

## Ahaziah [Israel] and Elijah (852n BC)

2 Kings 1:2–16

2 And Ahaziah fell down through a lattice in his upper chamber that was in Samaria, and was sick: and he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go, enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover of this disease.

3 But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, *Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron?*

4 Now therefore thus saith the LORD, Thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die. And Elijah departed.

5 And when the messengers turned back unto him, he said unto them, Why are ye now turned back?

6 And they said unto him, There came a man up to meet us, and said unto us, Go, turn again unto the king that sent you, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, *Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that thou sendest to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron? therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.*

7 And he said unto them, What manner of man was he which came up to meet you, and told you these words?

8 And they answered him, He was an hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins. And he said, It is Elijah the Tishbite.

9 Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and, behold, he sat on the top of an hill. And he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down.

10 And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty.

11 Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly.

12 And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. [\[Luke 9:54\]](#)

13 And he sent again a captain of the third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him, and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight.

14 Behold, there came fire down from heaven, and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties with their fifties: therefore let my life now be precious in thy sight.

15 And the angel of the LORD said unto Elijah, Go down with him: be not afraid of him. And he arose, and went down with him unto the king.

16 And he said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast sent messengers to enquire of Baalzebub the god of Ekron, *is it not because there is no God in Israel to enquire of his word? therefore thou shalt not come down off that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.*

## The Death of Ahaziah [Israel] (852n BC)

2 Kings 1:17–18

17 So he died according to the word of the LORD which Elijah had spoken. And Jehoram reigned in his stead in the second year of Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah; *[Jehoram's coregency with Jehoshaphat]* because he had no son.

18 Now the rest of the acts of Ahaziah which he did, *are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?*

## Elijah Ascends to Heaven (852n BC)

2 Kings 2

### Elijah Tests Elisha

1 And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.

2 And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Bethel. And Elisha said unto him, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel.

3 And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.

4 And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho.

5 And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace.

6 And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the LORD hath sent me to Jordan. And he said, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on.

7 And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan.

8 And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they

two went over on dry ground.

9 And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

10 And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: *nevertheless*, if thou see me *when I am* taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.

#### **Elijah is Taken Up to Heaven**

11 And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, *there appeared* a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

12 And Elisha saw *it*, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.

#### **Elisha's Double Portion**

13 He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan;

14 And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where *is* the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over.

15 And when the sons of the prophets which *were* to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.

#### **Elisha Tries to Prevent a Search for Elijah**

16 And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the LORD hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send.

17 And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and they sought three days, but found him not.

18 And when they came again to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Go not?

#### **Elisha Heals the Water of Jericho from Joshua's Curse**

19 And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city *is* pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water *is* naught, and the ground barren.

20 And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought *it* to him.

21 And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren *land*.

22 So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.

#### **Elisha Calls for God's Judgment on the Youth of Bethel**

23 And he went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head.

24 And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the LORD. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.

25 And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.

### **Joram, Ahaziah's Brother, Assumes the Throne of Israel (852n BC)**

2 Kings 3:1–3

1 Now Jehoram the son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and reigned twelve years.

2 And he wrought evil in the sight of the LORD; but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made.

3 Nevertheless he cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin; he departed not therefrom.

### **Joram [Israel] Asks Jehoshaphat to Help Quell the Moabite Rebellion (c. 852n BC)**

2 Kings 3:6–27

#### **Joram Enlists the Aid of Judah**

6 And king Jehoram went out of Samaria the same time, and numbered all Israel.

7 And he went and sent to Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab hath rebelled against me: wilt thou go with me against Moab to battle? And he said, I will go up: I *am* as thou *art*, my people as thy people, *and* my horses as thy horses.

8 And he said, Which way shall we go up? And he answered, The way through the wilderness of Edom.

### **We Three Kings**

9 So the king of Israel went, and the king of Judah, and the king of Edom: and they fetched a compass of seven days' journey: and there was no water for the host, and for the cattle that followed them.

10 And the king of Israel said, Alas! that the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab!

11 But Jehoshaphat said, *Is there* not here a prophet of the LORD, that we may enquire of the LORD by him? And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, Here *is* Elisha the son of Shaphat, which poured water on the hands of Elijah.

12 And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the LORD is with him. So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

### **Elisha Prophecies Victory**

13 And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What have I to do with thee? get thee to the prophets of thy father, and to the prophets of thy mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, Nay: for the LORD hath called these three kings together, to deliver them into the hand of Moab.

