

## BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR JANUARY 2

### 1 KINGS 12:1–16:28

#### THE BACKGROUND

Solomon died around 930 B.C. and was succeeded by his son Rehoboam. The new king was 41 years old, reigned 17 years, and was the son of Naamah the Ammonite, one of Solomon's foreign wives (1 Kings 14:21). Solomon had built the temple, the palace, and many other buildings. He needed an enormous labor pool to complete these jobs. Therefore he enslaved the non-Israelite inhabitants of the land (1 Kings 9:20-23), and he "drafted forced laborers from all Israel" (5:13-18). To raise money for his business and commercial enterprises, Solomon divided the land into 12 taxation districts, each with a district deputy. These new taxation districts tended to ignore traditional tribal boundaries.

With Solomon's death, the days of the United Kingdom of Israel came to an end. Saul, Israel's first king, had been a prince over a loose tribal confederation. His successor, David, united the tribes, extended the borders, empowered the military, and defeated neighboring enemies. Solomon inherited a strong kingdom, positioned to do great things. However, the subtle rifts between the northern tribes and Judah in the south were never completely resolved. With Rehoboam's ascension to the throne, the need for wise decision making was brought to the forefront.

#### 1. PROBLEMS IN THE TRANSFER OF POWER (1 KINGS 12:3-5)

**Verse 3:** *They summoned him, and Jeroboam and the whole assembly of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam:*

The northern tribes summoned Jeroboam from Egypt. Jeroboam had been a successful project manager for Solomon's construction projects. He had accomplished so much that Solomon appointed him over the entire labor force of the house of Joseph (11:28). When the people needed a spokesman to speak to Rehoboam, Jeroboam was the logical choice. The fact Solomon had tried to kill Jeroboam (11:40) ensured the northern tribes of Jeroboam's loyalty. The northern tribes presented a conditional promise to be Rehoboam's servants. The one condition was lighter service. Rehoboam faced an important decision.

**Verse 4:** *"Your father made our yoke harsh. You, therefore, lighten your father's harsh service and the heavy yoke*

*he put on us, and we will serve you."*

The northern tribes' presentation began with the claim Solomon had made their yoke harsh. The term "harsh," meaning "severe" or "brutal," calls to mind the imagery of Egyptian bondage (Ex. 1:14). The same Hebrew term is used in both passages. Another word in this verse was used in reference to the Egyptian bondage as well. The Hebrew word translated "heavy" is the same root term used to refer to the heavy labor Pharaoh put on God's people (Ex. 5:9). Did Jeroboam use this terminology intentionally to suggest the working conditions under Solomon were equivalent to those during the time of Egyptian bondage? We have no sure way of knowing. What is clear, however, is the magnitude of the problem. The northern tribes were intent on changing their harsh circumstances. They demanded Rehoboam lighten his father's harsh service and heavy yoke. Additionally, they withheld their pledge of service to Rehoboam until they heard his answer to their request. Their statement and we will serve you functioned as a promise of loyalty conditioned on a lighter load.

**Verse 5:** *Rehoboam replied, "Go home for three days and then return to me." So the people left.*

Rehoboam had a decision to make. How would he respond? Would he make a good or bad decision? Given the importance of this decision, much was at stake. Rehoboam needed time to consider the people's request, so he instructed them to go home for three days. Rehoboam's first step in making this important decision was to buy himself some more time to think it through. His instruction for them to return indicated to the people he was giving their request serious consideration.

#### 2. CHOOSING THE RIGHT CROWD (1 KINGS 12:6-8)

**Verse 6:** *Then King Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had served his father Solomon when he was alive, asking, "How do you advise me to respond to these people?"*

Rehoboam consulted, or sought counsel, from the elders who had served his father. Many times a son will seek the counsel of his father. Though Rehoboam didn't have that option, he could confer with men who had interacted with his father on a daily basis. These men were called elders because of their age and because of their experience. Some wisdom can be obtained only through years of experience. Rehoboam had at his disposal some men who had worked in close quarters with Solomon, had observed and learned

from his wisdom, and had experienced the ebb and flow of court life. They had witnessed the fruit of Solomon's good decisions and the calamities of his bad ones. Their input could aid Rehoboam at this time as he decided how to respond.

**Verse 7:** *They replied, "Today if you will be a servant to these people and serve them, and if you respond to them by speaking kind words to them, they will be your servants forever."*

The wise elders advised Rehoboam to take the role of a servant rather than a lord, and to speak kind words instead of harsh words. The elders knew the tensions between the northern tribes and Judah. Perhaps some of them had witnessed David's skill in uniting the tribes. Most knew firsthand the severity of Solomon's demands on the northern tribes. These elders viewed the people's request as reasonable. The elders surely knew the ordinance of the Lord concerning the king (Deut. 17:14-20). Solomon had violated many aspects of this divine code for kings. The elders were in a position to guide the new king in a better direction. By being a servant who would serve them, the king would gain the people as servants forever. The elders also counseled Rehoboam to respond to them by speaking kind words, literally "good words," to them.

Rehoboam found himself in a situation similar to one his grandfather David had been in years earlier (2 Sam. 2:5-7; 5:1-3). On that occasion, David had used kindness to win over the northern tribes' confidence. His diplomacy was an important part of establishing his rule over the northern tribes.

**Verse 8:** *But he rejected the advice of the elders who had advised him and consulted with the young men who had grown up with him and served him.*

Rehoboam decided not to follow the advice of the elder counselors. Instead he turned to the young men who had grown up with him and served him. Consulting the young men made good sense because their viewpoint would add to Rehoboam's overall comprehension of the situation he was facing. Rehoboam thus enjoyed the counsel of wise elders who had served with his father and the counsel of young men who brought fresh insight and energy to the situation.

Rehoboam first bought himself some time by sending the people home for three days. Then he took the second step of consulting with two different groups of advisers.

However, buying time and getting counsel doesn't guarantee a good decision. In Rehoboam's case, he took the advice of his young counselors. They advised him to take a

hard stance and threaten more severe labor (1 Kings 12:9-14). By advising Rehoboam to declare he would discipline them with barbed whips, the young men revealed their arrogance and ignorance. They sought to improve their standing with the new king by encouraging him to take a tough line against any dissent.

