 5:26 ESV) This scene is reminiscent of Samuel’s encounter with Saul when Saul kept the booty from a campaign against the Amalekites, which was supposed to be destroyed. (“What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?” 1 Samuel 15:14 ESV) So Gehazi is caught in a lie to a prophet of all people. How stupid is that? The sentence comes next: “Therefore the leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your descendants forever.” (2 Kings 5:27 ESV) This story also is like the episode of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts chapter five when this couple, on separate occasions, lied to the apostles and that cost them their lives. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:31 ESV) When Elisha says “Did not my heart go…” strikes me that he was heartbroken over this deception; hoped better things of Gehazi.

2 Kings 6:1-23 Iron Floats / Horses and Chariots of Fire

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The opening verses of chapter six tell us that the Lord is concerned about the minutest details of our lives. It so happened that when someone was chopping a log the axe head flew off and fell into the Jordan. The unfortunate man wielding the tool had borrowed it. He pleads with Elisha to do what he can. Elisha throws a stick in the river where the axe fell and the axe floated to the surface.

The next scenario is during a time of war with Syria. As the king of Syria makes his plans and strategies, Elisha relays them to the king of Israel. Elisha, of course, is no where near to where the king of Syria is. This happened on several occasions prompting the king of Syria to ask how the king of Israel gained his intelligence. The King accuses his own men of being traitorous in informing the Israelite king of Syria’s battle plans. However the king’s servants told the king that Elisha the prophet, who is in Israel, was the culprit. “The mind of the king of Syria was greatly troubled because of this thing, and he called his servants and said to them, ‘Will you not show me who of us is for the king of Israel?’ And one of his servants said, ‘None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom.’” (2 Kings 6:11-12 ESV) Next of course, the Syrian king wants to know where in Israel Elisha is keeping himself.

Evidently Elisha was unafraid of the king of Syria for he made no secret that he was in Dothan (a scant 10 miles north of the capital city of Samaria). The Syrian king dispatches horses and chariots “and a great army” (v. 14) and surrounded the city at night. In the morning Elisha’s servant (not named) rises to find a huge army encamped around the city. Concerned he goes to Elisha saying “What shall we do?” (v. 15 ESV) Unfazed, Elisha tells him not to be afraid because “those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” (2 Kings 6:16 ESV) The structure of this statement reminds me of 1 John 4:4 “for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” (ESV) Next Elisha prays, “O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.” (2 Kings 6:17 ESV) “So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” (2 Kings 6:17 ESV)

I suppose the Syrian army felt superior in the face of an unseen heavenly host. To rectify that, Elisha then asks the Lord to strike the army with blindness. (See note below.)

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“6:18 blindness. Probably not a loss of physical sight (since the Syrians would not doubt their location just because they could no longer physically see it), but rather a dazed mental condition in which they are open to suggestion and manipulation but still able to follow the prophet to Samaria. The Syrians are ‘bedazzled’ and do not ‘see’ things clearly, whereas Elisha’s servant has been given perfect clarity of ‘sight’ about reality.”]

Elisha is very helpful to the Syrians in that he tells them that he would lead them to the man they want (the king of Israel). Shortly after entering Samaria Elisha asks the Lord to then open the eyes of the captives. When the king of Israel (Jehoram) sees the captive army he asks Elisha if he could strike them down, not once but twice. Why not? Elisha has other plans for the Syrians, “He answered, ‘You shall not strike them down. Would you strike down those whom you have taken captive with your sword and with your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master.’” (2 Kings 6:22 ESV) So the Syrians live to fight another day. And fight they will!