14 And Elisha said, As the LORD of hosts liveth, before whom I stand, surely, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look toward thee, nor see thee.

15 But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him.

16 And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Make this valley full of ditches.

17 For thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle, and your beasts.

18 And this is *but* a light thing in the sight of the LORD: he will deliver the Moabites also into your hand.

19 And ye shall smite every fenced city, and every choice city, and shall fell every good tree, and stop all wells of water, and mar every good piece of land with stones.

### **God Tricks the Moabites**

20 And it came to pass in the morning, when the meat offering was offered, that, behold, there came water by the way of Edom, and the country was filled with water.

21 And when all the Moabites heard that the kings were come up to fight against them, they gathered all that were able to put on armor, and upward, and stood in the border.

22 And they rose up early in the morning, and the sun shone upon the water, and the Moabites saw the water on the other side *as* red as blood:

23 And they said, This *is* blood: the kings are surely slain, and they have smitten one another: now therefore, Moab, to the spoil.

24 And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them: but they went forward smiting the Moabites, even in *their* country.

### **The Kings Carry Out God's Command**

25a And they beat down the cities, and on every good piece of land cast every man his stone, and filled it; and they stopped all the wells of water, and felled all the good trees:

### **Mesha Survives**

25b only in Kirharaseth left they the stones thereof; howbeit the slingers went about *it*, and smote it.

26 And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through *even* unto the king of Edom: but they could not.

27 Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him *for* a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great indignation against Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to *their own* land.

## **Elisha and the Prophet's Widow (c. 850 BC)**

2 Kings 4:1-7

1 Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.

2 And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for thee? tell me, what hast thou in the house? And she said, Thine handmaid hath not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil.

3 Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbors, *even* empty vessels; borrow not a few.

4 And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full.

5 So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought *the vessels* to her; and she poured out.

6 And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, *There is not a vessel more.* And the oil stayed.

7 Then she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest.

### Elisha and the Shunammite Woman (c. 850 BC)

2 Kings 4:8–17

8 And it fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where *was* a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And *so* it was, *that* as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread.

9 And she said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this *is* an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually.

10 Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.

11 And it fell on a day, that he came thither, and he turned into the chamber, and lay there.

12 And he said to Gehazi his servant, Call this Shunammite. And when he had called her, she stood before him.

13 And he said unto him, Say now unto her, Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what *is* to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people.

14 And he said, What then *is* to be done for her? And Gehazi answered, Verily she hath no child, and her husband is old.

15 And he said, Call her. And when he had called her, she stood in the door.

16 And he said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, *thou* man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid.

17 And the woman conceived, and bare a son at that season that Elisha had said unto her, according to the time of life.

### The Death of Jehoshaphat (849t BC)

1 Kings 22:45, 50

2 Chr 20:34; 21:1–3

#### Before His Death, Jehoshaphat Gives Gifts to His Sons

2 And he [Jehoram] had brethren the sons of Jehoshaphat, Azariah, and Jehiel, and Zechariah, and Azariah, and Michael, and Shephatiah: all these *were* the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel.

3a And their father gave them great gifts of silver, and of gold, and of precious things, with fenced cities in Judah:

#### Jehoshaphat Gives the Kingdom to Jehoram

3b but the kingdom gave he to Jehoram; because he *was* the firstborn.

#### Jehoshaphat Dies

45 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, and his might that he shewed, and how he warred, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?  
50 And Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father: and Jehoram his son reigned in his stead.

20:34 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold, they *are* written in the book of Jehu the son of Hanani, who *is* mentioned in the book of the kings of Israel.  
21:1 Now Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David.  
And Jehoram his son reigned in his stead.

### Jehoram, Jehoshaphat's Son, Begins Sole Reign of Judah (848n/848t BC)

2 Kings 8:16–17

2 Chronicles 21:5

16 And in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel, Jehoshaphat *being* then king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah began to reign.

17 Thirty and two years old was he when he began to reign; and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem.

5 Jehoram *was* thirty and two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem.

## Chronological Notes

### 1) Establishing a Chronological Framework for Elisha's Ministry.

A) *Elijah's Translation* (2 Kgs 2). Elisha's sole ministry began with the translation of Elijah.<sup>1</sup> The story itself gives no chronological data—it simply notes that Elijah and Elisha were traveling from Gilgal when Yahweh was about to take Elijah up to heaven (Gilgal was approx. 10 miles south of Samaria). However, the canonical arrangement places the story immediately after the death of Ahaziah (2 Kings 1:15b–18; 852n BC) and before Joram's [Israel] campaign with Jehoshaphat [Judah] to quell the Moabite rebellion (2 Kings 3:6–27; c. 852 BC). Assuming this placement to be chronological, we can fix an upper bound on Elisha's sole ministry of 852 BC.