Positions of power can be used for service to others or for personal wealth and benefit. Rehoboam opted for the latter. He wanted to wield power to his advantage rather than to serve his people as the elders had advised. We're told the Lord brought about this turn of events "to carry out His word" through Ahijah the prophet (12:15). The Lord had foreseen (and predicted through Ahijah) Rehoboam's decision to crack down on the people of Israel. God was sovereign in His foresight, and Rehoboam was free to choose as he saw fit. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are held in tension.

### 3. AVOID GETTING STONED (1 KINGS 12:16-18)

**Verse 16:** *When all Israel saw that the king had not listened to them, the people answered him: What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. Israel, return to your tents; David, now look after your own house! So Israel went to their tents,*

Every decision has consequences. Rehoboam decided to take a hard line in spite of the people's promise to serve him if he lightened up on them. When they reassembled after three days and heard Rehoboam's harsh response, they knew the king had not listened to them. The prospect of serving a king under increasingly severe conditions held no appeal to them. Therefore, they divested themselves of Rehoboam and the tribe of Judah immediately. What David had won through kind diplomacy, Rehoboam lost through harsh threats. During their years of kingship, David and Solomon had established God's people as a formidable nation.

Rehoboam's poor decision split the kingdom. The cry, "Israel, return to your tents" was a clarion call to secede from the union. The northern tribes would become their own kingdom. The attendant result was for David to look after his own house, a reference to Rehoboam being king over a truncated kingdom, the tribe of Judah.

**Verse 17:** *but Rehoboam reigned over the Israelites living in the cities of Judah.*

Any Israelites living in the territory of Judah were subjected to the rule of Rehoboam. All other Israelites living north of Ju-

dah came under the rule of Jeroboam. The majestic kingdom of David and Solomon had become as a broken pot. Hostility between Israel in the north and Judah in the south marked the years following the division of the kingdom. One man's decision resulted in dire consequences for all concerned.

Rehoboam had failed to weigh the effects of his decisions before he announced his hard line to the northern tribes. Once the decision was made it couldn't be retracted. The damage was done. The effect was devastating.

**Verse 18:** *Then King Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was in charge of forced labor, but all Israel stoned him to death. King Rehoboam managed to get into the chariot and flee to Jerusalem.*

As further evidence of Rehoboam's failure to comprehend the severity of the situation, he sent Adoram [uh DOH ruh], a man in charge of forced labor, to Jeroboam and the people. We're not certain whether he sought to enforce his new hard-line policy or to effect compromise and renegotiation. At any rate, all Israel stoned him to death. The northern tribes had returned to their tents and had killed Rehoboam's envoy. Fearing for his own safety, Rehoboam mounted his chariot to flee to Jerusalem. The split between north and south was final (12:19).

Rehoboam had asked for three days to consider the people's proposal. He sought counsel from two different groups of advisors. He made his decision and conveyed it clearly. What had gone wrong? Rehoboam had failed to weigh the effects of his decision with great care. By refusing to weigh the effects of his choices, he enacted a more oppressive policy than his father, resulting in the severing of the nation into two kingdoms.

### 4. WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU FAIL (1 KINGS 12:22-24)

Word of Jeroboam's return from Egypt and Rehoboam's hard stance spread throughout Israel. The people made Jeroboam their king (12:20). Only Judah followed the house of David with Rehoboam as their king (12:20). In his attempt to tighten his grip on the northern tribes, Rehoboam had squeezed them through his fingers. Never again would he be in a position to rule over them. After returning to Jerusalem from Shechem, Rehoboam mustered an army of 180,000 choice warriors, a formidable force (12:21). The army's sole purpose was to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam. Civil war appeared inevitable.

**Verse 22:** *But a revelation from God came to Shemaiah, the man of God:*

God chose this decisive moment in history to intervene in the story. He gave a revelation to a man of God named Shemaiah [shih MAY yuh]. The phrase "man of God" here refers to a prophet (see 2 Chron. 12:5). The word "revelation" renders a Hebrew term meaning "word" or "message." God sent a specific message through a prophet to a specific person on a specific occasion. In this case, the revelation constituted advice to Rehoboam on how to proceed after the secession of the northern tribes from his kingdom.

**Verse 23:** *"Say to Rehoboam son of Solomon, king of Judah, to the whole house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people,*

Rehoboam was identified as the son of Solomon. Since his father was well-known, one purpose of identifying Rehoboam in this manner was to associate the current crisis with the folly of his father. Solomon made poor decisions regarding his foreign wives and their gods. Likewise, Rehoboam, the son of one of Solomon's foreign wives, made poor decisions regarding the forced labor of the northern tribes. Like father, like son. Rehoboam had to live with the consequences of his poor choice.

Rehoboam also was identified as the king of Judah. The title signified the reign over the smaller of the two kingdoms. However, only the Southern Kingdom had a direct descendant of David on the throne; the Northern Kingdom never did. The message was also for the whole house of Judah and Benjamin and the rest of the people. The inclusion of Benjamin indicates some inhabitants of that tribe lived under Rehoboam's jurisdiction.

**Verse 24:** *'This is what the LORD says: You are not to march up and fight against your brothers, the Israelites. Each of you must return home, for I have done this.'* "So they listened to what the LORD said and went back as He had told them.

God sent a timely message to Rehoboam to help him make a good decision instead of adding another poor decision to the one he already had made. The message is introduced with a prophetic formula: This is what the LORD says. This phrase ensured the hearers the message carried the full weight of divine authority. What the people were to hear was not just Shemaiah's opinion; the message he delivered was a revelation from God. The message had three short components. First, the Lord commanded the king and his people not to march up and not to fight. In effect, God was telling the

king and his army of 180,000 warriors to stand down. Their “would-be” opponents were identified as their brothers, the Israelites. The term “Israelites” translates the literal phrase “the sons of Israel.” Interestingly, the people of Judah and Benjamin were also sons of Israel. Should Rehoboam decide to fight, he would pit brother against brother.

Second, they were to return home. Their homes represented the peaceful alternative to the pitched tents of the battlefield. Third, God was at work in spite of Rehoboam’s poor decision earlier to strengthen his grip, resulting in the defection of the northern tribes. God’s declaration “I have done this” served to remind the people of Judah or the Southern Kingdom that He was in control though the current circumstances looked grave. Such assurance enabled the king and his people to obey God’s command to stand down and go home.