2 Kings 9:1-16 Jehu Anointed King of Israel
At this point Elisha sends one of “the sons of the prophets” to Ramoth-gilead to seek out Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi. He was then to anoint Jehu privately and say, “Thus says the LORD, ‘I anoint you king over Israel.’” (2 Kings 9:3 ESV) Then this messenger was to leave quickly. The messenger finds Jehu among other commanders who were gathered together and singles him out for a private meeting. There the messenger anoints Jehu as king “saying to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, I anoint you king over the people of the LORD, over Israel. And you shall strike down the house of Ahab your master, so that I may avenge on Jezebel the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish, and I will cut off from Ahab every male, bond or free, in Israel. And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah. And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the territory of Jezreel, and none shall bury her.’ Then he opened the door and fled.” (2 Kings 9:6-10 ESV)

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“9:3 flask of oil. Elijah had been commanded to anoint Jehu king over Israel (1 Kings 19:16), but had failed to do so. It is left to Elisha now to fulfill his mission. Anointing with oil was a common practice in the ancient Near East to mark various rites of passage, and in Israel it was closely associated with the enthronement of kings (see 1 Sam. 16:13). It appears to be bound up with the king’s legitimacy and right to rule; to be the ‘anointed of the LORD’ is to be a person inviolable and sacrosanct (1 Sam. 24:6-7; 2 Sam. 19:21-22). The secret anointing that takes place here (in an ‘inner chamber’; 2 Kings 9:2) is particularly reminiscent of Samuel’s anointing of Saul (cf. 1 Sam. 9:27-10:1). The reasons for Elisha’s advice to the messenger to open the door and flee are not provided, but the reference to Jehu’s reckless chariot driving in 2 Kings 9:20 perhaps suggests that he has a reputation for rash behavior and could be dangerous to the messenger.”

Jehu reveals to the others with him what had just transpired which then prompted the others to sound the trumpet and proclaim “Jehu is king.” (2 Kings 9:13 ESV)

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“9:7 you shall strike down the house of Ahab. The oracle actually delivered by the messenger is much longer than the one pronounced by Elisha in v. 3. The essence of the message is given there, with its fuller form being delayed until later, presumably so that repetition should not unnecessarily hold up the narrative. For the same reason, only the essence of the message is later communicated by Jehu to his fellow officers (v. 12), the details being subsumed under ‘Thus and so he spoke to me.’ The blood of my servants the prophets. Elijah did not explicitly state to Ahab in 1 Kings 21:21-24 that the Lord’s action against Ahab’s house would be partly a matter of vengeance for the blood of the prophets. This is implicit in 1 Kings 19:14-18, however, where God’s response to Elijah’s complaint about the murder of the prophets (1 Kings 18:4, 13) is precisely to send him to anoint Jehu (among others).”

Jehu has the support of the commanders and so orders them that no one leave the city (Ramoth-gilead) to spread the news in Jezreel (to where King Joram has withdrawn to recuperate from his wounds suffered at the hands of Hazael king of Syria). Jehu is off to Jezreel (on a divine mission) “and Ahaziah king of Judah had come down to visit Joram.” (2 Kings 9:16 ESV) Joram (or Jehoram [either is correct – j.t.]) is the sole surviving son of Ahab (see 2 Kings 1:17).

2 Kings 9:17-37    Jehu Assassinates (Executes) Joram (Jehoram) and Ahaziah (king of Judah)
This next section plays into our fears/fantasies/fascination with regard to revenge. Jehu has come to Jezreel with a company of men. The watchman in the tower sees him in the distance but can’t yet discern who is coming. Joram sends out a messenger to ask the one approaching “Is it peace?” (v. 17) Jehu tells the messenger to ride behind him. Joram sends out another messenger with the same message and with the same result. This time the watchman adds this comment: “He [the messenger] reached them, but he is not coming back. And the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi, for he drives furiously.” (2 Kings 9:20 ESV)