(1) There is one potential reason to reject the placement of 2 Kings 2 as chronological—the letter from Elijah to Jehoram [Judah] as recorded in 2 Chronicles 21:12–15.<sup>2</sup> The letter comes as a surprise to the reader of Chronicles. As Selman observes: “Elijah makes no other appearance in Chronicles, is only known to have prophesied in Israel (though cf. 1 Kgs 19:3, 8), wrote no other letters, and is thought by many to have been dead by this time!”<sup>3</sup> Solutions to this issue include:

(a) Coregency Solution: Elijah wrote the letter during the early years of Jehoram's [Judah] coregency<sup>4</sup> with his father Jehoshaphat (2 Kgs 1:17; 854t–849t BC).<sup>5</sup>

(i) The data in 2 Chronicles 21:1–11 does not support this solution. In the letter, Elijah makes specific mention of the fact that Jehoram murdered his brothers (2 Chr 21:13). This action was not taken until *after* Jehoshaphat's death (cf. 2 Chr 21:2–4).

(b) Prophetic Solution: Elijah wrote the letter prophetically before his translation and it was delivered to Jehoram [Judah] after he murdered his brothers (c. 848t BC).<sup>6</sup>

(i) Dillard is dismissive: “It is not probable that the Chronicler intends us to think the letter was written ‘prophetically’ before Elijah's death or that it was in some way transmitted from heaven.”<sup>7</sup> However, we should not be too quick to dismiss this solution. As Mabie comments: “While nothing in the text indicates this was the case, nothing in the text precludes the possibility either.”<sup>8</sup>

(c) Scribal Error Solution: The name “Elijah” in 2 Chronicles 21:12 is a scribal error—the intended name was “Elisha.” This error requires only the two final consonants to be altered.<sup>9</sup>

(d) Anachrony Solution: 2 Kings 2 is out of place chronologically and Elijah was not translated until after the beginning of Jehoram's sole reign over Judah in 848n/848t BC.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I assume an actual translation to heaven (e.g., Enoch). This understanding is contested by Roy E. Knuteson in “Elijah's Little-Known Letter in 2 Chronicles 21:12–15,” *BSac* 162:645 (Jan 2005), but I do not find his argument convincing.

<sup>2</sup> Scholars who see the letter as the Chronicler's own invention and thus having no implications for the chronology of Elisha's ministry include: H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, 306–7; E. L. Curtis and A. A. Madsen, “A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles,” *ICC* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910), 415; W. Rudolph, *Chronikbücher* (HAT 21; Tübingen 1955), 267; Jacob M. Myers, “II Chronicles,” *The Anchor Bible*, 122.

<sup>3</sup> Martin J. Selman, “2 Chronicles: An Introduction and Commentary,” *TOTC*, 455.

<sup>4</sup> Rodger C. Young, “Tables of Reign Lengths from the Hebrew Court Recorders,” *JETS* 48/2 (June 2005) 225–48.

<sup>5</sup> Suggested by Selman (456), Thompson (John A. Thompson, “1, 2 Chronicles,” *NAC*, 299), and Merrill (cf. Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 351 n. 78).

<sup>6</sup> Frederick J. Mabie, “1 and 2 Chronicles,” *EBC*, Rev. Ed., 251; J. Barton Payne, “1 & 2 Chronicles,” *EBC*, 505.

<sup>7</sup> Raymond B. Dillard, “2 Chronicles,” *WBC*, 168.

<sup>8</sup> Mabie, 251.

<sup>9</sup> This solution is preferred by Alberto R. Green, “Regnal Formulas in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of the Books of Kings,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* Vol. 42, No. 3, Jul., 1983, 176.

<sup>10</sup> This view is suggested by Dillard (167–8), Payne (505) and the *Chronological Life Application Study Bible*.