What decision did Rehoboam make when considering whether to retaliate against the northern tribes or to obey God’s revelation for him to send his army home? He listened to what the LORD said. On this occasion the king and the people made the right decision. They followed God’s word rather than their own natural inclinations to retaliate. They did as He told them.

## BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR JANUARY 9

### 1 KINGS 16:29–22:53

#### THE BACKGROUND

Following Solomon's death around 930 B.C., the twelve tribes of Israel split into two distinct kingdoms. The Northern Kingdom took the name Israel; the Southern Kingdom took the name Judah. Two primary factors led to the division of the tribes into two separate kingdoms — the spiritual factor and the economic factor. The spiritual factor related to the Lord's judgment on Solomon for his idolatry in serving the pagan gods of his foreign wives. Yet, because of David's faithfulness to Him, the Lord chose not to tear the 10 northern tribes away from the kingdom until after Solomon's death (1 Kings 11:34).

The actual split came in the early days of Rehoboam, Solomon's son and successor. The precipitating cause was the economic factor. Solomon had accomplished many great building projects during his 40-year reign but had done so with the help of conscripted labor. The lion's share of the load fell to the northern tribes who sought relief from Rehoboam after Solomon's death. The economic impact of losing so great a source of manual labor coupled perhaps with a perceived insubordination led Rehoboam to threaten even more severe treatment. The northern tribes had experienced enough. They seceded from Rehoboam's kingdom.

#### 1. THE STAND (1 KINGS 18:20-21)

**Verse 20:** *So Ahab summoned all the Israelites and gathered the prophets at Mount Carmel.*

Ahab accepted Elijah's challenge and summoned all the Israelites. Ahab sent for the Israelites just as Elijah had requested, confidently believing Baal's and Asherah's prophets would be victorious over Elijah. The contest was held on Carmel, a name that conveys the concept of a fruitful field or vineyard. The region was known for abundant rainfall, fertile soil, and rich production of grapes. Ahab also gathered the prophets for this contest between Yahweh and Baal. As the prophet of the Lord, Elijah filled an important role. In the Old Testament, God used prophets to call kings and common people to be faithful to the Lord and to His covenant. Prophets confronted sin, reminded the people of the law of Moses, and enforced covenant fidelity to whatever degree possible. In a similar fashion, the prophets of Baal assembled

by Ahab had the responsibility of performing cultic rituals in attempts to validate their belief in Baal as the god of storms and of crop fertility.

**Verse 21:** *Then Elijah approached all the people and said, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow Him. But if Baal, follow him." But the people didn't answer him a word.*

The contest began with Elijah addressing the crowd. He confronted the people with a question, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions?" The term "hesitate" renders a Hebrew word meaning "to limp" and appears in a form indicating ongoing activity. In effect Elijah asked, "How long will you go on limping between two opinions? The verbal form appears again in 1 Kings 18:26 to refer to the "lame dance" conducted by Baal's prophets. Elijah viewed the people's vacillating loyalties between Yahweh and Baal as a person limping along. The two opinions concerned whether they believed Yahweh or Baal was the provider of rain and the soil's fertility. Apparently the people attempted to hedge their bets by worshiping both Yahweh and Baal. Given the intensity of Jezebel's devotion to Baal, failing to worship this idol might have met with death. If she didn't hesitate to slaughter the Lord's prophets, she certainly would've had no reservations about killing others of His people.

Elijah challenged the people to follow, literally "go after," the one true God. He dared them to decide who was the true God and then to act on that decision. Elijah sought a united Israel worshiping the Lord alone. Jezebel sought to unify Israel around the worship of Baal. Obadiah was a worshiper of the Lord caught between these competing worldviews, and Ahab wavered on the issue of whether his ancestral God was mightier than his wife's god. The people showed their lack of commitment by not answering Elijah.

The contest was straightforward. Both sides placed a sacrificial bull on an altar. Then Elijah called on the Lord, and the other 450 prophets called on Baal. Whichever deity answered by consuming the offering in fire would be recognized as the one true deity. The prophets of Baal went first, calling on Baal from morning to the time of the evening sacrifice. The intensity of their devotion was marked by their willingness to cut themselves (18:28). Their shouts, ritual dances, and bloodletting were to no avail. Baal was a no-show. Then Elijah repaired the altar of the Lord by using 12 stones to symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel. He then arranged the wood and put the bull in place. Finally, he took

a counterintuitive step by drenching the altar with 12 pots of water. At the time of the evening sacrifice, when faithful Hebrews offered the Lord a sacrifice, Elijah began to call on the Lord (18:36). Having witnessed the utter failure of the prophets of Baal, Elijah trusted in God's help.

#### 2. THE PRAYER (1 KINGS 18:37-39)

**Verse 37:** *Answer me, LORD! Answer me so that this people will know that You, Yahweh, are God and that You have turned their hearts back."*

We can almost feel the expectant urgency in Elijah's voice as he called on God, "Answer me, LORD! Answer me." Elijah addressed God by His covenant name, LORD. The double use of the imperative "answer me" demonstrated Elijah's intense devotion to the Lord every bit as much as the bloodletting of Baal's prophets expressed their belief in Baal. Elijah sought three things. First, he wanted the people to know Yahweh was God. Second, he wanted them to know he was the Lord's servant (18:36), who acted on God's word. Finally, he wanted the people to know that Yahweh turned their hearts back to Him using this contest.

**Verse 38:** *Then Yahweh's fire fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench.*

Unlike Baal, who failed to respond though his prophets cried out all day, danced, and cut themselves, Yahweh answered immediately. His fire fell and consumed the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust. What about the 12 pots of water? Yahweh's fire completely licked up all the water in the trench. God heard Elijah's prayer, accepted his sacrificial offering, and completely consumed the altar and everything near it. Not even an abundance of water could prevent Yahweh's fire from consuming everything in sight. Yahweh's victory, and by extension Elijah's, was complete. Baal had been proved a counterfeit deity. As for Elijah, God answered his prayer because he had chosen to stand boldly for the Lord and had trusted in God's help.