The setting here is important and significant. Jehu is at the property of Naboth the Jezreelite. You may remember that poor Naboth was minding his own business when Ahab came upon him in his vineyard and asked Naboth to buy/trade/sell the vineyard to him, which he refused. The upshot is that Jezebel then arranged for a couple of false witnesses to testify that Naboth had blasphemed God and denounced the king which then costs Naboth his life (see 1 Kings chapter 21). So here we are in Naboth’s, excuse me, Ahab’s vegetable garden. Here it gets real good! “Then Joram king of Israel and Ahaziah king of Judah set out, each in his chariot, and went to meet Jehu, and met him at the property of Naboth the Jezreelite. And when Joram saw Jehu, he said, ‘Is it peace, Jehu?’ He answered, ‘What peace can there be so long as the whorings and sorceries of your mother Jezebel are so many?’ Then Joram reined about and fled, saying to Ahaziah, ‘Treachery, O Ahaziah!’ And Jehu drew his bow with his full strength, and shot Joram between the shoulders, so that the arrow pierced his heart, and he sank in his chariot. Jehu said to Bidkar his aide, ‘Take him up and throw him on the plot of ground belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. For remember, when you and I rode side by side behind Ahab his father, how the Lord made this pronouncement against him: “As surely as I saw yesterday the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons – declares the Lord – I will repay you on this plot of ground.” Now therefore take him up and throw him on the plot of ground, in accordance with the word of the Lord.”” (2 Kings 9:21-26 ESV) Ahaziah’s fate was no better for Jehu dispatched him with the command: “Shoot him also.” (v. 27) Ahaziah manages to make it to Megiddo where he died. Ahaziah was contaminated with idolatry; he had taken for wife one of the daughters of Ahab who had infected him with the practices of Baal. This is precisely what Moses had warned against way back in Exodus (34:13-16).

**Jezebel’s Turn**

Jezebel has heard that Jehu had come to Jezreel so she adorned herself to meet him. Jezebel is being both regal and sarcastic with Jehu. “And as Jehu entered the gate, she said, ‘Is it peace, you Zimri, murderer of your master?’” (2 Kings 9:31 ESV) Zimri was the agent the Lord used to destroy the house of Baasha – he usurped the throne, alas, he lasted only seven days. Jehu orders her servants (eunuchs) to throw her down (she was on an upper floor). She was then trampled underfoot by the horses. Jehu then went in and ate and drank and when he was done he ordered that Jezebel be afforded a respectable burial, after all, she was the daughter of a king. But, when they went to collect her, there was nothing but her head, hands and feet. “When they came back and told him, he said, ‘This is the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, “In the territory of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel, and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say, This is Jezebel”’” (2 Kings 9:37 ESV)

**2 Kings 11:1-20 Athaliah (Queen Mother) Reigns in Judah**

Apart from Deborah Athaliah is the only woman ever to reign in either Israel or Judah. While Jezebel was the overriding influence in Ahab’s life and decisions, Athaliah actually rules as regent after her husband
Joram (of Judah, not the same person cited above) dies. Athaliah almost goes unnoticed by most of us as we read the Old Testament. She must be as wicked as Jezebel if not more so; she was after all Jezebel’s daughter. How is it most of us have not heard, or if we have, do not remember Athaliah? If I were to guess, it might have something to do with Jezebel’s “foreignness”.

During the time of Athaliah’s regency, the line of David (i.e., Jesus’ ancestors) hung by but one person: Joash the son of Ahaziah (whom Jehu dispatched in chapter 9 above).

[**Dake’s Annotated Reference Bible** Notes p. 682]

“Athaliah, Jehovah is strong.

“Queen Athaliah was the granddaughter of Omri (2 Chron. 22:2), and the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. The marriage between Jehoram, king of Judah, and Athaliah, daughter of Jezebel, was part of Satan’s design to introduce idolatry into Judah, so that Athaliah might do for Judah what Jezebel did for Israel. Jehoshaphat began his reign by strengthening himself against Israel (2 Chron. 17:1), but married his son to the idolatress daughter of Israel’s worst rulers – Ahab and Jezebel. The leaven worked morally and politically, and was used by Satan in an effort to destroy the Seed of the woman, the Messiah, whom he was determined to prevent from coming into the world. Jehoram, king of Judah, began this destruction by killing all his brethren (2 Chron. 21:4). The Arabians came and destroyed all his sons, save the youngest, Azariah (2 Chron. 22:1). Then Athaliah killed all the sons of Ahaziah after his death (2 Kings 11:1-2; 2 Chron. 23:3), or thought she did; but the infant Joash was rescued, being the only one left in the line of the coming Messiah. He was hid for six years, while the faithfulness of Jehovah’s word hung upon the divine preservation of the child’s life. Athaliah’s was a case of “like mother like daughter” – both were wicked queens, idolaters and murderers. Imagine a woman killing her grandchildren and all other close relatives as Athaliah did, to further her political ambitions!”