- (i) This solution assigns an upper bound on Elisha's sole ministry of 848 BC. Note that Elijah's absence from the 2 Kings 3:11–19 narrative does not necessarily imply his absence from earth at the time (although the wording of 3:11 suggests that Elisha's interaction with Elijah was past).<sup>11</sup>
- (2) After rejecting the coregency solution, we are left with two solutions which retain a date of 852 BC for the beginning of Elisha's sole ministry (prophetic and scribal error), and one solution which reduces this date to 848 BC (anachrony). At this point, we need more data before coming to a conclusion. We will come back to this issue after we have examined the rest of Elisha's ministry.<sup>12</sup>
- B) *Elisha Prophesies Victory for Joram [Israel] and Jehoshaphat* (2 Kgs 3:11–19). Given the synchronism with Jehoshaphat, this event is associated with the beginning of Joram's [Israel] reign (c. 852n BC).
- C) *Elisha and the Prophet's Widow* (2 Kgs 4:1–7). We are given no chronological data for this story. The canonical arrangement places it early in Elisha's ministry (c. 852 BC).
- D) *Elisha Asks God to Give the Shunammite Woman a Son* (2 Kgs 4:8–17). We are not told when Elisha first met the prominent woman who lived in Shunem (cf. "one day" in 2 Kgs 4:8). Their friendship began at her insistence and grew over some period of time ("whenever he was passing through, he would stop there for a meal"). Eventually, Elisha wanted to repay her kindness and when she refused his gratitude, Gehazi pointed out that she had no children. Elisha, at God's direction, foretold the birth of a son, and "at the specified time the next year she gave birth to a son" (2 Kgs 4:17). From this, we can reasonably conclude that the story involves a 15–21 month period (6 to 12 months of friendship plus a 9 month pregnancy).<sup>13</sup>
- E) *Elisha Raises the Shunammite Woman's Son from the Dead* (2 Kings 4:18–37). The story of the woman of Shunem continues with the words "the boy grew and one day he went out to see his father who was with the harvest workers." Obviously, a period of several years had gone by—the question is, how many? Clearly, he was old enough to speak (>2 years) and old enough to go out into the field alone (>5 years), so a conservative estimate is that the boy is around 6 years old when he died and was raised to life by Elisha. Thus the time period involved in the Shunammite woman narrative of 2 Kings 4:8–37 totals around 8 consecutive years.
- F) *Elisha Cures the Stew* (2 Kings 4:38–41). The canonical arrangement places this story after the raising from the dead of the Shunammite woman's son. Further, it tell us that it took place "when there was a famine in the land" (2 Kgs 4:38).
- (1) There are several famines recorded in the book of Kings: Elijah's famine (1 Kgs 18:2), the poisoned stew famine (2 Kgs 4:38), Samaria's famine (2 Kgs 6:25; 7:4), Elisha's seven-year famine (2 Kgs 8:1) and the Jerusalem famine (2 Kgs 25:3). It is likely that the poisoned stew famine and Elisha's seven-year famine are the same (and the Samaria famine, while primarily the result of Ben-Hadad's siege, was likely exacerbated by the seven-year famine).<sup>14</sup> The other famines are far enough removed from Elisha's ministry that they can be excluded from consideration.
- (2) When did Elisha's seven-year famine begin? The only clues we have are found in 2 Kings 8:1–6.
- (a) The text reads, "Now Elisha advised the woman whose son he had brought back to life" (NET; 2 Kgs 8:1). This wording implies that Elisha predicted the famine *after* he raised the woman's son from the dead (cf. 8:1).<sup>15</sup>
- (b) Gehazi was recounting the story of Elisha raising the woman's son from the dead to the king when the Shunammite woman returned from Philistia. This implies that Elisha raised her son from the dead *prior* to her

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<sup>11</sup> Mabie, 251.

<sup>12</sup> Japhet does not take a firm position on any solution: "It seems probable that the Chronicler had a different view of the chronological pattern, which in any case implies a difference of a very few years" (Sara Japhet, "1 & II Chronicles," *OTL*, 812).

<sup>13</sup> The canonical arrangement implies that Elisha's friendship with the woman formed subsequent to Elijah's translation.

<sup>14</sup> Donald J. Wiseman, "1 and 2 Kings," *TOTC*, 218; Iain Provan, "1 & 2 Kings," *UBCS*, 190 (Provan suggests that: "from here to ch. 8, the whole narrative takes place in the context of famine").