**Verse 39:** *When all the people saw it, they fell facedown and said, "Yahweh, He is God! Yahweh, He is God!"*

The Israelites affirmed the Lord as God when they saw He had answered Elijah's prayer. They demonstrated their humility and submission when they fell facedown. The repeated confession, "Yahweh, He is God! Yahweh, He is God!," affirmed their acceptance of Yahweh and their corresponding rejection of Baal. The contrast between Yahweh and the false

god, Baal, couldn't have been starker. Even with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah shouting, dancing, and bloodletting, the gods of Jezebel failed to send fire. Yahweh's fire fell and won the day. The people acknowledged the Lord as the one true God. They were emboldened in their stand for the Lord because Elijah had trusted in God's help.

Elijah seized the opportunity to thwart Baalism in Israel by having the prophets of Baal killed (18:40), completing a reversal of events from the time Jezebel slaughtered the Lord's prophets (18:4,13). With the prophets of Baal silenced and the Lord rightly recognized as the one true God in the people's hearts and minds, the long drought came to an end (18:41-46). Yahweh, the true Controller of storms, did what Baal couldn't do. He sent rain. In a sense, the spiritual drought in Israel, the unbridled worship of Baal and Asherah, came to an end as well.

### 3. THE BREAKDOWN (1 KINGS 19:1-3)

**Verse 1:** *Ahab told Jezebel everything that Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword.*

Ahab descended the mountain and went to Jezebel in Jezreel. The king told her of everything Elijah had done. The news that he had killed all the prophets focused her destructive gaze on the prophet more intensely than ever. Jezebel worried about the future of her father's religion in her kingdom. Apparently, the drought-ending downpour (18:45) did nothing to persuade Jezebel of Yahweh's power or to dissuade her from believing in Baal and Asherah. Her heart was focused on revenge.

**Verse 2:** *So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "May the gods punish me and do so severely if I don't make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow!"*

Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, who also had come to Jezreel (18:46). Jezebel's message was a death threat against Elijah. Her oath, "May the gods punish me and do so severely," revealed three things about her. First, she still believed in her gods in spite of the failed contest on Mount Carmel. Second, she was as committed to Baal and Asherah as Elijah was to the Lord. Jezebel felt compelled to respond to Elijah's attack on the prophets of her gods. Third, she focused her evil intentions openly on the immediate destruction of Elijah. She wanted Elijah dead by this time tomorrow!

**Verse 3:** *Then Elijah became afraid and immediately ran for his life.*

Elijah got Jezebel's message. He became afraid. The vic-

tory on Mount Carmel vanished in the heat of impending extinction. He was in the same city with a queen determined to destroy him. Elijah panicked and ran for his life. The bold stand he had previously taken for the Lord was neutralized by his fear. Elijah needed help and encouragement. Otherwise, he faced ministry burnout.

### 4. THE REALITY CHECK (1 KINGS 19:13B-18)

**Verse 13b:** *Suddenly, a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

Elijah had taken a 40-day journey to Horeb, the mountain of God (19:8-12). There the Lord spoke softly to him. Elijah needed to climb back up on his feet and into the ministry. The Lord was there to help him. Elijah suddenly heard a voice (19:13b). Suddenly renders a Hebrew term often translated "behold," and has the effect of calling one to attention. The voice is that of Yahweh, the victorious God of Mount Carmel. The question was poignant, "What are you doing here?" The question was also personal, directed specifically to Elijah.

**Verse 14:** *"I have been very zealous for the LORD God of Hosts," he replied, "but the Israelites have abandoned Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they're looking for me to take my life."*

Fear can produce irrational thoughts and actions. Elijah answered the Lord's question with five assertions that focused on Israel's recent history regarding the worship of Yahweh:

1. Personal Faithfulness: "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of Hosts."
2. National Infidelity: "The Israelites have abandoned Your covenant."
3. National Iconoclasm: "The Israelites have torn down Your altars."
4. National Insurrection: "The Israelites have killed Your prophets with the sword."
5. Personal Faithfulness: "I alone am left, and they're looking for me to take my life."

Thus Elijah drew a sharp contrast by framing Israel's national denial of Yahweh with his own, personal faithfulness to Yahweh. The last statement, "They're looking for me to take my life," represented the fountainhead of the spring of fear. Jezebel's threat was real, intense, and personal.

**Verses 15-16:** *Then the LORD said to him, "Go and return by the way you came to the Wilderness of Damascus. When you*

*arrive, you are to anoint Hazael as king over Aram. You are to anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel and Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel-meholah as prophet in your place.*

The Lord responded to Elijah's despondency by giving him a threefold commission. First, he was to anoint a new king, Hazael [HAZ ay el]over Aram. Aram was one of Israel's neighbors to the north. Second, Elijah was to anoint a new king over Israel, Jehu [JEE hyoo]. Finally, Elijah was to anoint Elisha [ih LIGH shuh] as a prophet in Elijah's place.

Sometimes the best cure for feelings of hopelessness is reengagement in a worthy cause. Elijah loved the Lord and served Him faithfully. The Lord did not discard Elijah just because he went through a bout of despair. Instead, the Lord spoke softly to him and treated him graciously while seeking to restore his confidence. The threefold commission enabled Elijah to focus on something bigger than Jezebel's threats. The Lord's assignment garnered Elijah's full attention, thus preventing him from dwelling any longer on his personal circumstances.

**Verse 17:** *Then Jehu will put to death whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death whoever escapes the sword of Jehu.*

The three men Elijah was commissioned to anoint — Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha — would each play a role in destroying the royal infrastructure supporting Baalism in Israel. Hazael would do his part; Jehu would follow him as a sort of clean-up man. In the event someone escaped Jehu, Elisha would put that person to the sword.

**Verse 18:** *But I will leave 7,000 in Israel—every knee that has not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him."*

As the Lord continued to help Elijah climb back up, He assured the disheartened prophet he wasn't alone. Those who had bowed to and kissed Baal did so to show their devotion to Jezebel's god. The Lord's 7,000 faithful negated Elijah's belief that he alone was left as a faithful servant of Yahweh. In this way, the Lord encouraged Elijah to get back in the fight. Elijah began his climb back up by getting Elisha to join him (19:19-21).

## BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR JANUARY 16

### 2 KINGS 21:1–23:30

#### THE BACKGROUND

This Scripture for this week's lesson is taken out of sequence with that of our other lessons in 2 Kings in order to provide a basis from the Books of Kings for the annual Sanctity of Human Life Lesson. Life's sanctity or blessedness was an issue in 7th-century-B.C. Judah just as it is in 21st-century America. In both historical periods, the lives of children were in jeopardy. The major difference between the two historical periods lies in the fact that during the 7th century B.C., religion was embedded in politics. Thus a political leader, like a king, not only could participate openly in public and private religious rituals, in most cases the king determined the nature and course of the nation's religious rituals. For example, during his long reign, the evil King Manasseh of Judah decided to sacrifice his son to Molech [MOH lek] (2 Kings 21:1-6; 23:10). As king, his example became a guiding practice followed by other Israelites.

#### 1. READ ME FIRST (2 KINGS 22:11-13)

**Verse 11:** *When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes.*

Whether the book of the law referred to the entire first five books of the Bible, the Torah or Law of Moses, or just a portion of Moses' Law like the Book of Deuteronomy, is uncertain. However, the portion read to Josiah convinced the young king that God's people needed to humble themselves and repent of their sins to avoid severe, divine judgment. The phrase "when the king heard the words of the book" doesn't merely mean he heard someone reading. Rather, he heard the words with discernment. He was listening to and applying the words to his own life. Consequently, he tore his clothes. In biblical times, tearing one's clothes was a sign of grief and mourning associated with death, catastrophe, or other tragedies. By tearing their garments, people signified their humility and voluntary submission to others, especially to God. When the Scripture was read, Josiah heard and heeded.

**Verse 12:** *Then he commanded Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the court secretary, and the king's servant Asaiah:*

Josiah realized Judah had strayed far from the Lord. His act of tearing his clothes showed immediate contrition.

However, he wanted to know the full ramifications for the nation. So he commanded his servants to find out what Judah's sins meant for the future of the nation. Josiah didn't limit his response to personal acts of humility; his personal contrition led to national revival. He initiated the process by enlisting the aid of key people in his kingdom. As the high priest, Hilkiah was primarily responsible for all aspects of the temple, its environs, and the religious rituals.

His discovery of the book of the law started the sequence of events leading to national revival. Josiah also enlisted Shaphan [SHAY fan], his court secretary, and Shaphan's son Ahikam [uh HIGH kam]. Shaphan and his family were godly people in service to the king. They also befriended Jeremiah the prophet, who was active during this time period. Little is known of Achbor [AK bawr] and the king's servant Asaiah [uh ZAY yuh], though both are presented as cooperating with the king's reform efforts.

**Verse 13:** *"Go and inquire of the LORD for me, the people, and all Judah about the instruction in this book that has been found. For great is the LORD's wrath that is kindled against us because our ancestors have not obeyed the words of this book in order to do everything written about us."*

Josiah commanded these godly servants to "go and inquire of the LORD." Josiah wanted prophetic confirmation of his understanding of the Scripture read to him. Were the ramifications of Judah's sins really as calamitous as Josiah believed? The young king needed to know the full implications of the nation's sins before he made wide sweeping changes. The request to "inquire of the LORD" was personal, "for me," but also national, for "the people, and all Judah." To avert disaster and to bring revival, both king and people needed to repent and seek the Lord. Further, Josiah's desire for prophetic confirmation was directly tied to the instruction in this book that has been found. All true prophetic utterance will align with God's revealed word in the Bible.

Josiah acknowledged the greatness of the "LORD's wrath." Additionally, by representing the "LORD's wrath" as a response to the sins of the people, Josiah demonstrated that wrath was justified. Not everything that happens to persons, families, or nations is attributable to their sinfulness or to the Lord's righteous anger. However, in this particular situation, the Lord's wrath was indeed tied inseparably to the misconduct of His people.

#### 2. DO LIFE TOGETHER (2 KINGS 23:1-3)

**Verse 1:** *So the king sent messengers, and they gathered to him all the elders of Jerusalem and Judah.*

Once Josiah received Huldah's report, giving him the prophetic confirmation he desired, he took immediate steps to mobilize the nation toward revival. He sent messengers throughout his kingdom to summon all the elders of Jerusalem and Judah. Josiah exercised keen leadership by acknowledging the important role local leaders needed to play for there to be a movement on a national scale.

The nation had been organized by tribes, clans, and families before the monarchy was ever established. Each level of organization had a leader. Elders were older men who had earned a position of leadership by virtue of their standing in the community. They were deemed trustworthy; people tended to follow them. Often elders had more influence over a local population than the king who lived some distance away. However, the fact the elders gathered to the king in Jerusalem indicates who held ultimate power.

**Verse 2:** *Then the king went to the LORD's temple with all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as well as the priests and the prophets—all the people from the youngest to the oldest. As they listened, he read all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the LORD's temple.*

In addition to the elders from throughout the land, all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as well as the priests and the prophets joined the throng in Jerusalem. Apparently the crowd was very large, for all the people from the youngest to the oldest gathered at "the LORD's temple." Josiah intentionally picked the temple as the gathering place, since the Lord had chosen that particular place for His name to dwell.

The gathering was reminiscent of Solomon's prayer of dedication that secured God's promise of forgiveness for His people when they repented of their sins (2 Chron. 7:12-16). Josiah understood his times. Sadly, his nation had entered a state of sinful separation from God. The time had come for the people from the youngest to the oldest to renew their commitment to the Lord.

**Verse 3:** *Next, the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant in the presence of the LORD to follow the LORD and to keep His commandments, His decrees, and His statutes with all his mind and with all his heart, and to carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this book; all the people agreed to the covenant.*

How does a nation get back on track with God? Is it enough for the leader to acknowledge things are not as they should be? Does individual confession of sins by a mass of people result in national revival? Acknowledgement of sins is highly important, but true revival cannot come until people commit to walk in the Lord's ways. Josiah led the people in a covenant renewal ceremony similar in tradition and scope to the one led by Moses (Book of Deuteronomy) and the one led by Joshua (Josh. 24).

The use of three distinct terms to describe the stipulations of the covenant, commandments, decrees, and statutes, indicates a substantial portion of the book of the law, discovered during the temple renovations, had been read to the people. Josiah made a covenant, literally "cut" a covenant, referring either to the stipulations of the covenant being cut into stone as a reminder or to the cutting of a sacrificial animal by which covenants were sometimes inaugurated.