[**ESV Study Bible** Notes p. 665]

“11:1-3 Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah. Possibly a daughter of Jezebel (2 Kings 8:26), Athaliah certainly displays the same ruthless streak. Her attack on the royal family is stemmed only by the resourceful Jehosheba, who hides the young Joash and his nurse in the Jerusalem temple. The nurse’s willingness to share danger with the child in her care contrasts sharply with the spineless leading men of Samaria in Chapter 10:1-7.”

From that we see that Athaliah has a good pedigree and that the plan of the LORD was not going to be thwarted by anyone.

In the seventh year of Athaliah’s reign Jehoiada, the priest, thought the time right to reveal the king to the nation. He ordered the temple guard to surround the king at all times, or as the bible puts it: “Be with the king when he goes out and when he comes in.” (2 Kings 11:8 ESV) With the king secure, Jehoiada then went on to anoint and crown young Joash king. Everyone present clapped his hands and shouted “Long live the king!” (v. 12)

All the people were making such a racket that Athaliah heard it and went to the temple to see what it was about. There she saw young Joash standing where the king stands, by the pillar according to the custom. She tore her clothes and cried, “Treason! Treason!” (v. 14) At that point, Jehoiada commanded the guard to seize her and take her out of the temple “for the priest said, ‘Let her not be put to death in the house of
the Lord." He also made it clear that if anyone moved to follow her that person was to be put to death. They dragged Athaliah to the king's house where they put her to death.

[ESV Study Bible Note p. 666

“pillar. In 1-2 Kings the Hebrew ‘ammud has appeared thus far only in 1 Kings 7, referring to the pillars of the Solomonic palace (1 Kings 7:2-3, 6) and temple (1 Kings 7:15-21, 41-42). Either Jachin or Boaz is probably in view here (1 Kings 7:21); ‘Jachin’ may mean ‘the establisher,’ and would thus provide a fitting location for a coronation. The emphasis on custom is important in a context where the authors are trying to stress the legitimacy of Joash’s claim to the throne; the coronation takes place in line with law and custom, and in full view of the people of the land.”]

The ceremony continues with Jehoiada, the priest, making “a covenant between the Lord and the king and people that they should be the Lord’s people, and also between the king and the people.” (2 Kings 11:17 ESV) Once inspired, the people move on to the temple of Baal, tear it down and kill the priest of Baal, Mattan, before the altars. Then with great ceremony the new king processes into the king’s house and took his seat on the throne of the kings.

2 Kings 17:1-18 The Demise of the Northern Kingdom

Hoshea, the last king of Israel, began his reign, as did so many of the kings of Israel before him, by eliminating his predecessor. The bible tells us he reigned for nine years as a vassal of the king of Assyria. Unhappy with that situation, Hoshea makes an alliance with So, the king of Egypt which, in turn, displeases the king of Assyria. The Assyrian king had no choice but to imprison Hoshea and besiege Samaria for three years. In short order the Assyrian king carried Israel off to Assyria. So the Northern Kingdom only existed just over 200 years (930 B.C. to about 722 B.C.) Anyone care to guess what the overriding offense against God was? Let’s just say it began with their first king, Jeroboam I who had set up the golden calves one at Dan (in the north) and one at Bethel (in the south) telling the people “Behold your gods O Israel.” (1 Kings 12:20). The remainder of the reading deals with a laundry list of the offenses and the efforts of God to reach and reclaim Israel. The pity is that Judah had done worse and her day was coming, but not yet. “Judah also did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced. And the Lord rejected all the descendants of Israel and afflicted them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until he had cast them out of his sight.” (2 Kings 17:19-20 ESV)