<sup>15</sup> The text could read, "Now Elisha advised the woman to whom God had given a son."

leaving for Philistia.<sup>16</sup>

(3) We conclude, then, that the seven-year famine began not long after Elisha raised the woman's son from the dead. When we add this time period to the earlier 2 Kings 4:8–37 narrative, we have around 15 consecutive years from the beginning of Elisha's initial contact with the woman to her return to Israel from Philistia (15 to 21 months + 6 years + 7 years = 14.25 to 14.75 years). Since this block of time exceeds Joram's [Israel] reign of around 11 years (852n–841n BC), we are forced to conclude that either Elisha met the Shunammite woman prior to Elijah's translation (841 + 15 = 856 BC), or that she returned to Israel during the first years of Jehu's [Israel] reign (852 – 15 = 837 BC).<sup>17</sup>

- G) *Elisha Feeds 100 People* (2 Kings 4:42–44). The canonical arrangement places this story after the poisoned stew event and during the seven-year famine.
- H) *Elisha Heals Naaman* (2 Kings 5). The canonical arrangement places this story during the seven-year famine (it follows the famine-related events of 2 Kings 4:38–44). Unfortunately, we are not told the name of either the king of Syria or the king of Israel. Do we have reason to believe that Joram was king of Israel and Ben-Hadad was king of Syria?<sup>18</sup>
- (1) At the beginning of the story of Naaman's healing, the text records that Syria was sending raiding parties into Israel (2 Kgs 5:2). Later, at the end of the story in which Elisha traps the Syrian army in Samaria, the text says that Syria stopped sending raiding parties into Israel (2 Kgs 6:23). These two verses suggest that 2 Kings 5:1–6:23 forms a single chronological unit that describes events that occurred in series during the time of the Syrian raids.
- (2) Immediately after the end of the Syrian raids (2 Kgs 6:24), King Ben-Hadad besieged Samaria.<sup>19</sup> Note that the verse says, "Afterward" (ESV; lit. "it came to pass after this"). This means that 2 Kings 6:24–7:20 took place sometime after the events of 2 Kings 5:1–6:23. Since Hazael killed Ben-Hadad prior to Jehu becoming king of Israel (cf. 2 Kgs 8:28), we conclude that 2 Kings 6:24–7:20 is associated with Joram's reign. This in turn suggests that 2 Kings 5–7 forms a single chronological unit—all three chapters took place during Joram's reign over Israel (852n–841n BC).
- I) *Elisha Makes an Axhead Float* (2 Kings 6:1–7). This event is part of the 2 Kings 5–7 chronological unit and thus occurred during Joram's [Israel] reign.
- J) *Elisha Traps Syria's Army* (2 Kings 6:8–23). This event is part of the 2 Kings 5–7 chronological unit and thus occurred during Joram's [Israel] reign.
- K) *Elisha Prophesies the End of Ben-Hadad's Siege of Samaria* (2 Kings 6:24–7:20). This event is part of the 2 Kings 5–7 chronological unit and thus occurred during Joram's [Israel] reign.
- L) *Gehazi Recounts the Tale of the Shunammite Woman's Son to the King* (2 Kings 8:1–6). The last we heard of Gehazi, he was afflicted with Naaman's skin disease and had gone out from Elisha's presence (2 Kgs 5:27). He is not mentioned by name again in connection with Elisha (cf. 2 Kgs 6:15–17), and we infer that his service to Elisha had ended. Now we find him chatting with the king of Israel (the king is again unnamed).
- (1) When did this event take place and who was king of Israel at the time?

<sup>16</sup> It could not have happened immediately upon her return—her home and land had been confiscated, and so the father would not have been out in the fields with the harvesters. The entire story falls apart if we try to have the famine concurrent with her sojourning in Philistia.

<sup>17</sup> This idea is not without precedent. Wiseman comments: "...the king might be Jehu, for J(eh)roam knew Elisha well" (Donald J. Wiseman, "1 and 2 Kings," *TOTC*, 205).

<sup>18</sup> This is the standard interpretation. See Iain W. Provan, "1&2 Kings," *UBCS*, pp. 198–200, 204–205 and T. R. Hobbs, "2 Kings," *WBC*, pp. 63, 76.

<sup>19</sup> While there is debate over how many rulers of Syria were called Ben-Hadad, Hazael was never called Ben-Hadad—he is consistently called King Hazael throughout Kings and Chronicles. Thus we infer that the Ben-Hadad of 2 Kings 6:24 was the Ben-Hadad whom Hazael murdered. Since Joram [Israel] fought Hazael, it follows that Joram was king during the siege of Samaria (cf. 2 Kgs 8:28).