### 3. GUARD THE KIDS (2 KINGS 23:10)

**Verse 10:** *He defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of Hinnom, so that no one could make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech.*

Paramount in his campaign to remove instruments of death was Josiah's destruction of Topheth [TOH feth], a place of human sacrifice in the Valley of Hinnom [HIN ahm]. The Lord condemned Topheth through the prophet Jeremiah as a Valley of Slaughter, doomed to be a cemetery (Jer. 7:31-33), Josiah defiled Topheth, meaning he acted in a way that demonstrated contempt for the site of child sacrifice. As a result of Josiah's bold action, no one could sacrifice his child to Molech.

Josiah's reforms were far sweeping (2 Kings 23:11-23). He eradicated altars and high places dedicated to false gods in Jerusalem and throughout his kingdom. He reinstated the Passover of the Lord "written in the book of the covenant" (23:21). Josiah's intent was to reinstate the true ceremonies of the covenant in place of the false rituals that had emerged in Judah over years of idolatry.

### 4. TAKE AN INVENTORY (2 KINGS 23:24-25)

**Verse 24:** *In addition, Josiah removed the mediums, the spiritists, household idols, images, and all the detestable things that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem. He did this in order to carry out the words of the law that were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the LORD's temple.*

Josiah wanted his reform to be comprehensive. In addition to tearing down altars and destroying idols, he also removed the people who promoted necromancy. These mediums and spiritists claimed to be able to speak with deceased persons and to channel their energy, much like the people Americans can watch on television. Yet a culture of life cannot be built on a foundation of unhealthy dabbling with the dead. Josiah knew this reality; we should, too. He eliminated household idols, images, and all the detestable things in his kingdom. What was his motivation? He acted to comply with the words of the law in the book Hilkiah found in the temple. By openly living according to God's words in the Law of Moses, Josiah established a pattern for life.

**Verse 25:** *Before him there was no king like him who turned to the LORD with all his mind and with all his heart and with all his strength according to all the law of Moses, and no one like him arose after him.*

Josiah is described as incomparable in terms of his devotion to God. Once again using the language of the Shema (Deut. 6:4-5), the writer of 2 Kings ascribed to Josiah the honor of having turned to the Lord with all his mind, all his heart, and all his strength. Josiah loved the Lord and turned to Him with his whole being. The king observed all the law of Moses. The fourfold use of the word "all" accentuates Josiah's commitment. The Hebrew text begins and ends the verse with the phrase "like him" for emphasis, literally "like him there was not before him ... and after him no one arose like him." Unfortunately for God's people, Josiah was a rare breed.

King Josiah kept working to remove all ungodly practices in Judah, gaining a reputation of having no equal in wholeheartedly turning to the Lord. Believers can keep working to build a godly culture of life, realizing that such a goal is worthy of wholehearted, lifelong effort.

## BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR JANUARY 23

### 2 KINGS 1:1–5:27

#### THE BACKGROUND

The story of the two monarchies continues. In the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Ahab's son, Ahaziah, became king after his father was killed in battle in 853 B.C. The final event recorded in 2 Kings is the release of Judah's King Jehoiachin from prison in Babylon in the year 560 B.C. Thus, 2 Kings covers the history of Israel and Judah over a period of almost three centuries.

Four primary features characterize this history. First, each king of Israel and Judah was evaluated as having done either good or evil in the Lord's sight. Second, the role of various prophets at key junctures of the history was highlighted. Third, the history revealed the constant interaction between God and His people.

Though Israel and Judah were small nations during their brief existences as separate kingdoms, both were featured in this history. Major empires like Assyria and Babylon came into view only as they intersected the history of God's people. These major empires were instruments in God's hands to discipline His people when they refused to repent of their sins. Finally, the inspired writer exercised great selectivity when choosing which episodes to include or exclude. One of his goals was to illustrate the deuteronomic formula, the teaching that if people obey God, they will be blessed; if they disobey God, they will be cursed.

#### 1. GRACE: NOT FOR SALE (2 KINGS 5:14-16)

**Verse 14:** *So Naaman went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, according to the command of the man of God. Then his skin was restored and became like the skin of a small boy, and he was clean.*

Naaman complied with the instructions he originally dismissed as foolish; he dipped seven times in the Jordan. Because his actions conformed to the command of the man of God, he was healed and made clean. Obedience to the word of God brought health to Naaman just as Elisha had promised (5:10). His skin became like the skin of a small boy. The additional comment "and he was clean" shouldn't escape our notice. Skin diseases often rendered people socially unacceptable and isolated. Though Naaman was brilliant on the battlefield, his skin disease no doubt limited his

social engagements and hindered his opportunities to enjoy the blessings of victory. By having his skin restored, Naaman would've been welcomed back into society. He was no longer unclean and no longer a social outcast.

**Verse 15:** *Then Naaman and his whole company went back to the man of God, stood before him, and declared, "I know there's no God in the whole world except in Israel. Therefore, please accept a gift from your servant."*

To his credit, Naaman responded to his God-given healing by returning to the person who served God so faithfully. Naaman and his whole entourage went back to the man of God, Elisha. Because Elisha had graciously guided Naaman in his time of need, Naaman sought to respond with a gift. Naaman's statement, "I know there's no God in the whole world except in Israel" is extraordinary.

Was Naaman converted to faith in the one true God through the gracious conduct of Elisha? After all, Naaman didn't receive healing until he obeyed Elisha. Some biblical interpreters believe Naaman was converted to faith in Israel's God. Others point to some of Naaman's subsequent actions, like continued worship of the god, Rimmon (5:18), to suggest he probably wasn't converted so much as he was acknowledging God's role in his healing. His confession "there's no God in the whole world except in Israel" is then taken as an exuberant expression of gratitude more than a profession of faith. Either way, the grateful commander sought to display his sincere gratitude by offering Elisha a gift.

Naaman, once offended because Elisha hadn't come to him personally (5:11-12), humbled himself before Elisha, referring to himself as his servant. His plea for Elisha to accept a gift was a heartfelt response of gratitude for the prophet's role in his healing.