- (a) Flashback Solution: 2 Kings 8:1–6 occurred prior to Naaman’s healing.<sup>20</sup> This solution places the event subsequent to the Shunammite woman’s son being raised from the dead but before Naaman’s healing. The king of Israel would have been Joram. However, as we have seen above, the block of time involved in the Shunammite narrative is 15 *consecutive* years—thus Naaman’s healing must have already taken place.
- (b) Healed Solution: Gehazi had repented and been healed prior to his talk with the king.<sup>21</sup> This is, of course, an argument from silence, but it is still possible. By this time, Jehu would have been king of Israel.
- (c) Diseased Solution: Gehazi was still afflicted with Naaman’s skin disease,<sup>22</sup> but it was not so serious that he could not interact with others in some limited or controlled fashion. It should be noted that Naaman’s disease did not require complete separation from other people—Naaman was able to command Syria’s army and interact with Ben-Hadad and his own family without fear of contaminating them (cf. his interaction with his wife and servant girl in 2 Kgs 5:2–4). If Gehazi was still afflicted with the disease, then it is probable that he lived a solitary life, but was still able to interact with others. The king would have been Jehu, who by this time has assumed the throne of Israel. If done properly, Jehu could have conversed with Gehazi and still have avoided any concerns about becoming unclean (cf. Lev 13–14).

(2) We conclude that 2 Kings 8:1–6 took place subsequent to the seven-year famine and at the end of the 15 consecutive years involved in the Shunammite narrative. By this time Jehu had killed Joram and assumed the throne of Israel. Note that this conclusion means that 2 Kings 8:1–6 is out of place chronologically—it should be placed after Jehu’s rise to power (after 2 Kgs 10:30). Its canonical placement was likely done for literary reasons; it completes the Shunammite narrative which is a fundamental part of the Elisha cycle of 2 Kings 2–8.

- M) *Elisha Prophesies the Rise of Hazael as King of Syria* (2 Kings 8:7–14). The synchronisms with Ben-Hadad, Hazael, Joram [Israel] and Ahaziah [Judah] date this event to the final year of Joram’s [Israel] reign (841n BC).
- N) *Elisha Anoints Jehu King of Israel by Proxy* (2 Kings 9:1–3). The synchronisms with Ben-Hadad, Hazael, Joram [Israel] and Ahaziah [Judah] date this event to the final year of Joram’s [Israel] reign (841n BC).
- O) *Elisha’s Death* (2 Kings 13:14–20). This event is clearly associated with the reign of Jehoash [Israel] (798n–782n).
- P) We return now to the question of when Elisha’s ministry began: 852 BC or 848 BC. If we go with the anachrony solution, Elisha’s sole ministry began in 848. This means that the seven-year famine began around 8 years later in 840.<sup>23</sup> This creates an issue for 2 Kings 5–7 which is clearly associated with both the seven-year famine and Joram’s [Israel] reign. Since Joram [Israel] was killed by Jehu in 841 BC, we conclude that the better choice is either the prophetic or scribal error solution—thus Elisha’s sole ministry began in 852 BC.

## 2) Chronological Table of Elisha’s Ministry.

- 852 BC — Ahaziah [Israel] dies; Joram [Israel] becomes king; Elijah is translated; Elisha’s sole ministry begins.
- c. 850 BC — The Shunammite woman gives birth to a son.
- c. 844 BC — The son dies and is raised to life; Elisha predicts a seven-year famine; the Shunammite woman leaves Israel.
- c. 844–841 BC — The events of 2 Kings 5–7
- 841n BC — Elisha predicts Ben-Hadad’s death; Hazael kills Ben-Hadad; Joram [Israel] and Ahaziah [Judah] attack Hazael; Jehu anointed king.
- 841–837 BC — The events of 2 Kings 9:1–10:30.
- c. 837 BC — The seven-year famine ends; the Shunammite woman returns to Israel; Gehazi talks with Jehu.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas L. Constable, “2 Kings,” *Bible Knowledge Commentary of the Old Testament*, 552; C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 3, 235–36.

<sup>21</sup> Jesse C. Long, *1&2 Kings*, 350; Hobbs, 101–105.

<sup>22</sup> Naaman’s disease was almost certainly not modern leprosy (Hansen’s disease), since the lesions of Hansen’s disease are never white (2 Kgs 5:27).

<sup>23</sup> This assumes that Elisha met the Shunammite woman *after* Elijah’s translation.