**Verse 16:** *But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, I stand before Him. I will not accept it." Naaman urged him to accept it, but he refused.*

Elisha responded to Naaman's offer of a gift with an oath formula, "As the LORD lives." The remainder of the statement, "I stand before Him," indicated Elisha was guided by a commitment to the Lord. Had Elisha responded impulsively, he would've been susceptible to a spirit of greed by which many grab for the things of this world and lose their fellowship with the Lord. Elisha's statement, "I will not accept it," was his way of acknowledging before Naaman, Naaman's entourage, and his own servant Gehazi, that Naaman's healing was a matter of God's grace, and God's grace wasn't for

sale. How could Elisha accept a reward for something God had done? The prophet's words "I stand before Him" served as a reminder that God was a witness to what he was doing; his actions wouldn't escape the Lord's notice. The Lord was pleased with Elisha because he was motivated by grace to help Naaman. The Lord's pleasure and presence was sufficient. No earthly reward was necessary. Indeed, no earthly reward could compare with experiencing God's presence. Though Naaman urged him to accept a gift, Elisha persistently and graciously declined his offer.

We demonstrate the Lord's gracious nature when we carefully avoid taking advantage of others, especially those filled with gratitude over what the Lord has done for them. Knowing God used us to help others is reward enough. As a faithful Judge, God observes how we act and He knows what motivates us when we deal with others. He's pleased when we're motivated by grace instead of greed.

Naaman requested two mule-loads of dirt to carry back to his country so he could create a worship site on which to sacrifice solely to the Lord (5:17-19). Naaman also asked for pardon in advance whenever he entered and bowed in the temple of Rimmon, his master's god. Based on his earlier confession that "there's no God in the whole world except in Israel" (5:15) and his sensitivity to his duties to enter Rimmon's temple, in my opinion Naaman had a genuine conversion experience.

#### 2. THOUGHTS OF A PROFIT (2 KINGS 5:20-22)

**Verse 20:** *Gehazi, the attendant of Elisha the man of God, thought: My master has let this Aramean Naaman off lightly by not accepting from him what he brought. As the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something from him.*

Naaman hadn't traveled far when a spirit of greed overcame Gehazi, Elisha's servant. In sharp contrast to his master's gracious spirit, Gehazi entertained greedy thoughts of profit. He thought his master had let this Aramean [ar uh MEE uh] Naaman off lightly by refusing to accept his gift. Ironically, Gehazi took an oath using the same formulaic words as Elisha, "as the LORD lives," to seal his commitment to run after Naaman and get something from him. A spirit of greed blinded Gehazi to the truth Elisha had established, namely, God's grace wasn't for sale. Greed motivated Gehazi to seek material gain for himself from Naaman. Gehazi's behavior was clearly wrong. First, he had done nothing to secure Naaman's healing. Second, if his master was too gracious to ac-

cept a gift or thought doing so was inappropriate, on what grounds could Gehazi claim eligibility or justify receiving a gift? Finally, Gehazi revealed his motivation in dealing with others was greed. He used people for what he could get. He displayed a “what’s-in-it-for-me” mentality.

**Verse 21:** *So Gehazi pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw someone running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him and asked, “Is everything all right?”*

The verb “pursued” conveys intentionality. Gehazi set out with urgency to catch up with Naaman in order to satisfy his greed. Naaman saw someone running in his direction and dismounted his chariot. Naaman’s question, “Is everything all right?” should be understood as sincere in keeping with the depiction of Naaman throughout this passage. Still basking in the joy of his healing and motivated by gratitude, Naaman sought to be of service in any way he could. He no doubt welcomed the arrival of Elisha’s servant as an opportunity to express his appreciation. Thus, in this situation, Naaman’s motives were pure though Gehazi’s were not. How could a foreigner exhibit a more godly spirit than a man from among God’s people?

**Verse 22:** *Gehazi said, “It’s all right. My master has sent me to say, ‘I have just now discovered that two young men from the sons of the prophets have come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them 75 pounds of silver and two changes of clothes.’”*

Gehazi assured Naaman everything was alright. Then, he deliberately misled the Aramean commander by concocting a lie. He claimed Elisha had sent him with a message. Gehazi was effective for several reasons. First, he attributed his message to Elisha, the man who had helped Naaman and whom Naaman would love to reciprocate. Second, Gehazi made a specific request for an amount of money, 75 pounds of silver, and for two changes of clothes. Third, he claimed the gift was to help two young men from the sons of the prophets. By claiming the gift was for two of God’s servants, Gehazi made his request in a way that didn’t conflict with Elisha’s earlier refusal of the gift for himself. Gehazi, in strong contrast to Elisha, was motivated by greed.

### 3. NO GOOD FROM GREED (2 KINGS 5:24-27)

**Verse 24:** *When Gehazi came to the hill, he took the gifts from them and stored them in the house. Then he dismissed the men, and they left.*

The sincerity of Naaman’s gratitude is confirmed by the

fact he doubled the amount of silver Gehazi requested from 75 pounds to 150 pounds. Gehazi had to conceal his ill-gotten gain from Elisha, so he took the gifts and dismissed the men. Having sent away the witnesses to his deceit, Gehazi no doubt felt his plan had succeeded.

**Verse 25:** *Gehazi came and stood by his master. “Where did you go, Gehazi?” Elisha asked him. “Your servant didn’t go anywhere,” he replied.*

Every sin is observed by God. Spirit-filled prophets know the heart and will of God. God had observed Gehazi’s greed and had revealed his devices to Elisha, who was put in charge of teaching the wayward servant that no good can come from greed. Greed often brings real and significant damage in a person’s life and relationships. Gehazi learned the hard way; his greed didn’t get him ahead, but rather set him back.

Elisha confronted his deceitful servant with a question, “Where did you go?” One lie often generates others, so Gehazi continued the ruse by denying he had gone anywhere. He was convinced Elisha knew nothing of his greedy plot. He thought he could trick Elisha as successfully as he had scammed Naaman.

**Verse 26:** *But Elisha questioned him, “Wasn’t my spirit there when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is it a time to accept money and clothes, olive orchards and vineyards, sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves?”*

Elisha wasn’t deceived; he exposed his servant’s lies and greed. He asked a rhetorical question, “Wasn’t my spirit there?” to remind his servant he had God-given abilities to discern the truth. Apparently, at precisely the same moment when the man got down from his chariot to meet Gehazi, God stirred Elisha’s spirit to discern what was taking place. The prophet was divinely empowered to see his servant’s actions. Elisha then challenged Gehazi’s thinking by asking, “Is it a time to accept various gifts?” Elisha listed more types of gifts than his servant actually received in order to make a point. The occasion of God’s healing a helpless person is no time to profiteer for personal gain. To accept a gift as a personal reward for something God alone had brought about was equivalent to claiming credit for the miracle oneself.

**Verse 27:** *Therefore, Naaman’s skin disease will cling to you and your descendants forever.” So Gehazi went out from his presence diseased—white as snow.*

Elisha allowed the punishment to fit the crime. Gehazi had coveted what Naaman possessed. In greed, Gehazi fo-

cused his attention on Naaman’s silver and garments. Elisha reversed his servant’s ill-gotten gain by giving him something else Naaman once had — his skin disease. Gehazi’s shameful behavior would affect him and his descendants forever.

## BACKGROUND COMMENTARY FOR JANUARY 30

### 2 KINGS 6–8

#### THE BACKGROUND

God called prophets to confront the evil of His people, especially the kings. One reason King Joram was considered evil was because he committed the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat (2 Kings 3:3). Included among those sins was the usage of non-Levitical priests (see 1 Kings 12:31-33). These priests were essentially employees of the king who promoted his policies and carried out quasi-religious functions. Because these politically-oriented priests couldn't objectively instruct the people in the Lord's ways, God used prophets to confront the people.

#### 1. THE POWER OF DESPERATION (2 KINGS 7:3-7)

**Verse 3:** *Four men with skin diseases were at the entrance to the gate. They said to each other, "Why just sit here until we die?"*

These four men were the epitome of human needs ... hungry, diseased, outcast, and dying. They questioned their plight by asking, "Why just sit here until we die?" The question served several functions in this account. First, it associated sitting at the gates of the capital city with death. Second, the question anticipates a movement in the story. The four men were about to do something to improve their chances of survival. Third, if these outcast members of society entertained notions of survival, might there be hope for those inside the walls of Samaria? Finally, and most importantly, their question diverted the reader's attention to a new phase of the story of Samaria's siege, the phase of the Lord's unusual deliverance.

**Verse 4:** *If we say, 'Let's go into the city,' we will die there because the famine is in the city, but if we sit here, we will also die. So now, come on. Let's go to the Arameans' camp. If they let us live, we will live; if they kill us, we will die.'*

To improve their chances of survival, the four diseased men considered all their options. First, they could stay put and die outside the city gate. Second, they could enter Samaria, where the famine was so severe inside the city they would die there as well. Third, they could approach the enemy camp. The Arameans would either let them live or put them to death. The prospect of being killed would only hasten the inevitable; the chance at life was better than any

other option they had. In the midst of great personal needs and devastating circumstances, the four men considered all their options. They decided striving to live was better than waiting to die.

**Verse 5:** *So the diseased men got up at twilight to go to the Arameans' camp. When they came to the camp's edge, they discovered that there was not a single man there,*

The men left at twilight to go to the Aramean camp. The growing darkness of twilight provided a measure of cover to the men as they approached the enemy. They could abandon their plan if they had second thoughts, provided they remained concealed. To their surprise and confusion, they didn't find a single man there. In this context, the term "man" refers to the enemy soldiers in Ben-hadad's army.

**Verse 6:** *for the Lord had caused the Aramean camp to hear the sound of chariots, horses, and a great army. The Arameans had said to each other, "The king of Israel must have hired the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Egypt to attack us."*

The method God used to thwart the enemy was miraculous. No human being took part in the process whereby the Arameans abandoned their supplies and fled in panic toward the Jordan River. Somehow the Lord caused the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots, horses, and a great army. The enemy panicked, thinking King Joram had conscripted mercenary armies from the Hittites [HIT tights] to the north and from Egypt to the south.

**Verse 7:** *So they had gotten up and fled at twilight abandoning their tents, horses, and donkeys. The camp was intact, and they had fled for their lives.*

Convinced they were being trapped, the Arameans fled for their lives. The haste of their retreat was marked by their refusal to break camp or to take their horses with them. The same twilight darkness that provided a measure of cover to the four diseased men also provided a cover for the retreating army. The abandonment of their tents, horses, and donkeys indicated they had no intention of regrouping and continuing the siege.

#### 2. DON'T JUST SIT THERE (2 KINGS 7:8-9)

**Verse 8:** *When these men came to the edge of the camp, they went into a tent to eat and drink. Then they picked up the silver, gold, and clothing and went off and hid them. They came back and entered another tent, picked things up, and hid them.*

Their personal famines ended when they went into a tent to eat and drink. Ironically, these four outcasts were enjoying physical strengthening and renewal, while only a short distance away, the people who had cast them out of their city were starving to death. The four men found silver, gold, and clothing in the Aramean camp. The clothing no doubt was an improvement over the beggar's rags worn by the diseased men. The fact these four men came back and entered another tent, picked things up, and hid them indicated their immediate focus was on self-preservation and enrichment.

**Verse 9:** *Then they said to each other, "We're not doing what is right. Today is a day of good news. If we are silent and wait until morning light, we will be punished. Let's go tell the king's household."*

The term "right" referred to doing the upright or honest thing. How could they gorge themselves on abundance while their fellow citizens stood on the cusp of death? They realized in the darkness of that evening, a new day had arrived, a day of good news. Interestingly, the Hebrew people reckoned the start of a new day as the evening rather than the morning. Therefore, the diseased men discovered the treasures and food stores of the abandoned camp literally at the beginning of the new day.

#### 3. SHARE IN THE JOY (2 KINGS 7:15-16A)

**Verses 15-16a:** *So they followed them as far as the Jordan. They saw that the whole way was littered with clothes and equipment the Arameans had thrown off in their haste. The messengers returned and told the king. Then the people went out and plundered the Aramean camp.*

Joram's scouts tracked the Arameans as far as the Jordan, just over 20 miles to the east. Thinking the Hittites were approaching from the north, the Egyptians from the south, and blocked by the Mediterranean Sea to the west, the Arameans fled east to escape. The 20-mile path was strewn with clothing and equipment, a further testimony of the effectiveness of God's psychological warfare against them. When the messengers verified the report to Joram, the people of Samaria plundered the Aramean camp.